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31 Januar 1924

First Engagement 1957

In the Wuerzburg Music Academy in those days we had a teacher named Heinz Endres. He came from Munich and was one of the first to act as Karl Richter's Concertmaster. It was not an easy feat to assemble an orchestra for six performances of the Matthäus Passion abroad and Richter had asked Endres "Haven't you got a few good people in Würzburg?" Endres had then said "Yes, an Oboe, a Violin and a Viola."

I travelled to Munich for rehearsals, and from there with the train to Italy. The first performance was in Trieste, then in Florence, Turin and the last performance was in Rome. There we had planned a seating rehearsal, Richter however wanted to try something out because a new tenor had arrived. And my dear colleague from Munich did not have his oboe with him because it was only a seating rehearsal.

Then came the great aria "Ich will bei meinem Jesus wachen" and Richter looked in my direction and asked, "Could you take over from here? I want to practise a few beats" "Yes of course", I replied. He began and had the whole piece; it is pretty long and accompanied by the choir, played right through to the end. The last note had hardly faded before applause and stamping came from the choir at the back, I was almost lost. At the end Richter came to me and said, "Where are you from? I don't know you, but tonight you have to play the solo. I replied "Herr Richter that is impossible I can't do that out of respect for my colleagues, but if you want me to I'll gladly come to you in Munich.

Oboe-The French School

The dear colleague was excellent, but had another school, the German school. I had the French school which is normally taught these days, very expressive, in just the same way as Richter himself made music, Vibrato etc, this of course attracted attention and that's how it all started. I was at that time very often in Munich, it was sometimes too often, I had to fit all this in with my teaching. The concerts though were usually at the weekend in the Markuskirche.

The Bachwoche in Ansbach

I had also thought that the Bachwoche would be something for me seeing as I was here so often. I wrote to Dr Weymar and received a flat refusal. It was not possible all: all positions were engaged. I thought to myself there will be other Bachwochen, and wrote back that maybe I would have a chance in future years. Then a letter arrived, I don't have it anymore, sad to say. It started "As I have already told you.....very explicit and that was that.

Later, I was in Munich for Cantatas with Karl Richter in the Markuskirche. Dr. Weymar always sat in the fifth or sixth row, the concert came to an end and Dr. Weymar asked Karl Richter, "Tell me, who was that on the Oboe?" My name was said, and from then on I always took part in the Bachwoche in Ansbach. Richter liked me too. So much so that I didn't have to travel to the rehearsals by bus, Richter took me there in his private car.

Musical Understanding

We understood one another perfectly .Although I had little private contact with Richter, we would say” Hallo, and how are you” and not much more, but musically, we were on the same wave length. He approved of everything I produced, It was sometimes almost embarrassing. In almost every concert where a grand Aria called for an Oboe or D’amore I always received a friendly smile. I used to think “Why isn’t he like that with the others? But that was the way it was; and I thoroughly enjoyed myself

A Distinguished Position

For the Weihnachtsoratorium in the famous Sinfonia, four Oboes are required: two Oboes and two English Horns. There are certain interjections used, always occurring at different points. This was shown in the score so everyone was informed. But woe betide anyone who missed his cue, then it was finished. There was a student of mine from London who was more than first rate, and she missed her cue. During the interval he asked to see me and wanted to know all the whys and wherefores etc. I said to him that some things just happen and that he shouldn’t throw the baby out with the bath water, that the piece was extremely tricky and that he had probably experienced this often enough. Then rather audaciously I said, “The singers are never criticized if the same thing happens to them, then it doesn’t seem to matter at all” He just gave a little shudder and that was that. I said to myself, oh well, this is probably the last time you’ll be taking part. But no, Every now and then I was allowed to voice a critical remark.

I was in his good books, once, at the Bachwoche in Ansbach, during the Cantatas sung by Ursula Buckle, he had an outstanding Continuo, together with Hedwig Bilgram on the organ, when the following took place during a soprano Aria with obligatory Oboe d’amore. The stimmen given by the publisher were partly a catastrophe and an absolute cheek. I had a written Stimme where two of the rows were almost identical and I slipped into the wrong row. It just happened, to err is human .I soon found my way back again but the feeling is always as though it had taken an endlessly long time and that it would never end. We however caught up and at the end of the concert when he scolded us I said: “That was me Herr Richter”- he said,” No it wasn’t “ I replied “I’m sorry, I must admit I made a mistake” But for him it could not be me. That was how the relationship was between us.

Richter was unique

Sunday mornings we would always listen to the Bach Cantatas on the Bavarian Classic Radio programme. After the first couple of beats it was clear that it was Karl Richter. He himself and the way he conducted were unparalleled. The man had a charisma: it had not so much to do with the signals he gave, Its difficult to explain WHAT it was, it was just Karl Richter!

Problems with the Oboe d’amore

During my time in Berlin when the Matthäus-Passion was performed I always avoided having to take part. First of all I didn’t have an instrument, it was always difficult with the Oboe d’amore. The instruments were very rare and were mostly old and decrepit, untuned and lacking the necessary conduit. Oboe, yes English Horn, yes but not the Oboe d’amore, so I always succeeded in not having to take part. Later when I came here I of course aquired the instruments needed.

Matthäus-Passion Recording 1958

The Deutsche Grammophon always insisted on engaging the best musicians, brass instrumentalists and soloists from Hamburg, from Frankfurt, from no matter where; amongst them was Edgar Schann from Lausanne in Switzerland. At one time he was solo English Hornist in Ansermet, was somehow or other on good terms with Richter. Richter's wife was Swiss-born. I got along very well with Edgar Schann We played very well together. Then came the first recording of the Matthäus-Passion in Munich, 1958. English Horn instrumentalists from Hamburg took part again. The Matthäus-Passion, so to say, did well to use English Horns, it is both delicate and arduous, and would otherwise not have functioned so well.

That year, I was by chance, in the Festival Orchestra in Bayreuth. I had received an invitation from the two Wagner grandchildren. It came on the first of April and I thought to myself that's an April Fool's joke, why should this happen to me? I'm in the symphony Orchestra, I was never in the Opera. I had only ever recorded Opera with Ferenc Fricsay, my chief Conductor.

So there I was in Bayreuth and always drove this triangle: Würzburg, Bayreuth, Munich. I had in those days a further 28 hour week to manage. How did that function? Not at all really, But nevertheless it did, and I was very lucky to be able to play the second Oboe in Bayreuth, in Parsifal with Knappertsbusch. When he suddenly rose before the orchestra with his "Schillerkragenhemd" it gave me goosepimples!! It was the same with Richter. One can't explain it. It is what always fascinated me, he made a gesture and the goosepimples would start.

The first recordings in Munich with the English Horns had not functioned very well. A call came to the, Festival hall where Richter said "It's not working out properly with the English horns, can't you do something together with Edgar Schann?" I said "I don't know, send Edgar to me in Bayreuth, then we can try and see what we can do". Edgar Schann came, we tried it out. We got together and played all the English-Horn pieces together and it turned out very well.

Edgar Schann

I was invited to visit Edgar Schann in Lausanne. He lived in an old historical house up in the vineyards. Very lovely, really unique. He was a very fine chap. We got to know one another and to understand one another from the very first note. We made music together. He played the first part and I the second and then vice versa. With Bach it makes no difference if it's first second or third, it was ideal for making music together with a person like him.

Rehearsals

Richter's Rehearsals? It was very simple. He never said to me: "Couldn't you do it like this ?" That wasn't the way it went. In the last years that we were together he mostly said: We know all that, we've done it often enough. And I thought to myself: well actually it would have been rather good, if certain parts for example transitions which are always the most difficult, could be played through so that everyone was informed. But the Bach orchestra was made up of really good people outstanding Continuo, even when changes were made. Hedwig Bilgram on the organ, that was ideal. That was fun.

Singing Quality

Once the following took place with Richter: a Cantata, Soprano Aria. We were rehearsing in the Academy and there was a singer, her name is irrelevant. She was dismissed in the afternoon. In the evening there was another one there, and the same thing happened again-dismissed. And then for the concert itself Agnes Giebel arrived. She was a capacity in this domain and then everything functioned.

And something else that I didn't think was good, I'll say it openly, was the way these so-called exclusive artists who sang for Deutsche Grammophon were received. Their pictures were hung up in the Herkulesaal in the rear corridor, Exclusive Artists! I had the audacity: it was an Aria, I'm not going to say who sang it, to play the recording for a student. Listen to this " So what?? was the reaction. Then I said, this is such and such a body. OH really!!!! If I had said beforehand who it was then everyone would have found it good. That's the way things go unfortunately.

Otto Büchner

I got to know Otto Büchner through chambermusic. He played violin, the cellist worked in a meat factory in Uttenreuth near Erlangen, Dr. Hantschke, a highschool teacher was on the Viola, and Hantschke's wife became Mrs Büchner. We used to make music in the Henkestrasse at Hantschkes. My first piece of music that I played there was the wonderful Oboe Quartett from Mozart. That's when I got to know OttoBüchner we got along together from the word go and played Quartett.

Otto Büchner was very much supported by Dr.Spilling, the director at that time of the Music Department of the Bavarian Radio Station at Studio Nürnberg. That is how I too became acquainted with the Radiostation in Nürnberg. Dr. Spilling kept us busy. Every month I had at least one recording or concert. I've known Otto well ever since and for me he was always the best violinist. When we played the Bach-Doppelconcert together the movement was free, agocic, dynamic. everything. It was simply so. We made a lot of recordings for the Nürnberg studio.

He was also a sportsman, Football! I have a film where they played football on the Cococabana, the beach at Rio de Janeiro. Johannes Fink also took part and one of the singers too, I think it was Ernst-Gerold Schramm.

The Munich Bach Choir

A I said, I made music all over the place, but when the Bach Choir was standing behind me, that was always, ach! that is the Bach Choir. When they let too loose he could always animate them and then sometimes it was a bit too high. For example the Mass in b-minor: I will never forget it. We sat directly in front of the choir. Their cue always came like a shock. Kyrie! Crazy! There are many really good choirs, but without wanting to compare, this choir had a very distinct tone or as it's said these days, a Sound. It was there from the very beginning, it was there in Ansbach. Every time they were there, beautiful, it made you feel good.

There are certain things that cannot be explained. Richter's personality and his sign and body- language for example. It didn't always have to be exactly right, it was simply there and it had to transmit the spark to the choir. Sometimes he snubbed the choir if something was not as good as it should have been, fair enough! But there were never any problems with the Orchestra, It was a wonderful time for me, I wouldn't have missed it for anything.

Colleagues on the Oboe

There were always different colleagues taking part. everything was altered very often. I played together a lot with Manfred Clement, we got along together very well. t here again I was well known for being a chameleon, I found it easy to adjust. The oboe has so many different tones, light and deep, various Vibrati, some ample some small, or none at all, sometimes it didn't fit in at all and very often I had to ask "Couldn't we do it like this or like that?? The result was sometimes very lovely, as for example the Sinfonia in the Weihnachtsoratorium. As I mentioned earlier one could please oneself. Richter let us play. I can't remember him once saying, "Can't you do that differently, or in another way, I would prefer it", never, never at all.