

# 1954

## Eight weeks music with Ferenc Fricsay

### Eight weeks of experience, rehearsals and concerts

### Eight weeks of unforgettable moments and impressions, achievements and hopes



The followings excerpts from letters written by Laila Storch (*oboist with ten years' experience at that time and member of the Houston Symphony Orchestra*) to her mother Juanita Storch under the influence of the unexpected experiences of making music with Ferenc Fricsay: a testimony of her particular situation and special artistically experience.

She became till nova days a very close friend of the Fricsay-family after these few weeks of musical cooperation.

Laila Storch, in the advanced age or 93 years, came 2014 from the United States to Budapest to participate the commemorative festivity of Ferenc Fricsay to honor his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday.



(left to right)

Aloysia Friedmann (Laila's daughter), L. Dobay-Fricsay, Laila Storch,  
Sz. Ókovács (MD of the Opera), M. Dobay-Fricsay (daughter of F.Fricsay) and T. Vásáry (Pianist)

**November 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1953**

Dear Mother,

It is really amazing how things happen – For the past two weeks we were subjected to the most horrible English conductor you can imagine – superficial, sarcastic, unmusical, etc. etc. I didn't even have the time to write you about him, as there was so much extra work too – but it was all disgusting, especially as thy built him up so, and even talking of hiring him for Houston. Revolting! After his last concert on Friday night at the end of an 11 service week, we were all worn out and glad to see him go. On Saturday a.m. we had to start all over with two rehearsals and a *new conductor*. Now three days later and his one concert is over already – but it was night and day. This was actually one of the most thrilling symphony concerts I've ever experienced. You well know, it usually goes by week after week with only an occasional glimmer from perhaps some visit soloist to spark up the scene ... An how, this man, I could just tell as soon as he'd played *one* page of the Mozart Symphony (*Haffner*) at the first rehearsal, is an *artist* and a dedicated musician. No time for cracks or remarks like all the fakers; it took all his time and concentration just to work out the music – and what he did in three days was just sensational. His name is Ferenc Fricsay. Please note, and do send me whatever they write in the San Francisco papers about him as he is headed to guest conduct there now. Tell Beth to clip all criticisms for me – Marion and I want to know everything about his reception there. (*Marion Davies, 1<sup>st</sup> cellist of the Houston Symphony and my best friend was also originally from northern California.*) The gratifying thing to me is that true worth, and art can still touch even the most dulled and stupid (appearing anyhow), audiences. You can fool a few of the people, even the ones who wield social and administrative power and are *supposed* to know something like Ima Hogg, but the mass of music goers are still capable of responding, providing something is really *true*. I had thought this on the basis of the tremendous enthusiasm always at Prades (*Referring to the Casals festivals where there was an audience from all walks of life.*) Anyhow, tonight the Houston audience *reacted*. They called him back four times after Bartok and you know they can't take contemporary music – and the Mozart Symphony even got an ovation and at the end of the Tchaikovsky 5<sup>th</sup>, the whole audience kept applauding as did the orchestra, and then they, (the audience), finally stood up and kept applauding. (*Quite unusual in those days*)

Fricsay has nothing sham about him. He is demanding, but kind, and has a beautiful expression – especially when things go well.

The amazing thing is that he is young – about 40. This is fabulous for a conductor of his calibre. I didn't think there were *any* und 70. I can only compare this concert to how we felt when Bruno Walter was here – that same purely artistic approach. All I can say is, if Europe can still produce something like this, then its great creative force has not died out. He has that extra *something* – intensity, character, integrity, nobility, all those qualities integrated with a remarkable actual technical control of an orchestra. - The blend of fire and form. As in all truly great artistic productions, it has to be the result of careful thought, working out and planning – nothing left to chance ever comes out. I've seen that so well with people like Tabuteau and Casals. Analysis, but *intelligent* analysis, not useless picking like the fools do.

This letter may be incoherent, but as you can see, I am in a state of enthusiasm very seldom encountered during my years in orchestra, (*I was already in my 8<sup>th</sup> season and third orchestra*). This could almost give you hope to go on.

I thought there were no young conductors like this. A violinist who played in the Prades Orchestra (*Francis Akos Festival of summer 1953*) had told me he was good, but I never dreamed he'd be something *great* like this. If Houston was smart, they'd try to get him, but I don't think there's a chance, and anyway, he is too fine for this town. You can imagine the extent of my enthusiasm, when I say if he had a permanent orchestra somewhere, I'd at least try to make every effort to play in it. It would be so rewarding and worthwhile ... You could tell he heard everything and was aware of every last corner of the orchestra. - Really a fabulous conducting technic, and then also imagination, poetry and colour. As far as I know, he has been the conductor or a radio orchestra in Berlin for several years and I don't know what else. He's a Hungarian. This is his first time in America and he's conducting just in Boston, Houston and San Francisco. (These three orchestras were all in the process of looking for a new conductor) Actually, I don't know how we were lucky enough to get him at all, though the other towns have him for much longer ...

Tonight's concert was what I *thought* playing in a symphony orchestra should be - but I've seen it so rarely, as almost to doubt it existed. I was happy for Casals, but naturally that was all small orchestra and we never had the chance to do *big works*. (I mean with *large orchestrations* because of course the music itself was *big*.) This is the first glimmering I've seen that there may be, or rather *are*, some genius conductors under 50!

I just noticed that it is 1.30am. I guess I'd better get to bed, but I just had to write you about Fricsay.

Love, Laila

### **November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1953**

..... Don't forget to send me any clippings you can about Fricsay, especially all of Frankenstein's and Friends reviews. (*The two leading music critics with the San Francisco newspapers*) We just assume that S.F. will try to get him, but perhaps not, as they such a parade of guests since the past two seasons and plenty to choose from. Anyway, though people have intimated they'd try to get him here, any kind of rumours fly, and I just couldn't believe it could happen. If such a fantastic thing should come about, it would change the whole picture here, but I don't think there's a chance of it. - We heard the broadcast (*playback*) last night and it really was exciting.

### **December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1953**

.... Just received your letter with clippings and at that very moment Marion called to ask if I'd heard anything, as she'd asked her mother for clippings too, and didn't get anything yet - so I had to read everything to her on the phone. Actually every time Frankenstein said something not too favourable she was happy, hoping that means S.F.'s reaction won't be too great, but when I told her what you said about the Standard broadcast and the applause, she just groaned. I don't think they'll ever get him here anyhow, and it's just inevitable that he should have that audience reaction everywhere, as he seems to have that extra inner power that just commands it. That is a wonderful picture from the Chronicle (San Francisco newspaper) - better than any that were in the local papers here - of course; San Francisco always does everything in a fairly intelligent way. So glad you can hear the Standard broadcasts anyhow. Try not to miss the other one ....

The Fricsay concert is still the only thing that threw a little real light into this landscape. Just like a comet leaves its tail showing in the sky, so everyone here is still talking about it. Not just Marion and I went raving mad – everywhere we go we hear people speak of him. What a pity Houston only had him for three days, but I suppose we're lucky he hit here all.

### **December 24<sup>th</sup>, 1953**

.... Thank you for the two Fricsay reviews. You have done a wonderful coverage and Marion and I *both* appreciate it. It certainly is interesting. It can't have been just our "imagination" here, as such diverse types of musicians in the orchestra are *still* talking about him and really *all* thought he was tremendous. Of course no conductor can generate a real "electrical storm" no matter how good he is, unless the musicians are *all trying* their utmost, and they really were here. Of course I never heard anything so *horrible* as the way we played for Abravanel the two weeks following.

*(Early in 1954 we heard what was unexpected and almost unbelievable news!)*

### **January 17<sup>th</sup>, 1954**

So much excitement that I really feel a bit tired now. Marion called at 7.30a.m. with the news about Fricsay. We'd been tipped off yesterday that there would be something in today's paper, but the most we ever wildly expected was perhaps 10 weeks – certainly never 16. Of course, they haven't succeeded in getting him as a permanent conductor or anything like that. But then what is permanent, especially in Houston. He has such a smart manager, that he won't give up Fricsay for a long term contract to the first orchestra that asks for him. The amazing thing is that Houston has got him at all! The few people I've spoken with are all flabbergasted ... It is all so unexpected, or at least never considered as within the realm of possibility.

*(During the summer of 1954 which I spent mostly in Prades and Switzerland, I had hoped to hear Fricsay conduct in Lucerne, but due to a serious bicycle accident, I had to give up the trip. Letters with details accounts about Fricsay therefore resumed only after he arrived in Houston in October at the beginning of the symphony season. We naturally wondered if our exalted feelings about his one concert of a year earlier could really mean that he was going to be like that all the time!)*

### **October 27<sup>th</sup>, 1954**

Dear Mother, .... Yesterday was our first rehearsal with Fricsay and today again. No doubt of it, he is a wonderful conductor, and if his humour stays as it is, it'll seem almost too good to be true. He works efficiently and quickly and demands complete attention, but seems completely lacking in ugly sarcasm, which is so rare among conductors. I'll guess I'll have to wait for at least a few weeks for a "final judgment" on him, but so far, he seems everything we thought he was in our wild enthusiasm of last year. The way he does Bartok, it becomes as clear and simple as 1 – 2 – 3 – and the score is so complicated. Haydn, also a gem and very good ideas musically.- The Brahms 2<sup>nd</sup> we only got Through the first two movements and he said, (15 minutes before the end of rehearsal time), "I think that is enough for today. You are tired, I am tired, and this is Houston. - It is too hot", - a classis speech which expresses my sentiments of the past six years.

The last few days have been terrible, so muggy and I've been sitting in my shorts making reeds, just dripping and sweat in in bed at night, but when you know it's like that here, you cease to be amazed by it. We're supposed to move into the re-modelled Music Hall on Sunday and I guess all future rehearsals will be there. They say it'll be air-conditioned, but I'll have to see. Of course, even that has its disadvantages. Sometimes they get the hall *too* cold.

I can't help but wonder how much patience Fricsay will have with this uncultivated crazy town. Only thing, as someone said, like everyone else, he has to earn his living somewhere.

### **October 29<sup>th</sup>, 1954**

Dear Mother,

Four days of Fricsay and he still seems wonderful. As far as conductors go, you can't imagine anyone more fair and agreeable to work with and yet at the same time demanding the *utmost* in musicality and attention to detail. I still feel we must wait before being *completely* convinced, but if he stays the same as he is, it certainly is excellent. I feel exhausted after rehearsals like I did when I was in Curtis. The amount of concentration required is really enormous – but such a satisfaction to hear the *whole* orchestra being moulded in such a way. I you feel tired after, at least it seems for *something* and in a way one is *less* tired, because you *want* to work. His whole approach and personality just demand it of you. I still feel what I thought last year, that he is an honest and fair musician and demands only the *music* and none of his remarks to musicians are personal or mean. This is so rare. He hasn't thrown a tantrum yet or raised his voice – only told the trombone, after he didn't get a passage right for about the fifth time, that he mus "exercise his part" at home, that *he* was always studying the score, and expected the others to do the same – and you could tell he *meant* it. He really knows what he is doing, and I must say, I'm grateful for the Curtis training and ten years of experience to help me try to do things as he wants them.

### **October 31<sup>st</sup>, 1954**

Dear Mother,

This a.m. we had the first rehearsal in the new hall. It looks quite beautiful inside, but the *acoustics* are nothing to brag about – in fact one doesn't hear well sitting on the stage at all. It is quite amazing, but to me Fricsay seems more interesting in every rehearsal. We did Haydn today, and his conception of Haydn is really so *right*, spirit and all. He says such good things that sometimes I feel like shouting out, "Amen"!

A couple of places in the Brahms, he gave me a pleased smile, which certainly seems rewarding! It is all so different. Vera Jelagin said the same thing I felt today, that we were *sorry* when the rehearsal was over. We'd have liked to go on playing and do the other movement of the Haydn ... He has the really classical European approach, but not a Prussian martinet, mixed with wonderful lyrical and singing and truly musically sensitive quality that makes it really an inspiration to work with him. So, this far I don't think my reaction to that one concert last year was wrong! I couldn't help but wonder sometimes during the long interval, if we'd overestimated him.

## November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1954

Dear Mother,

Well, our first concert with Fricsay is over and it seemed to be quite a success. The orchestra came through well, considering all the strain involved, especially in the Bartok *Dance Suite* which is so complicated. But Fricsay prepares so intelligently in the rehearsals and it really shows up in the concert. He is a *smart* and *logical* man. I think he was also a little more tense than he might be usually, not knowing how we would react and if he could really depend on everyone in concert conditions.

The Brahms 2<sup>nd</sup> is not an easy one to start with for oboe, and that darn solo made me nervous, but I guess it wasn't too bad. At the end of the movement, he said "*Fine*" under his breath, so I guess I passed the first week! I wish you could have heard the concert. I'm sure our orchestra never sounded like this. If he keeps a hold of it, it'll be *an orchestra* or else, but I really don't see how he can put up with Houston. There were some stupid speeches before the concert and they seem so "Texas" and vulgar and out of place – about the new hall, but the mayor used it as an opportunity to tell how many votes he had so far in today's election, etc. Fricsay's Haydn is really aristocratic, as is his whole approach to music, and it certainly seems amazing to have it *here*. I just wonder to what extent it will *really* be appreciated.



## November 4<sup>th</sup>, 1954

Well, rehearsals continue at a most interesting pitch and pace. Fricsay really knows what he wants. He demands *a lot* but is very nice about it all – none of this terrorism and insulting like Stokowski and others indulge in. I really respect him for this and it proves an orchestra conductor can be strict and particular and get results without being a disgusting despot. He also has a cute sense of humour which pops out once in a while and gives everyone a good laugh.

## November 6<sup>th</sup>, 1954

Glad you enjoyed the pictures of Fricsay and Mrs. F. This is almost two weeks and we still think he's wonderful. In fact even more so, so it looks quite promising. He seemed pleased with all my solos in the Bach "C Major Suite" which is on Monday. The same one we played in Prades so I *should* know it. But it's always difficult.

Yesterday after rehearsal he came over to tell me a couple of 16<sup>th</sup> notes were quick and somehow with several other musicians, we started talking about Bach and vocal works, and it seems he's a real Bach enthusiast and seems to have good ideas about it – I mean in the *tradition* that I like, not the pedantic stiff academic approach ....

Next Saturday the first Pop concert is *Johann Strauss* and *Schubert* with FRICSAY! Should be something! Yesterday's rehearsal on Stravinsky was wonderful – good imagination.

## **November 8<sup>th</sup>, 1954**

Dear Mother,

Just a line to tell you that Fricsay gave me my first bow of the season after the C Major Bach Suite. He seemed really pleased and was smiling broadly after the big oboe part in the Gavotte. Then we played Stravinsky and the Dvorak *New World*. - Never heard the *New World* sound like that. - It was really an exciting performance. I was talking to some people backstage afterwards, not too far from Fricsay's dressing room, and I guess he saw me, and *he came out* and shook my hand and started to congratulate me for the Bach, but I managed to tell him how wonderful I thought the Dvorak was, and then he said, "For me, was the Bach very fine", so I guess he was really pleased. It's certainly nicer to be off to that kind of star with a new conductor, I must say.

I was in misery all day though – was afraid I couldn't play anything. Missed a couple notes in a tricky passage in the morning rehearsal that I never missed before, and it got me nervous. However, it went perfectly tonight.

We have two rehearsals for our Sunday Bach program this week, (our own Bach Society) plus the Viennese Pop concert on Saturday, so it'll be a busy week. I haven't dusted or washed anything since I moved in here. I guess I won't be able to until Fricsay goes back to Europe for Christmas.

Wednesday (next day) Fricsay's rehearsal of the Sorcerer's Apprentice this a.m. was wonderful – so amusing. All the details, but all directed toward the idea of getting across the story. He was in fine humour and told a funny story about Mengelberg.

## **Sunday morning, November 14<sup>th</sup>, 1954**

... The last few days I've also been wishing you were here to hear Viennese music. We did our first Pop Concert with Fricsay last night and it was fabulous, as have been all the rehearsals on Strauss and Schubert. Never have I heard anyone conduct Strauss waltzes like he does! It is really the absolute ideal of Viennese spirit. Just what you imagine it should be – but imagine having that in *Houston*! We are all concerned that the audiences don't *really* seem to appreciate him yet, and that egg-head Roussel (*local music critic*) hasn't even been writing all-out for him as he should. If they lose out now, they'll never have a chance for another conductor of this calibre. You can't fool 85 musicians and I have never seen an orchestra so unanimously crazy about a conductor, and he even seems to get better. He was more at ease and relaxed while doing the Strauss and even told some jokes and imitated things that the music was supposed to represent and we were all in stitches. (*laughing*) We played that *Tritsch-Tratsch Polka* for an encore and he described how I was supposed to depict old ladies yacking in a Café, and the way he did it, we just all hysterics.

I think the best thing of all is his sense of imagination and colour, because that really puts the final touch on the music, which so many conductors lack. The notes may all be mechanically perfect but that doesn't make music and how wonderful to find someone in this day of machine-like accuracy who still puts the first emphasis on the *really important* elements of music, while not neglecting the others.

After the experience of Casals, I just could never be happy with any other type conductor, which makes this even more amazing for me. Fricsay is for the singing line and beautiful sound, but he is conscious of everything else the music demands. - The subtle difference between a Rossini staccato and a Mozart staccato – etc. etc. - Such a sense of real style.

I just wish you could hear his concerts. You'll have to plan on coming sometime. - If not before Christmas, then when he comes back.

### **November 17<sup>th</sup>, 1954**

Dear Mother,

Every day of work with Fricsay is a pleasure. He is really so fine – we are all afraid too good for Houston. Last night's audience seemed enthusiastic though. Never heard the *Sorcerer's Apprentice* done with so much fire and when he tried to describe the story for us, mixing up his English with German words, it was really picturesque ...

Fricsay has a quick sense of humour – I sneezed during rehearsal of *Sorcerer* the other day (loud, as I often do, but had waited for a loud part of the music). He looked over and said, "But not after one!" and then when he started up again gave me a special downbeat for to sneeze! I should have saved it for *Hary Janos*, that Hungarian piece we're playing next week, which is supposed to start with a sneeze!

### **November 20<sup>th</sup>, 1954**

I've been waiting to write a long letter with sort of an analysis of the Fricsay situation, but I just don't have the time. It is actually very strange that he landed here, and if it were a different place it could have big results – as you say. He didn't click with the orchestra in San Francisco. Well, here, he and the orchestra have a wonderful rapport and he seems happy about that, but the town basically stays its stupid self. The orchestra is not representative of Houston, being composed of entirely different elements. Fricsay has had a very dubious reception by the stupid "so-called" music critics. They don't seem to appreciate what they have in him, and even the orchestra management doesn't hop and skip to get the things done they should. He wants chimes; they should see that chimes are there, etc. They don't want to spend money – they don't seem to really appreciate art. His whole way of doing things is an uncompromisingly musical one and he doesn't ever get mad at the orchestra, but only impatient when other things don't go well – like outside noise in the hall, or lack of the right instruments, etc. etc

I don't know if I explain the point. We felt that he should have the utmost of cooperation in every way and it doesn't look as if he'll get it. If not, Houston will only prove a frustrating place for him, and he'd do better not to stay. - Will continue in next. -

## November 24<sup>th</sup>, 1954

Dear Mother,

It just seems there is no time to write things I'd like to. I continue to marvel at Fricsay in every rehearsal. Monday's concert of Hary Janos was fabulous. He really made that Hungarian story live with all its humour and colour. And how beautifully he did Haydn this a.m. - Only the gap between what he wants and what comes out of the orchestra is pretty horrible. One of the things I fell the most lacking in der orchestra is a sense of colour or atmosphere. When we did that Hungarian Dance, especially at first, it just had no flavour or imagination or fire. People play so prosaic and dull.

## Thanksgiving Day 1954

Dear Mother, Thought I'd start a letter anyhow.- Been practicing Hungarian music all a.m. - We do an *all-Hungarian* Pop concert on Saturday night ...

**Saturday** ... - Just back from rehearsal. - Proof that it's the people that make places is that I fell positively exhilarated very often after rehearsals not, and usually in Houston, it was deadening. But with Fricsay, orchestra rehearsals really take wings. It is amazing - the time flies by instead of dragging, and even the most tiresome old "chestnuts" like that Liszt 2<sup>nd</sup> *Hungarian Rhapsody* seem fun to play. Of course, I always have the oboe and *reed* problems, but outside of that, I've never had so much *fun* (imagine using that word), playing in an orchestra (Regular season that is - Prades in an exception). Fricsay can ask for things that if other conductors asked for, you would probably be annoyed and fell resentful, but he has such a wonderful manner with the orchestra, that you just don't mind doing anything and everyone *tries* to do what he wants.

At one point in the Liszt, I guess I was getting ahead of going too fast in one spot, and he finally stopped and laughed and looked very amuses and said, "You have more temperament than I do!" and we started over - but those are his reactions. Some other conductor would get angry and growl and yell, "Follow me!"

When we do light or any dance-style music, it is just enough to make you want to "take off". He really gets a lift and lilt into it, and how many times in the past we have just thudded and thumped along on Brahms *Hungarian Dances* or *Viennese Waltzes*.

## November 30<sup>th</sup>, 1954

Did you hear that the great conductor Furtwängler died yesterday? This is really a loss to music. He was 68 - younger than many other conductors. (Bruno Walter is 78.) It is said he died of pneumonia, but I heard last summer already that he was very sick and he's never had such a robust constitution. It is really a shame.

**December 4<sup>th</sup>, 1954**

Things happen so fast that I can't keep up with writing. I fell just beat this morning. We had an extra performance with Toth of that Menotti opera last night – (Assistant concertmaster Andor Toth occasionally conducted) and I slept very badly after ... partly due to a hot humid spell, and also to a conversation with Marion and Ed. It is all such a paradoxical situations here insofar as Fricsay is concerned. The strange thing was that the night of that one concert with him last year, and on the basis of those three days only, I felt "That is the conductor I want to play with, and the only one who gives me any hope for the possibility of still enjoying symphony playing." (I could have been wrong), and this was long before I thought or even *dreamed* there would be a chance of his coming here. It was the farthest thing from my imagination or I would *not* have written him that letter the day after the concert as I don't often do things quite so impulsive. Remember, I as much as said I'd go anywhere if there were ever any opportunity to play with him ... and then he came to HOUSTON. And even more amazing, we weren't wrong. In fact, he seems more wonderful all the time. Naturally, it is not easy playing for him.

He has a million ideas and I have to change many solo parts and things as I've told you before, with someone else you might not like to do. But the other day he came over to show me some ideas he had about my parts in the slow movement of Brahms 1<sup>st</sup>, and his explanations were so beautiful I thought, and showed what a real imagination he has, and how far he goes – not thinking of notes. In fact, it's the only time I've ever heard any conductor express those kinds of ideas about some phrases. He said the string introduction was to him something dark, all blue in colour – and then after all those measures, the oboe was come in, and this passage to him was always like the voice of an angel bringing hope and he said, "But you don't know Fidelio?" – (I said I did), and he continued, "like when the first prisoner comes to the others and tells them there is hope of freedom, and so on, and then the second phrase, "This is like a shepherd, telling good thing, but not to little animals, the listeners are the people and he is bringing good to the people."

Well, I'm sure I don't know if I'll be able to give him that impression in that passage, which also happens to be a difficult bunch of notes, (though I've never had trouble with it from that standpoint), but I thought even to express such ideas about the music shows a glimpse of what type of conception of music he has. Everything represents something and (*which*) such a really noble feeling. But whatever *type* of music he does, is equally in its right character.

*Don't tell anyone the following*, but here's the rub. A few days ago, we heard a dark rumour. He (Fricsay) had spoken with Steve Gorisch (*Gorisch was fluent in German*) and said the board didn't want to give him what he wanted and he didn't think there was much hope. Last night Ed was able to tell Marion and me much more detail, because his boss is the vice-president of the symphony board, and Ed saw a lot of papers that he shouldn't have, so of course this is all *absolutely* on the Q.T. and we shouldn't know anything about it. It seems it was an answer Fricsay's proposals. Apparently Fricsay wants or *wanted*, to really build up a big orchestra here, and in fact he told Gorisch that he had told the Board it could be one of the best in the country in about 3 years. He likes the people in it and feels they have *enthusiasm* and heart for music.

But it need so be bigger to do many standard works or to record – a higher minimum wage for the string players – a *good* hall that would be for the orchestra alone (like in any civilized place – the Music Hall re-built is only a poor improvement over the Auditorium).

At least we don't smell stale beer anymore, but acoustically it lacks much and also has to be used for many other things. Also, he wanted instruments for the orchestra and a promise of a European tour (!) or a good America one. (Ages ago I said I would be one of the biggest strokes of publicity for *Texas* if they'd send a good orchestra playing Brahms and Mozart to *Europe*, where people think there is nothing but cowboys here, and under the direction of Fricsay who is so well-known there, it'd be a sure-fire combination.)

Other things he wants too. - Opera here, etc. etc. But *they* don't see it, and what is the difficulty?? In *Houston, Texas*, the land of millions, the objections are based on money and budget ... bearing out what I've said for a long time - there are millions here, but there is *no desire or will* to turn them into artistic channels. So as things stand now, and also judging by the look on Johnsons face (*the symphony manager*) there isn't much hope. Other crazy objections - his programs so far have not been "big box office!" He goes overtime too much and doesn't understand about money. - It is all awful - to finally see a real artist at work and then have it like that. But I actually don't think this place could change fast enough to appreciate what Fricsay is. The orchestra loves him, but the orchestra is made up of people from all varied backgrounds and experience - none of them from Texas.

The sad part is that a similar situation hardly exists anywhere else in the U.S.A. young good orchestra that he could mould to *his* artistic ideas and who would happily do everything he wants. He has so many ideas musically, that he wouldn't be really happy even with a big fine orchestra who resisted change or doing what he wanted. That is, I'm sure, what he likes about us.

I guess it's a good thing I sent my Fulbright papers again, although not sure I would get in this time. B.F. (Before Fricsay) I was at a point where I could quite happily have given up orchestra playing. I didn't see any hope of its being the type of experience I'd one thought it could be, and after Prades, the contrast of coming back and working in music *just to earn a living* was too repulsive. There seemed no reason or justification for it in that light. But Fricsay's approach, the effort automatically justifies itself, because *it is art*. Even when he doesn't get the complete or ideal result yet with us, the direction and artistic method is there. So that if all hopes of playing with him go, I'll be in a real quandary. I'm even more convinced he's the only conductor I could play for (at least at this point of the game) as I can't take the disgusting unfair and sham human approach of most of them.

All I've seem including (*several famous conductors of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century*) are charlatans compared to Fricsay. You could compare him to someone of type of Bruno Walter, and in kindness to the musicians, he is as fine as Casals was in Prades. I never expected to see this in a professional symphony conductor. (*Casals never earned his living by being a conductor* and so it was pleasure and joy to him to conduct - big difference.)

So here we are. I'm almost *positive* that I'd leave Houston if Fricsay does, but there would be very little hope of getting in another orchestra conducted by him. He'd probably guest a lot and even if he *did* get an orchestra, he couldn't displace the oboist already there - even if he'd want to and that I wouldn't know. I feel he likes me (*my playing*) but all American orchestras have good oboists thanks to Tabuteau and there's no need to switch them around! But now, even if I went and tried to do something different like Fulbright, I'd *know* that orchestra playing *could* have been good, and I won't feel quite so resigned to giving it up. But I'd rather quit than do it on any less basis after this.

Well, this is a long story, but as it is all indefinite so far, may be a waste of writing. However, it is not too surprising. Fricsay is really too good for Houston – unless they'd get 100% back of him and give him everything so he could make it good enough for him. The problem is, *where* could he fit?

One thing made me very pleased after the Tuesday concert. I spoke to Mrs. Fricsay – she is lovely – and said something about Clara Haskil. She said she hoped that they'd be together in Switzerland at New Years, and I said how wishes I could see her, and she said, "But you will again, - and you must come to see us in Switzerland too." She certainly didn't *have* to say that, just to be polite, so she must have really meant it.

I mean the way some people say things of that nature, it seems only form, but she seems too sincere a person for that. So it is a nice prospect, and also when Fricsay was talking to me the other day about Brahms, he seemed more friendly and told me about his oboe players in Berlin etc. and asked me if I knew certain works, etc. etc.

### **December 7<sup>th</sup>, 1954**

Last night we played undoubtedly the greatest performance of Brahms 1<sup>st</sup> that I've even been involved in. I remember doing it with Ormandy, Hilsberg and Golschmann among others. With ... I could barely wait for it to be over. Fricsay really conducted with great freedom last night and as if he were inspired. I tried my best to play well. Didn't think it was all it could have been, but I really blew hard and worked anyhow, and a lot of people said afterwards that I'd played "like an angel".

I've never seen anything like Fricsay in an conductor. His face makes you feel you want to give *more* than you can and the result has really something of goodness and nobility in it. No wonder the orchestra tries its best to play for someone who acts the way he does with them. They try to play for the rats and the tyrants too, but the spirit is different and the atmosphere is more of tenseness than of real music making ...

We've been observing quite strict protocol and not speaking to him to congratulate him after concerts or anything- as the *whole orchestra* claps wildly on stage for him every time. But last night was just too great. (Johnson wasn't there either at his door) so Gorisch went in and then I did and Marion and several other I think after. As soon as he saw Gorisch and me at the door, he seemed to drop whomever he was talking to, and his face was alight and he came over to us. He was so nice and said he was happy about my parts and that he had "such a good feeling from the orchestra" – I *wanted* to tell him how I felt about his Brahms, but I don't think I got it out as all well. Anyhow, he was so kind and he said, "You must come to us in Switzerland. We want to see you next summer" etc..

Certain things Fricsay said yesterday in rehearsal, make Marion and me feel the possibility of his returning here is really not very great. Anyhow, he won't compromise with what he wants to do – that is obvious. He took off the Schubert *C Major Symphony* from next week's program because there wouldn't be enough time to rehearse it well. Now there is only this Saturday Pop concert and two regular ones before he leaves – but it things continue to look like this, you *must* come for a while in the spring when he returns.

## December 12<sup>th</sup>, 1954

Friday night some of us were invited to that oilman's place (the one with the guns in a glass case and all the records). It was arranged that Fricsay could come and bring some of his European recordings. It was the *first* time that any of us have seen him informally *anywhere* outside of the Music Hall, so it was quite an occasion. And that it really turned out to be before the evening was over. The records were marvellous, but at the end, he told all. Too long to go in details, but all are interesting and coincide with what Marion and I had already gleaned. Anyhow, the Board obviously lacks vision and Houston is missing the most unique opportunity in the world to become musically great. He presented his plan, (which was definitely *big*) but they couldn't see it. He was thinking on a *five years* basis. New hall, (he says musicians must have their own place with lockers, etc.) – he wanted *more* players and a higher minimum wage, but wouldn't have changed *any* of the principal chairs. Well. It's just all too beautiful. He had to know by December 1<sup>st</sup> and had told them so way last spring. All they offered him was another 16 weeks (at an even higher salary for him). He said he couldn't be earning fifty or sixty thousand and think that a first class musician in front of him was only getting two or three, and had to work in stores to live through the summer.

He said, "I am no Jesus Christ, but I can't stand this kind of social injustice." He said, "These millionaires and board members all come in black ties and tux to the first concert and haven't been since. They want me to come to their big dinners or be photographed with them – they give about \$300 to the symphony. I can afford to buy myself a dinner – why don't they give it to the orchestra? For me, it is an honour to be photographed with Toscanini, but what do I care for this sort of thing", etc. etc. - He really expounded.

Johnson has constantly interfered with his programs and he's had to suffer such undignified treatment here. He said not it is too late. Last week he *signed* one month Vienna Opera, one month Munich, one month Concertgebouw, one month recordings, etc. etc. and he only has a few weeks available to America or Houston. I actually hope he *doesn't* take a short guest stay here. It would be too awful, after the possibilities there were. Anyhow, I'm glad we had sort of a warning before. Naturally the next morning the whole orchestra knew and was just in a gloom. Never saw such depressed people.

The way the most blasé members of the orchestra talk about Fricsay – the 1<sup>st</sup> horn said he is one of the few *great men* he's ever seen. "Maybe there are three like that." Among orchestra conductors, it's very likely there aren't more. When I think of these seven weeks and he's never insulted or humiliated one musician or ever screamed or raised his voice to get what he wants!!

Before all this, earlier in the evening, Mrs. Fricsay had mentioned to me to sit near her, so I had a little chance to talk to her for the first time. She is completely lovely – and kind – and *beautiful*. It came out that she was born in Budapest, but her mother (I think) anyway she is one half Romanian and the rest part *Czech* and *Austrian*.

Also, she said, "My husband is also one half *Czech*, his father was from Czechoslovakia. Fricsay is not a Hungarian name. "Isn't that interesting? I'm sure you'll be sort of pleased, as after all, we've always rather liked our old section of Europe (*where so many of our relatives came from*) and it's nice to know they can still produce something of the calibre of this man. His ideals and artistic principles are so high and full of integrity that he seems like something from another age and it is hard to realize he is only forty – which means he wasn't even born until 1914.

The sad part is last night and just recently, I began to feel I was only now *beginning* to be able to play better for him and to be more at ease and to know what he wants. It would take time to become a real unit and I felt the possibilities of artistic expression with someone like that would be endless. It would be a real joy to go on with orchestra playing with this conductor. I'm afraid all others will be a disillusion. I'll just have to find some solution. - I hope I'll have a chance to talk with them a few minutes before they leave for Europe ... Last night we did the Mozart "*Musical Joke*" - one of the most hilarious and witty performances I've ever heard. After the concert Fricstay really amazed me. I went back just to shake hands and he held my hand and spoke very seriously, "Next summer in Europe, you *must* come to see us, and plan to stay with us for a *week* or *ten days*."

Well, it really impresses me, because after all, the scarcely know me. In these seven weeks, he's spoken with me perhaps three times for about five minutes in the orchestra and that mostly about some musical point, and I'd spoken with her two words once or twice before Friday night. I'm sure he must just draw his conclusions from the ether! He is so extremely sensitive, you fell he can read your thought while he's standing on the podium.

### **Dear Mother,**

I don't know where to begin. Here **it is the 21<sup>st</sup>** and I have absolutely nothing done for Christmas. It was *impossible* with the work there has been to do, plus the upset of the past couple of weeks - but the main thing, with Fricstay conducting, you just have to keep working all the time. I don't know if anybody realizes how it is, especially for oboe - *Reeds!!*

The situation keeps brewing here, with the newspapers taking opposite sides and articles every day. The idea started up that there was *still* a bit of hope and some people think he really *hadn't* signed in Europe, et. etc. - I personally am quite sure he'll never come to Houston on any permanent basis. If he came for only a few weeks, it would make a big problem (*for me*) of whether to stay jus for that or not. Anyhow, we'll see what happens. As of now, last night's concert was marvellous. - The whole first act of *Walküre* in big opera style. - The Board, Miss Ima and Johnson continue to act in the crudest way towards both Fricstays. No one official was even taking them to the plane, so Steve Gorisch offered and about twelve of us from the orchestra decided to go out this morning to see them off.

It seemed as they've been treated so rudely and in such a disrespectful man by many, that it was the least we could do. They really looked pleased and surprised and I think it made the send-off a little gayer. You can't *imagine* the articles Roussel has been writing - just absolutely *insulting*. Anyway, it was fun to see the big plane leave, (like the time we met Serkin), and both Fricstays stood and waved and smiles as long as possible and he took movies of us all until the very last minute. - Yesterday he spoke so nicely to the orchestra after rehearsal and presented two of his LP recordings, a whole Mozart opera, and two Haydn symphonies and said we should make a lottery for them. Then he called me to his room and *gave* me a record that he had signed with his best wishes. I just about fell over, I was so surprised. It was one he'd played the day I was at their place, so perhaps he knew how much I liked it. - Really thoughtful of him. It was so nice of them to have me come to lunch that day. Mr. Fricstay cooked a marvellous chicken - so I was glad I could take her a bunch of flowers this morning and was shocked that there were no others. People here just don't know *anything* about what is true greatness - but the majority of the orchestra does know. You can't fool musicians on that score.