

Christopher S. Anderson: Back to the Future

Anderson talked with us recently about how his research in Max Reger's early twentieth century music impacts his work and his world as he looks forward.

Dena Hill



Chris and daughter Erica, at an Aeolian organ, at the Philbrook Museum of Art in Tulsa, Oklahoma

This summer, Dr. Christopher S. Anderson joined Perkins School of Theology on the campus of his *alma mater* as associate professor of Sacred Music. At Perkins he teaches in the areas of the Church Music Colloquium for Master of Sacred Music Students, and music in worship.

Anderson's research in late Romanticism, particularly the music of Max Reger (1873-1916), has yielded frequent essays in journals of the United Kingdom, Germany, Sweden, and the United States. His first book, *Max Reger and Karl Straube: Perspectives on an Organ Performing Tradition*, was the first such extensive survey of any aspect about Reger in English. The book

won the 2006 Max Miller Book Prize, given by the Boston University School of Theology, which in turn administers The Organ Library of the American Guild of Organists. The award is granted to one English-language scholarly book addressing organ repertory and performance. Anderson's latest book, *Selected Writings of Max Reger*, was published in 2006.

Anderson has been a regular contributor to the biennial International Organ Academy at Göteborg University, Sweden, and was a featured lecturer at the Internationale Max-Reger-Tage of the Bruckner University in Linz, Austria. His archival researches have involved

the central musical institutions of the cities of Leipzig and Meiningen, Germany. Anderson appears regularly as an organ recitalist with a repertory that extends from the 16th century to the newest music for the organ.

He holds the Ph.D. in Performance Practices from Duke University. Prior to Duke, he studied under Ludger Lohmann at the Staatliche Musikhochschule, Stuttgart, and Robert Anderson at Southern Methodist University, where he earned degrees in organ performance and sacred music.



Lisa, Chris, and daughter Erica at Northaven UMC in Dallas



Anderson at the Taylor and Boody organ, St. Thomas Church on Fifth Avenue in New York City

When did you become interested in music?

I started lessons on the piano when I was five. I did that because my mom taught me a little bit on the piano when I was very young. She was good friends with a lady who taught piano where we went to church, and where my mother was the secretary. She was a farmer's daughter who got a scholarship to study music in England. She came back and taught piano lessons in the church basement. I studied piano with her until my graduation from high school.

How many instruments do you play?

I play the piano and the organ. Well, that's not exactly true. I joined the band in middle school and played all the way through high school graduation. I played the alto saxophone and I remember playing in the band for graduation.

Where are you from?
I'm from a town in western Kentucky called Princeton very close to the Lake area. The largest town it's near is Paducah, Kentucky. Princeton was small, about 7000 people...there are a few stop lights.

Tell me about your family.
I'm an only child (born July 13, 1966). My father, Jim, is an appliance repair man, self employed. My mom, Geralene, is a homemaker. She worked as a church secretary. She also worked as an assistant to a chiropractor and she still does that. She plays the piano, so that's how I got started.

That instrument went in its case after high school graduation and was never used again.

What years did you graduate from college, graduate school, and your Ph.D. program?
Transylvania University in Lexington, Kentucky, B.A. in Music in 1988; Master of Music and Organ Performance and M.S.M. from SMU in 1991; Ph.D. from Duke in 1999.

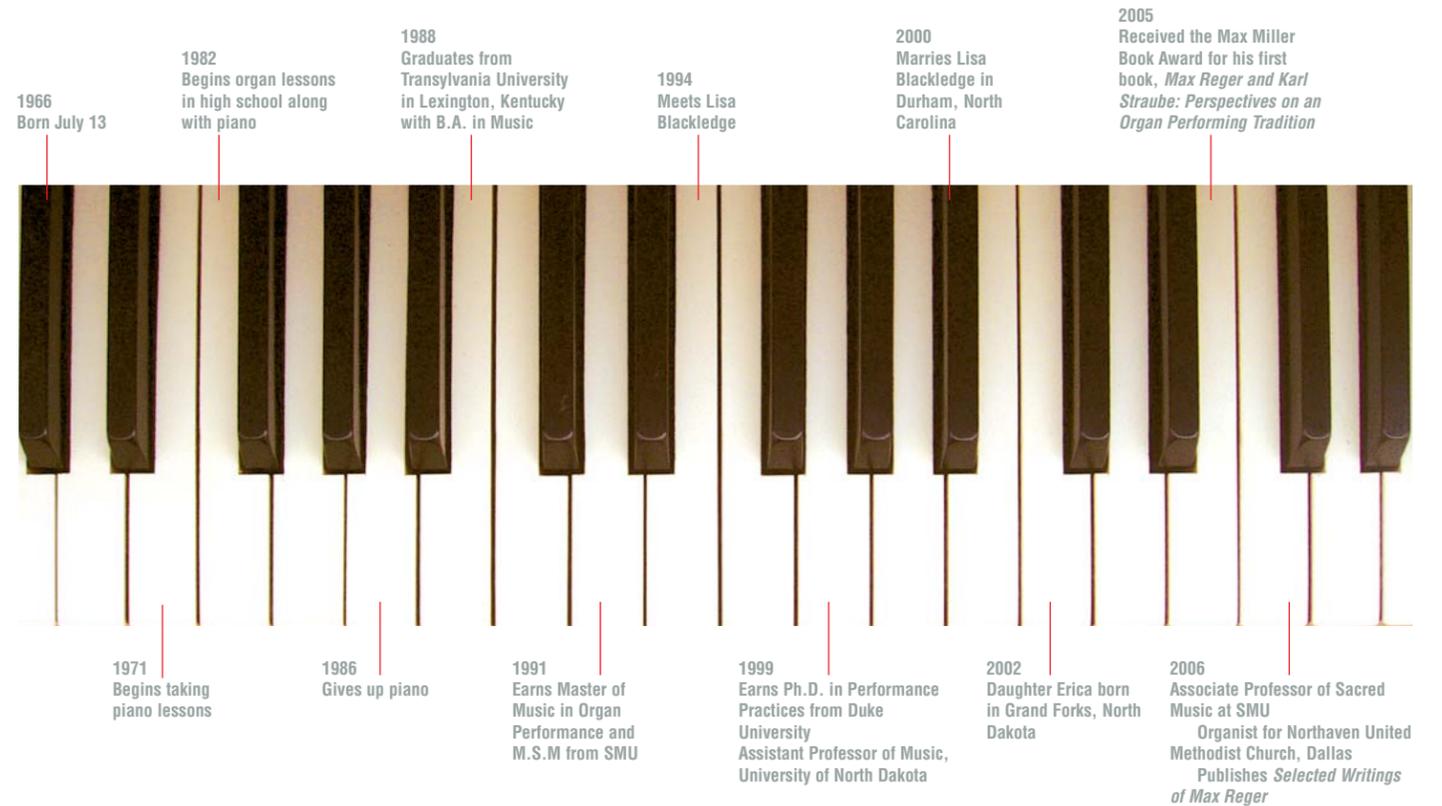
Where do you live now?
I live in Richardson. It's relatively close to the DART rail which is how I get here every day. It's great.

Your mentors at Duke where you earned your Ph.D. in Performance Practices were Peter Williams, Robert Parkins, and Zvi Meniker. What role did they play in the way you developed your research and/or the way you work now?

They each played a different role: Peter is one of the most prominent Bach scholars in the world, has been for a long time, certainly with relation to Bach and the organ he has been, and it was a great honor to be able to work with him. Peter's methodology is to formulate questions. He was my advisor and he was the person who really put the dye in my thinking. Robert's role was of the technicalities of what I was writing and thinking. He taught exactitude. Zvi was a fabulous practicing instrumentalist, and I benefited from his musicality.

Do you play the organ for your church?
I do. Northaven United Methodist Church. I was fortunate to get that job in September. Wonderful sanctuary. Fantastic architecture. It is very kind to the organ. Fantastic and talented people. We're very happy there.

As an organ recitalist, your repertoire ranges from the 16th century to the newest music. How did you pick this period of interest?
There's not much keyboard music in existence before the sixteenth century. It's not written down. The keyboard itself is a more clumsy affair the further back in history you go into the Middle Ages. Keyboards, yes we have them. Instruments we have, or specimens, or at least evidence we have, but written down music? No. So, for an organist, the norm is to play music beginning at the sixteenth century. I work with Max Reger, so I play a lot of his music. If I were to hang out anywhere, that's where I would hang out. The period falls between 1898 - 1916. It's a very small amount of time, but it's a time when a lot is happening in the world on many fronts.



What led you to specifically work with the music of Max Reger?
When I was a student here at SMU for my master's degree in organ performance, Bob Anderson, my teacher in Meadows School of the Arts who's retired now, said to me one day, 'You know Chris, I've got to find a big Reger piece to sic on you.' I remember he said it like that and I really had no previous experience with Reger. I knew who he was because everybody in organ knows who that is, and I knew it was very difficult. But I agreed and it ended up being on my graduate recital here. It took me forever to learn it; it was a very difficult piece. But over the process of learning that piece I became fascinated with his music.

This is very strange music in a lot of ways, harmonically very abstruse music. At times it just seems almost needlessly difficult technically. And, you know, you just begin to ask yourself wider questions than just, 'How am I going to learn this?' which is the question that students ask themselves. Because you know you've got to sit down in a practice room and actually figure out how to do this thing and memorize it and play it

in a concert. And after the initial trauma of that is over then you begin asking yourself, 'What sort of a person under what sort of circumstances is going to write this sort of music?' This opened up a massive door with lots and lots of questions, and that's how I got into Reger.

What music do you listen to for fun?
I listen to jazz although I don't know very much about it. I have always said there has to be a certain kind of music for me which I can only enjoy and I don't know anything about it. I just love it and I just want to encounter it. I know that there's stuff going on there that absolutely eludes me and I'm happy about that. I love Oscar Peterson as a pianist. Miles Davis – the big guys. I love Tierney Sutton, a fantastic jazz singer.

How did you meet your wife?
I was a student at Duke and Lisa had come in 1988 from Wisconsin to Chapel Hill, North Carolina. She finished her degree in piano performance, and stayed on as an accompanist.

You mention her work as a pianist in one of your books. Do you work together?
Yes. We started a concert series in North Dakota to raise funds for an organ renovation and she managed that series until we left.

What was the best day in your professional life?
It may be the day that I was offered this job. Another day that it could have been was last year when I got the Max Miller Book Award for my first book (*Max Reger and Karl Straube: Perspectives on an Organ Performing Tradition*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003.).

Have you ever played the organ at the Meyerson (The Morton H. Meyerson Symphony Center)?
Not yet! ♣