



ZENEAKADÉMIA  
ALAPÍTVÁ 1875

# Ferenc Fricsay

August 9<sup>th</sup> 1914 – February 20<sup>th</sup>, 1963

The early and seamless beginning of Fricsay's career was a result of primarily the careful guidance and conscious pedagogy of his father, himself a musician, Richárd Fricsay. Initially he had him taught to play the violin and the piano (he studied piano with Arnold Székely at the Academy of Music – between 1921 and 1925 -, and the violin with Gyula Mambriny). Later he learned to play the clarinet for two years with the guidance of Alto Berner, then took trombone lessons, and even pursued percussion studies for a while, as well.

At the Academy '*Kodály gave wonderful lessons in composition. We went gladly to the chamber music lessons of Leó Weiner. Whenever we could we sneaked to the piano lessons of Bartók, as well. [...] I don't know whether any other college could have provided education of this quality in that century.*' – as he characterized the most important impulses of the years at the Academy in his autobiography. His commitment to the career of a conductor was enhanced by the concerts conducted by Mengelberg, Wein-gartner, Kleiber, Schuricht, Furtwängler, Klemperer and Bruno Walter in Budapest. Whenever it was possible he followed the morning rehearsals, too. 'We considered these experiences as great gifts of life.'

He gave his degree recital in 1933 at the Academy. He conducted his own composition the overture *Cyrano de Bergerac* –, as well as excerpts from *The Mastersingers of Nuremberg*. He could have obtained the assistant conductor position in the Opera in Budapest after his final exam, but he refused that for he wanted to conduct and accepted the direction of the military band and Philharmonic Orchestra of Szeged. The golden age of the town's musical life had begun with that. The number of subscribers increased from two hundred and sixty to two thousand, Fricsay could invite such artists to Szeged as Dobrowen, Mengelberg, Dohnányi, Thibaud, Cortot and Szigeti. There he met Géza Anda, as well. He conducted opera performances at the town's theater (*Rigoletto*, *Masked Ball*, *Traviata*, *The Bohemians*, *Carmen*, *Faust*). He left Szeged with his wife and three children in the summer of 1944 and rode out the last months of the war in Budapest. He conducted the first concert at the Opera in February 1945, '*though only in the basement where the cloakroom was*'. In April he debuted with the *Traviata* in the State Opera. He was assigned to organize the Fővárosi Zenekar (Capital Orchestra). He received invitations from the Vienna Philharmonic and the Staatsoper orchestras in 1946, but the circumstances made possible only the latter (*Carmen*). Director Eugen Hilbert began negotiations at this time already that Fricsay should remain in Vienna as a permanent conductor from 1947. In the spring of the same year Fricsay accepted the position of assistant conductor of Otto Klemperer at the Salzburg Festival. He prepared the premiere of Gottfried von Einem's opera *The Death of Danton* and he himself conducted one of the seven performances. His international career evolved in a fast tempo after that.

In 1948 he could conduct a premiere again in Salzburg, the *Elixir* by Frank Martin. In the same year he became guest conductor at the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra and appointed music director at the Berlin Opera, and besides these he also took chief conductor position at the RIAS Symphonic Orchestra. He signed an exclusive contract with Deutsche Grammophon. He recorded nearly two hundred works during fifteen years. His recordings of Mozart's *Don Giovanni*, Bartók's *Bluebeard's Castle*, *Concerto*, *Piano Concertos Nos. 2 and 3* were awarded Grand Prix du Disque.

He fulfilled several invitations in the 1950s; he was touring North and South America and Israel besides Europe. In 1952 he moved to Ermatingen located at the Boden Lake. He was appointed general music director in Munich in 1956. He conducted the premiere of Kodály's Symphony in 1961 in Luzern. He had to retreat for long periods due to an illness more and more frequently. He died in Basel, and was buried in Ermatingen.

He worked together with the greatest performers of his time, among others with Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Yehudi Menuhin, Isaac Stern, Annie Fischer and Maria Stader.

'*Fate was gracious to him in so far as he could live the end of his life at the unsurpassed summit. However it was cruel to deprive him and all of us of those ripe fruits that could have developed wonderfully on that high ground.*' – as Kodály, the intellectual master wrote in his commemoration.

