

Antonia Fahberg

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Beginnings 1955

I was supposed to understudy for a colleague, and was almost due to go into confinement with my son. For Goodness sake, what am I supposed to wear? I had a black dress, that we draped with a black scarf held by safety pins. Karl Richter came every day and practised with me. I had never sung Bach before. It was a terrific success and from that moment on one of my great loves. Richter came every day, explained everything to me, it was amazing. Well! there you are! I went to Vienna, where later my son was born. Richter came to Vienna as well and even accompanied me on walks with my baby carriage. Anyway we kept in touch.

Churches and Concerthalls in Munich

The Markuskirche was actually very pleasant, but the Lukaskirche was palling. First of all because it was so huge and then not heated. We did the Weihnachtsoratorium there, it was so cold you could see your own breath.

Kongreßsaal Deutsches Museum

I think, I sang the Mattäus-Passion there for over ten years. This hall was naturally the opposite to the Lukaskirche. It was very warm and there was not much air so that you thought you were not going to be able to produce a sound when you stood up for the flute aria in *Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben*. Your throat was dry, you were exhausted, your back hurt from sitting too long etc. etc.. But that was not so important. We performed the Johannes-Passion there too. Once in the Lukaskirche, Richter had Marianne Schech singing the Mathäus-Passion, and she wanted to leave before the flute aria. She was one of the colleagues who were not used to having to sit for so long and still feel fit right up to the moment when it was their time to sing. A lot of them lost their nerves. Ingrid Bjoner once said to me, "Toni, it's not the singing that's so bad, it's having to get up after sitting for so long, that's what's so dreadful!"

Händel, Samson

I can remember that with Samson, we all rehearsed together. Samson is not so easy for the soprano, with that one great aria, and Richter at that time could not afford to pay the orchestra for several rehearsals. So we rehearsed everything with the piano and we needed only one rehearsal. That was the final rehearsal or the dress rehearsal or whatever you want to call it. And we delivered a fantastic Samson. That was the way we were in those days, we were dedicated to him. He only had to flutter his eyelashes and we knew exactly what he meant. This of course was not naturally understood by new colleagues who did not know him so well, they had a hard time of it in the beginning.

Bach Cantatas

Richter rehearsed all the Cantatas with me. He explained everything, the musical and the structural importance. I learnt a great deal. We did this repeatedly and the performances were excellent and that's the truth.

Cantate BWV 127

The Cantata *Herr Jesus Christ, wahr' Mensch und Gott* was the first Cantata I ever performed with Him, together with the aria *Die Seele ruht* one of the most beautiful Bach arias, that I ever sung

including the Passions. We made a record of it and later on I sang it in the Markuskirche under his direction.

Cantata BWV 51

The only thing I never did with him and something I would have liked to have sung was “Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen”. Maybe he didn’t think I was capable of singing it, or maybe he himself was not particularly inspired by this cantata, I don’t know. I would have loved to have performed it with him. But apart from that, I performed endless cantatas with him.

Cantate BWV 180

The aria *Lebens Sonne, Licht der Sinnen* from the cantate *Schmücke dich, o liebe Seele* was so lively and rhythmical, it was hard to stand still. I sang this cantata at least twice in the Markuskirche.

Rehearsal and Concert

Rehearsals were sometimes very different to the actual performance. Once you knew this, you adjusted to it. But if you didn’t know this and waited for the tempo you needed and it didn’t come then everything was very different, and that could be awful, especially the arias, not only the flute arias, but other arias too where you had to control and ration your breathing. But we were adjusted to him.

Colleagues

Oh! **Hertha Töpfer** and I could be as one voice if we wanted to. Musically, apart from her voice, Hertha is such a highly sensitive person and she reacted musically in exactly the same way that I did. When, for example, in the duet from the Mattäus-Passion *So ist mein Jesus nun gefangen* She decided to do something differently, I would sense it immediately and could follow and vice versa. We were so tuned into one another, in the Mass in B-minor as well we were like bosom friends, you can’t put it any other way. I have hardly ever made music with anyone in this way. I don’t mean singing, I mean making music which is very important, when it concerns Bach’s music. These difficult duets, the even more difficult musical forms, are always underestimated. Everyone watches out that he or she is up front, can be heard best of all, can be noticed in some way or other best of all. But this interplay, which was so important for us in the opera, and for which we were renowned, does not exist anymore today, sadly.

John van Kesteren came from the Gärtnerplatz Theater, Töpfer and Kieth Engen as well, we were always more or less the same group. That was very agreeable, that we knew one another, that we knew what to expect from one another, that we could respond to one another and that was good, good for the audience as well, they could look forward to something they knew they were going to enjoy, without fear of unpleasant surprises. And the fees paid? In the beginning we sang in part for nothing. We accepted the fact that there was no money to be earned, we said to ourselves that’s the way it is, but we can make such fantastic music together and that is worth a lot as well.

Kieth Engen

Kieth was an absolute treasure. He was always in a good mood, he was always pleasant. Karl Amadeus Hartmann, the founder of the series “Musica viva” called him the “marathon kisser”, because he used to kiss any of us who crossed his path. There was something mischievous about him, something youthful and aglow, and we were always happy to work together with him. We sang an enormous

amount together. And as long as he lived in Munich we were close friends with him and his family. They later moved to Murnau and we didn't get together anymore, but earlier we were very much at close quarters with him, thanks to Richter as well of course. Everything took place at the Prinzregentenplatz, Richter lived in the Schumannstrasse and Engen in the Giebelstrasse, it was a very prolific period.

Ernst Haefliger

Oh what a very brilliant Artist! When he sang the Matthäus-Passion, I was always amazed at the way he arranged and sang the mind-boggling parts right up to the last note. There was no difficulty that maybe the audience would become anxious, no such thing was apparent. He was a magnificent singer. I am very happy, that I was able to sing with him.

Fritz Wunderlich

Fritz Wunderlich was absolutely competent and absolutely amazing. I sang with him shortly before his death. He had the Matthäus-Passion in his programme for the very first time. We were in Augsburg, then he was in Vienna and later in Munich. That was in the spring of 1966 and in the summer of the same year he died. Fritz was a breathtaking singer. His rendering of the Evangelists! Peter Pears for example sang only the evangelists in the Passions, and somebody else had to sing the arias. But Fritz Wunderlich sang everything. Truly wonderful. He died much too soon.

The first time Fritz Wunderlich came to Karl Richter, he was a very young singer, engaged in Stuttgart and naturally very proud of his voice. He always wanted to show it off. For example he once told us: "I got up this morning at eight o'clock and wanted to sing a high C, but I didn't have one to sing." "We answered: "Are you crazy? What do you want to sing a high C for at 8, in the morning nobody normally has a voice at that hour never mind a high C!" Later on he calmed down a lot. He sang a wonderful piano and a forte too, it was only in the beginning that he was so provocative.

Peter Pears

Peter Pears was a fine singer, he took part in the recording of the Cantata I mentioned earlier. He sang the small tenor solo. He had the kind of voice that was called (in German) "a teardrop in a buttonhole", with other words sorrowful and heartrending. Although he could project this enormously and with a competence beyond all measure, he was a very modest person and a very modest singer. He never really made the most of himself, he was truly brilliant and an amiable colleague I was very happy at that time to be able to sing with him.

I sang with **Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau** in Ansbach in 1956.

Munich Bach Choir

The Choir was superb. It was the choir in the Munich of that time, that sang in the most vivacious the most impulsive and the most musical way. People singing for the love of it and not for money. It could be heard. And Karl Richter as far as I could judge, was a fantastic choirmaster. He could really bring out the best in his choir. The way the Bach choir sang *Jauchzet, Frohlocket* in the Christmas Oratorium, I've never heard anything like it since. The voices were young and natural, no old voices unable to hold the tension. Precisely in such Bach choirs there is often a tremendous vocal tension, and as a soprano, if the voice is not present enough or not youthful enough then singing in such a choir is not possible. For example in the Matthäus-Passion, Karl Richters *Wahrlich, dieser ist Gottes Sohn gewesen* is broad and sweeping, and with a choral society of teachers that was of course always appalling, it was at least

a half meter too deep and, they could not maintain the tension. Only the Bach Choir could achieve this, the tension was always maintained, for them nothing special. Above all they knew what was expected of them, that was what the others did not know and when the climax came they had nothing left.

Maurice André

Then in 1964, following the ARD Competition Maurice André joined us. He came to us in the same way as he blew his trumpet, like fanfare. In every way. I know we were in Salzburg with Richter and André was with us and Kesteren, Hertha, no doubt Kieth, who else should have been there. We performed the *Weihnachtsoratorium* in the Festival Hall. André was an agitator, an instigator. When we travelled back by train it was rather a boisterous affair, they all had quite a bit to drink and it was all lots of fun!!