

Ursula Buckel

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Beginnings 1957

Edgar Shann, a famous Oboist had engaged me for a Bach concert in a wonderful old Church in Lutry on the banks of Lake Geneva. After he had heard me sing he said: "I must call Karl Richter right away, you are a voice for Richter." I was then called upon to go to Munich for an audition. When I had finished singing they said: "Yes, a lovely voice!" I should however work on my voice for another year, I could become a lot better. „We will come back to you in one year's time.“

Naturally I thought they were trying to console me so that I wouldn't be too disappointed. I wasn't disappointed though, I thought it was fantastic that they had said I could improve. And then they did actually send for me. I'm not quite sure if it was a year or more later. From that moment on I was always engaged. I spent a lot of time with Richter in Munich, in Germany and in many foreign countries.

Bachwoche Ansbach

I sang a great deal in Ansbach. I was tremendously happy every time an engagement came to sing with Richter. At the same time I always thought to myself, I hope I can sing well and will be able to everthing properly. My husband always thought that Richter did something that other or very few conductors did, namely the phrasing had to be right with Richter I became aware of things I had never heard in other concerts. I would think, this is not the Mass in B-flat, the way he did it was so wonderful. I felt like an instrument that someone was playing, but even so, every time an invitation came there was always a moment in which I felt afraid and a moment in which I was overwhelmingly happy, and I would arrive full of bravery. On the whole this was very interesting, I would arrive from Geneva ,go to meet him and he would say: "Ja! Frau Buckel, how are you? How is your son?. He would be very affable, another time he would just growl a greeting at me and leave it at that.

During the Bachwoche our accommodation was in Neuendettelsau, and I always felt as though I was in a huge family and that we gave one another positive support and encouragement. There was never any internal streif it was absolutely harmonious. Dr. Weymar was usually there - they had kept their word and engaged me! When I think back it really was pretty steep, because the first thing I had to sing was the Johannes-Passion. The living together however helped a lot, we were all tuned into one another. The choir and Orchestra even played football together. We all felt really fine and able to concentrate our whole energy and power to the singing

That reminds me of a small episode that took place following a concert. We had gone to a restaurant to celebrate and there was a man who kept staring at me the whole time. In the end I didn't know where to look. I thought "I'm going to put an end to this" and went up to him and asked: "Excuse me, you keep looking at me all the time, may I ask why" and He said: "Are you really Ursula Bückel? I replied "Yes I am" whereupon he said, "You know in church you always seem so modest".

I love to laugh and sometimes without wanting to, laugh too loud and he obviously thought that when one sang religious songs, one always had to be modest - he was very confused. For me the rehearsals were quite normal, I never had the feeling they were too much. One always tried to sing as well and, if possible, to put a smile on Richter's face.

Thuringian Home

I come from Lauscha in the Thuringian Forest, the Germanys green heart, I was only 13years old when the war started. I took Organ lessons, my parents supported me very much, I also took piano lessons. The teacher was called up when the war started and he asked me if I could take over the organ duties. My legs were so short I could not reach the pedals. I had to adjust to this, and the congregation sang rather slowly. But it didn't take long before I had caught up with them and then they could not keep up with me It was a never - ending battle and of course amusing to watch. I was organist for 8 years. The worst thing about it for me, and even to this day something that I have never quite been able to get over, were the burials. I very often had to go to the crematory and someone's corpse would be lying there and, well, I was just too young, it made a lasting impression on me as far as fear was concerned. I was always in a state of fear in those days, but there were other musicians there, with the violin or the cello. Best of all were the weddings. Although I had not yet started totaken singing lessons I always sang at the weddings. In Lauscha everybody sings. There were many lovely voices and there are quite a few people from this little place who became famous. This small village with only 4000 inhabitants. had five amateur choirs. In this region everyone is musical. Through playing the organ I had the chance to learn a great deal in those eight years.

New home in Geneva

We moved to Geneva where of course I didn't know anybody, and I don't know anymore who it was who brought me together with someone else who then recommended a conductor to me. I auditioned, but he was only willing to give me the engagement if I could sing a high C. And I had to show him that I could. He gave me the notes and we began but I could not reach the C. In the end he said "I'll engage you anyway". And at the concert and during the rehearsals it came. Thank God!

Colleagues

Hertha Töpper: A fantastic singer! We got along very well together. Her husband he was a very nice person. Of course we worked together tehnically, and that did me very good. We were simply good together. To be truthful, I never had problems with colleagues in all my life.

Kieth Engen: You always had the feeling that he was very open-hearted,when he stood face to face with you and made you compliments. Apart from that I felt that he did it especially and not just to hear himself talk. He really took pleasure in your company, and he was always in a good mood. When we talked to each it was always open. I was very fond of his wife too Unfortunately we lost touch. I was often in Munich, but I used to think that she would think we only came to see her because of tickets, and I didn't want tocreate that impression.

Munich Bach Choir

If I just think about it, it resounds in me, I can hear the sound of the trumpets and the sopranos, it is really a very special sound,this sound of the Munich Bach choir. I found out that he looked for voices, belonging to non-professional singers, but with a good sound. I have heard that he gave tests, sometimes very hard ones. That maybe explains why it worked so well.

Bach-Choir Jubilee in Munich May 2004

Richters grandson (David Pia) is a big fellow. He was always very interested. He came to me and said "Frau Buckel, you live in Geneva" and he was only now learning about his grandfather. I said: "when

you are in Geneva, you can come and see me". During the performance he kept his ears wide open, I really noticed how sad it was for him not to have known his grandfather, Karl Richter better.

Concert trip to Moscow and Leningrad

In Moscow we performed the Johannes Passion in the Tschaikovsky Academy of Music. The listeners came in through the upper windows, the students went up into the attic to get the chance of hearing us. They almost crowded us out, and kept asking why we were performing just one time, for so many people. But it hadn't been planned. It was a fantastic atmosphere and absolute silence reigned when we had finished. And then suddenly footsteps could be heard, very slow footsteps, There was a little old lady with a headscarf and she had three or four flowers in her hand, she walked all the way from the back of the hall, right up to Richter in the front and gave him the flowers.

The concert was packed out and I saw a very big man sitting in the third row, he was wearing Jeans, but was otherwise dressed like a Kosack, with moustache and black hair, in any case I said to myself, what is he doing in a B-minor Mass? He didn't fit into the concert at all, and then I looked at him again and saw, that he spoke every tone or sang the music very softly, right through the whole Mass.

Concert trip to Japan

In Tokio, I can remember being together with my colleague Marga Höffgen. I could not speak English, I can't speak it today either sadly enough, except for two or three words. But at that time I had to order everything because Marga couldn't speak a word. What a double-dutch that was! It was the first thing we had to contend with when we arrived in the hotel room. I was fascinated by the gardens and all the other things we got to see, everything almost too beautiful to describe. It was the same in Osaka and Kyoto.

In Lauscha where I was organist during the war, a friend of mine had visitors from Japan, a conductor and a violinist. They had something to do with the Embassy in Berlin, I don't know how the connections were, in any case they were in Lauscha for quite a while and we made music together - it was a wonderful period. of time. Then they had to return to Berlin and to Japan. Now here we were with Richter in Tokio and I thought to myself it must be possible to trace a musician here in Tokio. The name was Areia. I mentioned this once during a meal and somebody heard the name Areia and said: "I know who that is we can call right away. Just imagine the little girl from Lauscha in Tokio!"

"To the Glory of God"

I like it best of all when the Churches are very big. Then I have the feeling, that I can open my arms and that they are as big as this Baroque church and into this space I can sing what I would like to believe and not always can, like many other people too. I have always said I sing to the glory of God and the pleasure of my listeners. Though sometimes I was not so pleased with myself, but I believe that everything that I sang had something good in it even when it was not always so fantastic. We all have our failings both big and small.

Karl Richter

With Richter, I really had the feeling that I was an instrument. He used me like an instrument, I sang out of him, it flowed through him the one merging into the other. When he lifted his baton my fears disappeared, I felt myself guided, very much guided, although he never forced anything. One was led by him in everything, one did even though I didn't consciously realise it at the time.