



Broadcasts of Kulturradio / rbb
04.08. - 09.08.2014 18:05

**In his six series of broadcasts
Kai Luehrs -Kaiser
portrays detailed
the Hungarian conductor.**

Who was Ferenc Fricsay? From 1946 a steep success bestowed him in Salzburg, Berlin and Munich. Composers as Dvorák, Bartók and Kodály, hardly anyone ever conducted better than he did. With his aim of audio emphasis and transparency he has influenced probably the aesthetics of all radio symphony orchestras of Germany. What is the merit of Fricsay in our days?

Commemorating the 100th birthday of Ferenc Fricsay

Broadcast no. 3 (August 6th 2014):

The "Mozart-ian". Fricsay as the first leader of the Deutsche Oper Berlin

*Musikbeispiel: LC 12281 233361 Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart / "Don Giovanni",
1. Akt "Batti, batti, o bel Masetto" / Irmgard Seefried, Sopran (Zerlina),
RIAS-Symphonie-Orchester / Ltg. Ferenc Fricsay 1958*

Today's broadcast of Ferenc Fricsay deals with "Fricsay as opera conductor in Berlin".

By virtue of a double contract in 1949 Fricsay was not only head of the RIAS Symphony Orchestra, (DSO today), but by the same contract he was also appointed as director of music at the Municipal Opera, later named as Deutsche Oper Berlin. – September 1961 Fricsay conducted in his function as director "Don Giovanni" at the inauguration of the new opera in the Bismarck Street. - Shortly after the reopening, Fricsay became seriously ill by a reappearance of his sickness. His first performance in the new house was almost his last. December 7th. 1961, about ten weeks later, he gave his last concert ever.

February 1963, he died in Switzerland, where he had lived for many years. So here we stand at the beginning of today's episode confronting a double cognitive contradiction

- Fricsay was put on record as first (earliest) musical director in the chronic of Berlins Deutsche Oper; but most of his (Berlin Opera) conductorships did not take place in the Bismarckstraße, but in the House of the Municipal Opera, the predecessor institution after the war "in the house of the Theatre of the West", at the Kant Strasse.
- While in Berlin Fricsay was quasi considered as leader of the orchestra of the Deutsche Oper equivalent to the RSO, it has to be emphasized that almost no recordings exist with the Orchestra of the Deutsche Oper.

Facts of case will be investigated in a moment.

Commercially evaluated only exception to this rule, is the Re-opening with Mozart's "Don Giovanni" with Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau in the title-role.

*Musikbeispiel: LC Eigenaufnahme Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart
Ouvertüre und Beginn aus "Don Giovanni", 1. Akt
Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Bass-Bariton (Don Giovanni) / Walter Berry, Bass-Bariton (Leporello),
Josef Greindl, Bass (Komtur)
Orchester der Deutschen Oper Berlin / Ltg. Ferenc Fricsay Live, 24. Sept. 1961*

In this recording Ferenc Fricsay is conducting the Orchestra of the Deutsche Oper Berlin (first performance with the new-named - Orchestra of the Deutsche Oper Berlin) at the opening of the theatre in the Bismarckstraße.

At the German resp. the Municipal Opera Fricsay has not conducted only extensively / substantially the most important pieces of serious repertoire; but he postponed his reserve versus Wagner which was substantiated by the anti-Semitism of Wagner.

Two of only four recordings, originated in the theatre of the West, are compositions of Wagner. -

He has even perpetuated the "Flying Dutchman"; a studio recording with the extraordinary Josef Metternich in the title role. Live it was recorded in 1952 with Josef Herrmann, Gottlob Frick as Daland and Ludwig Suthaus as Erik.

The copy of the recording is circulating somewhere in the orbit and next to it also on YouTube

And based on this Wagner excerpt we could wonder if Fricsay even by interpreting Wagner (and Verdi) has remained in the most charming way as „Mozart-ian“.

- *Not powerful as Dioniseus but sensible as Apollo*
- *Not thinking too extensive, but in delicacy*
- *Not tinny, but by strings*

*Musikbeispiel: Preiser LC 0092 89677 Richard Wagner / "Der fliegende Holländer", 2. Akt
"Was muss ich hören" / Ludwig Suthaus, Tenor (Erik) / Helene Werth, Sopran (Senta)
Orchester der Städtischen Oper Berlin / Ltg. Ferenc Fricsay Live 26. April 1952*

Fricsay's repertoire in and outside the Deutsche Oper in Berlin might not be documented as copious as his work with the RIAS Symphony Orchestra.

The limited glimpse into the documents one may provide show nevertheless, why - after the war up till our days - Fricsay was valued as indubitable original genius of the guild. -

- *nothing is amiss and nothing jerky*
- *energy and effort are palpable, but never sorrow*
- *the auditor is involved and fascinated by a musical event noting an immediate tension.*

No need of having to convey!

Here's the true art, and this art is still unchallenged till the top. - Yes, you can feel the pleasure and the urge to get to work finally and see treasures close beneath the surface, just waiting to be lifted and re-discovered.

In terms of a compelling, inspiring conductor Fricsay seems even to have been a very good "singer-conductor". - Of course a leader who expected spontaneous followers. - But likewise one did it willingly.

Brief interlude, to deepen our Fricsay findings in terms of "Flying Dutchman."

An example of captivating the audience and letting them glide, is the final studio recording (1952) with the RIAS Symphony Orchestra and the RIAS Chamber Choir, Josef Metternich as a Dutchman, Annelies Kupper as Senta, Josef Greindl as Daland, Sieglinde Wagner as Mary - and Wolfgang Windgassen as Erik -: all familiar singer of German or Municipal Opera.

*Musikbeispiel: DG LC 00173 445 687 Richard Wagner / "Der fliegende Holländer" 3. Akt
"Verloren! Ach, verloren! Ewig verlorntes Heil!" und "Erfahre das Geschick"
Josef Metternich, Bass-Bariton (Holländer) / Annelies Kupper, Sopran (Senta),
Josef Greindl, Bass (Daland) / Sieglinde Wagner, Mezzo-Sopran (Mary),
Wolfgang Windgassen, Tenor (Erik)
RIAS-Kammerchor / RIAS-Symphonie-Orchester / Ltg. Ferenc Fricsay 1952*

Fulminant, the Finale of the "Flying Dutchman" 1952 Ferenc Fricsay conducting the RIAS Chamber Choir and RIAS-Symphony-Orchestra and the Chorus and Orchestra of the Städtische Opera. The cast would have been feasible just as well at the Deutsche Oper: Josef Metternich as the Dutchman, Annelies Kupper as Senta, Josef Greindl as Daland, Sieglinde Wagner as Mary - and Wolfgang Windgassen as Erik.

It is remarkable, that the studio production was already made mainly with younger singers.

The singers Metternich and Windgassen were only end of the 30th. In contrast a result of the same year: the singers of the old generation in the live recording of the Kant Strasse: Josef Herrmann (who died three years later), Ludwig Suthaus and Maria Müller: all artists who had made their career during the Nazi era

Due to a fundamentally different casting focus - on one hand by Heinz Tietjen (opera functionary already during the Nazi era and after the war functionary at the Städtische Oper) and Elsa Schiller on the other hand, (persecuted by the Nazis, survived the KZ) who after the war supervised the artists at Deutsche Grammophon.

That the Jew Fricsay (in reality he was a practicing Catholic) found his way in the Berlin Opera business to get on with a person like Heinz Tietjen, emphasizes his will of cooperation. - He was a conductor, being capable and willing to deal with the most different personalities.

Astonishing!

On January 14th 1951 a wonderful document of the Verdi Requiem with the RIAS Chamber Choir, the Choir of St. Hedwig's Cathedral was recorded. - A striking recording, it seems to me.

*Musikbeispiel: Andromeda LC o.A. ANDRCD 9019 Giuseppe Verdi / „Messa da Requiem“
“Dies Irae” II.4 Quid sum miser II.5 Rex tremendae
Elisabeth Grümmer, Sopran / Johanna Blatter, Mezzo-Sopra / Helmut Krebs, Tenor,
Josef Greindl, Bass RIAS-Kammerchor / Chor der St. Hedwigskathedrale
Orchester der Städtischen Oper Berlin / Ltg. Ferenc Fricsay Live, 14. Januar 1951*

„Messa da Requiem“: Seems to me a fascinating recording due by its determination and extreme emotional burst.

Amazing in the emotional spectrum, something I have hardly ever seen in a performance of this composition - despite best known conductors.

This demonstrates that facing Ferenc Fricsay, we meet one of the last non-italian but most genuine „Verdi-anian“, who by his personification was a „Mozart-ian“ from, a species almost extinct in our days. Why? Because Wagner, as leading character has generally displaced his competitor Verdi to the second, (lower) grade; the distance of the first and second is remarkable great.

Let us gloat over once more (if I may say so) the virtues of preference by which Verdi conferred the crown of the 19th century.

Likewise fantastic! Although it (in quotes :) is „only the „Symphony Orchestra of the West German Radio“, not an „Opera Orchestra by origin“ playing the beginning of Verdi's "Trovatore"

*Musikbeispiel: Walhall LC o.A. WLCD 0026 Giuseppe Verdi / „Il trovatore“
Introduction und Anfang vom 1. Akt Wilhelm Schirp, Bass-Bariton (Ferrando) /
Chor und Sinfonieorchester des Westdeutschen Rundfunks / Ltg. Ferenc Fricsay 1953*

Another little side glance: Fricsay as an opera conductor: „under the grey dust of the years, but not a bit boring you hear an excerpt from "Il Trovatore" by Giuseppe Verdi; sung in German by Wilhelm Schirp as Ferrando. Choir and Symphony Orchestra of the West German Radio conducted by Fricsay in 1953

Notice: Fricsay, the bomb of temperament, does not need to be welt of the fore as master of demolition of all classes - This Verdi remains sanguine civil, cantabile and almost easy going.

As we have said, his commitment focused to opera quite significantly on the two celestial planets: Mozart and Verdi - with some significant excursions towards Wagner.

In the Verdi « discipline » he succeeded 1948, even twice a first appearance of legendary style. This has to be mentioned and worth to be heard.

For the first time on November 18th, 1948 Fricsay was the very first time as conductor of the City Opera playing Verdi's "Don Carlo" in the title role singing Boris Greverus, who fell in oblivion ever since.

As Posa a young baritone made his début Fricstay met him at the beginning with some reluctance (this singer reported). The facial expression of the conductor suddenly cheered up as soon the young Fischer-Dieskau sang just some notes. –

The fact that this spectacular double debut for sound recordings happened, certainly was not the merit of the unknown Fischer-Dieskau. - Once he told me that he wouldn't advise any beginner the role as the Marquis Posa –

How did the two artists manage the situation?

*Musikbeispiel: Walhall LC o.A. WLCD 0136 Giuseppe Verdi / „Don Carlo“ 2. Akt
“Der ist's, Carlos, mein Prinz”
Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Bass-Bariton (Rodrigo) / Boris Greverus, Tenor (Carlo)
Orchester der Städtischen Oper Berlin / Ltg. Ferenc Fricstay Live, Theater des Westens 18.11.1948*

Finally, I want to comment the fact that Ferenc Fricstay obviously was still belonging to a generation of bandleader, who were well focussed in the opera because they did not insisted to force the sound intensity of the orchestra and drown the singer's voice.

To use other words: Fricstay was towards the classical singers an old-fashioned conductor: his focus by all means was their audibility and superiority, a custom (convention) being putted extremely in question, already in the 60ies.

Conductors such as Karajan or even Sawallisch may also have been singer oriented musicians - and where experts of singing voices. But they put increasingly themselves - and their orchestra - in the foreground, which in a way singers could be worn out and on the other hand, the continuous demand for voluminous voices arose, and this has become the norm in our days.

Summarizing: Fricstay was - - not like that.

Not even by interpretation of Wagner, our last topic for today.

Fricstay's reserved attitude towards Wagner took a positive effect in the "Valkyrie" while the conductor had to reduce the enormous accumulation of sound. The sound slightly disillusioned - and opened the possibility to a total unsentimental harder, but at the same time sleeker sound.

*Musikbeispiel: LC 03982 5.00363 Richard Wagner / “Die Walküre” 1. Akt
“Du bist der Lenz” Maria Müller, Sopran (Sieglinde) / Ludwig Suthaus, Tenor (Siegmund)
Orchester der Städtischen Oper Berlin / Ltg. Ferenc Fricstay 1951*