

Horst Laubental

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Beginnings

During my studies at the Conservatory in Munich, I had already had the chance of hearing almost all of Karl Richter's concerts, a due to the fact that Bach had always interested me. Apart from that I came from a musical family that liked to play Bach's music. As a student I had every intention of getting to play with Richter as soon as possible and I succeeded in doing so.

I can still remember the first audition. I had an appointment at the Music Academy. Most of the pieces I had never sung before, only the Matthäus Passion: but not the Johannes Passion. We did two or three recitals from the Matthäus Passion including the grand part "Und ging hinaus und weinete bitterlich". And then he asked me "Do you have time at such and such a date?" and that is how with just one small audition I was given parts in several concerts, and was very happy to be able to perform with Karl Richter at such an early stage. Although I had observed him closely for many years, in order to adopt his style.

Rehearsals

I can't remember Richter ever working with me. Mostly we rehearsed in the mornings and then the whole thing was finished. In actual fact although I wanted to work a lot more with Richter, what took place was that we played effortlessly well together and I found it splendid that we came to the point so easily with one another. That was probably because in the five years of study I had learnt to adopt Richter's way of interpreting Bach and Bach's music and that made it a lot easier to play with him.

Richter's Style

For me a Passion with Richter was always a highlight. And above all his Recitatives, which he accompanied himself, full of dramatic and loveliness, everything was there. I have performed very many of Bach's work with very many Conductors but I always remained a "Richter-Disciple".

The Recitative

The Richter-Recitative was, for me, an experience. I always followed the text of the vocals, even in the opera. Richter gave me the freedom of using my own interpretation, naturally within the framework and form of the music. This was for me an enormous experience, to be able to sing out freely. I have sung the Matthäus Passion with Karajan and with Jochum just to mention these two names and with a lot of others too, but nobody fascinated me as much as Richter did when it came to the recitative because I could deliver the text the way it was written. That is what recitative means for me. And that is what I pass on to my young singers. I always tell them: "I come from the Richter School, you have to be able to do it in that way, and when another conductor wants something different take what I have passed on to you as fundament." By means of the text alone you can fashion and form the piece. I believe that Richter never ever left the text behind.

The Bach Passions

No two Passions were alike. In short, one year explosive, a year later, more broadly based. They were of course further developed. As a singer one had brought in other impressions, but I was always together with him. That was wonderful.

Geduld - Arie

I have to draw a comparison. I once did the *Matthäus*-Passion with Karajan. He used, I believe, Six cellos and four Contrabass, conducted at half-tempo, the *Geduld*-arie included. At the end of the aria, where with Richter this *Outcry* comes it was absolute Pianissimo. But with Richter I was fascinated because it had flared up right to the very end. I have also seen the *Matthäus-Passion* danced in Hamburg, an interpretation from Gunther Jena, one of Richter's pupils, it was fascinating. In addition this aria with the small *ariosa* at the beginning, was always time and again overwhelming. I can still see Richter and how he played with his whole body, relaxed but leaning into the cembalo with ultimate force.

Coloratura

I didn't care for coloratura. Of course they are the musical expression and "melody arches" belonging to a composition, but with Richter it came easy for me to sing them. On one occasion however we didn't see eye to eye. It was with the *Hirten-Aria* in the *Weihnachtsoratorium*. It was so awfully fast that I broke off the rehearsal because I couldn't keep up. He then said to me "If anyone breaks off a rehearsal here, then it is me!" He did not repeat the Aria. In the evening I thought to myself, we can only expect the worst! But he adapted exactly to my tempo. Fantastic!

Making Music with Richter

Once I had even experienced that Richter had not conducted at all during the b-minor Mass and the *Benedictus!* and I found that fantastic, being able to simply make music and he was a part of it, nothing escaped him.

The Bach Choir of Munich

Oh yes the Bach choir had of course developed and matured over the years. I had got to know the choir as a student, when the voices were in actual fact, almost metallic and barely conducted. Over the years however, as I grew to know the choir better it developed into an almost romantic instrument and became more and more lovely: the Passions, the Cantatas that we sang just became better and better. The way the choir developed is still very strong in my memory.

The Bach-Orchestra of Munich

Was there actually a Bach orchestra? Of course there were musicians, who had evolved in much the same way as we singers had. Whether it was a Hausmann, or whatever the names of these famous people were. Maurice Andre and the strings, they grew into the situation in just the same way as I did as a young singer. And of course something developed as a result. And if Richter were to appear today, I believe that we, even though we are all elderly gentlemen now, would make music in just the same way as we did 30 or 40 years ago. That I really do believe.

Colleagues

I really liked to work together with the choir. I knew many of them from the stage. Ursula Bückel and I were together in *Don Giovanni*. The liaison was wonderful, the working atmosphere was very good. I don't want it seem as though I can only recount how positive everything was, but I never have difficulties with colleagues. Not even with tenor colleagues such as Peter Schreier. I got along with him superbly, and the same applies to Haefliger. We always greeted one another as friends, the atmosphere was really good. We just don't get to see one another these days.

Ernst-Gerold Schramm

In a manner of speaking you could say we grew up together. I got to know him in the very beginning through Richter. What I appreciated about him was his beautiful voice and the way he interpreted Bach. For me he was the ideal Christus. It was not for nothing that Richter always had him in the programme.

Kieth Engen

A gentleman of song and a wonderful colleague. Whenever I hear one of his recordings on the radio I am always completely fascinated. Both of these colleagues are no longer alive. I still enjoy thinking back to the times I shared with them.

Hertha Töpfer

She was a singing phenomenon, What an exuberance! She burnt with a fiery passion, in her singing and in her private life. Stylistically sure of herself and with a voice both powerful and strong which both in Mozart or Bach's *Magnificat* could master the depth and the great sweeps which are required without exhausting herself, ever able to amplify, wonderful!

Opera Abroad

I was once in Buenos Aires with Richter. We performed the "Missa solemnis" from Beethoven, Matthäus Passion and the opera Xerxes from Handel. He conducted the Opera and it was very very exciting: for three or four weeks we lived in very cramped quarters together with the director. Richter was always present at rehearsals. It was very exciting for us to see him, the absolute concert conductor standing at the podium of - for that time - the biggest Opera house in the world, on stage, were often 20 to 30 meters away from him and we really had to pay attention.

Beethoven, Missa Solemnis

I don't know if at that time it was already his Piece, but it was to become his piece. My memories tell me it did not yet have this tremendous force and expression that Beethoven required for the *Missa Solemnis*. But I have sung this Piece a hundred times and I still have not come to terms with it. Back then it was Richter's first or second performance.

Further Professional Development

I was closely bound up with the Opera and travelled all over the world. I was never engaged at any one Opera House, but I had to sing from 35 to 40 evenings a year in Vienna, it was less than that in Munich, but very much more in Berlin, and then of course abroad. Opera, Opera, Opera, a lot of Song Recitals and over and over again the *Bach Passions*. For me they have always been my centre of interest, but no longer as frequently as they used to be when during the Passion Week they were sung six or eight times somewhere, but rather a Matthäus-Passion in Vienna or a Johannes-Passion in Munich. One virtually chose what one wanted and that applied to the choice of conductors as well.