

## **Paul Meissen**

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### **First Contact with Karl Richter**

If I remember rightly, I met Karl Richter for the first time in Hamburg. My studies had led me from Detmold to the State Music Chapel in Karlsruhe, Baden. After 2 1/2 years in Karlsruhe I joined the Philharmonic State Orchestra in Hamburg. I believe it was in 1956 in Hamburg that we performed the Brandenburg Concerts from Johann Sebastian Bach in two concerts. During this time I was also called upon to take part in just this performance with just this Chamber Orchestra; and that was when I met Karl Richter for the first time.

This arrangement with Hamburg was, as far as Richter was concerned, supposed to develop further, but it never took place more than this one time. He was certainly disappointed that most of the orchestra members also played in other Chamber Orchestras and he never felt that they afforded him their central point of interest. And I believe I was the only one from this formation that he always called from Hamburg to Munich.

### **Richters Music-making with the Choir**

The vitality and amplitude of sound of the Chamber Orchestra appealed to me from the very beginning. At a second meeting in Ansbach with the choir, I was fascinated by their liveliness and there was something else too that I had never experienced before, was the way that Richter, as conductor had to slow down the tempi of the choir. Sometimes he had to put the brakes on very hard so that the choir would not whiz off without him. That was something new because normally a choir has to be urged on, but he had them so well under control that he had adopted this braking effect. I know That Nicolet, who sat next to me once said: „What we are experiencing here has “Furtwangler-charisma“. I could not agree with him more. It was something completely fundamental, and I was not only impressed by this Hamburger ”Barock“, I was immediately and positively carried away by it.

### **Ansbach’s Speciality**

Ansbach’s speciality was Football. There was always a large community that got together there and became closer for every passing day. A community that ate together and lived together. Football played a big part in this communal way of living and brought us even closer together. But of course it was above all the musical things that united us most of all. It was exactly the same situation that I had the chance to share later, during my time in Munich, influenced of course by Richter’s presence.

### **Interpretation**

Richter was not a conventional conductor. You could not call him a virtuoso with the baton. Basically his interpretation came from the bottom of his heart. And even when his art of conducting sometimes lacked consistency, he was always in harmony with his inner self, it was something enigmatic and unexplainable. Man noticed that if there was any small deviation he reacted at once. His inner Image was so strong that it immediately affected his interpretation. I believe he did not need to conduct at all, that he would have been able to play the great passions, and the B-minor Mass note for note and off by heart because it was all stored within this inner self, and that was what made him such an unbelievably charismatic figure.

### **Articulation and Rythm**

With Richter you could comprehend from the very start what articulation was all about. It was the time

where I was gaining my fundamental orchestral training and a period which was actually both the epitome and the end of the romantic orchestra sound and articulation was not so explicit. Even though Richter was a romantic Bach interpreter he made it very clear to us how we were to articulate and always complained of the fact that orchestral musicians were inherently unable to articulate properly. But what I also learnt from him and what impressed me most was his relationship to rhythm. What I grasped from him was: that when you choose a slow rhythm then it must be played quickly from within; and when you chose a quick rhythm you must play it slowly from within. It was through Richter that I became aware of this ambivalence, and this consciousness has accompanied me and influenced me and my teaching all through my life.

### **Colleagues: Peter Pears**

I only ever experienced Peter Pears in Ansbach. It was for me a very great occurrence. I can't say exactly what fascinated me about him. I just know that when I hear his name spoken as now this minute, he is completely present for me. Apart from this subjective impression I can't give any details.

### **John van Kesteren**

We mentioned the Benedictus from the "Hohe Messe" earlier. Richter did the Benedictus with the violin, and I loved to listen. Later it was very very difficult for me to put it into effect on the flute because I always had the sound of the violin in my ear. But especially for the Benedictus as far as I was concerned was a tenor whose name did not belong to the usual names - John van Kesteren. Something very special for me. The Benedictus tenor for me.

### **Ernst Haefliger**

Ernst Haefliger was for me one of the most impressive of them all. Of course we have to leave out Fritz Wunderlich, who died relatively early, but Haefliger as Evangelist was for me the most impressive figure. His direct way of communication was for me and probably for every other listener, without compare, Peter Schreier was maybe the better narrator and he maybe was the more authentic Evangelist, but the more impressive and sometimes more moving - that is what Haefliger delivered.

### **Hertha Töpfer**

I never got to see Hertha Töpfer very often, even though I belonged to the Munich Bach-Orchestra, I don't know if I was there very often or not. I always travelled from Hamburg. One year I was in the Opera at the National Theatre and experienced her as Carmen, a great Alt singer who always impressed me tremendously.

### **Marga Höffgen**

For me, Marga Höffgen was always a very ambivalent figure. An unbelievably friendly woman. A woman you could just as easily have met in the kitchen as in a concert hall. But when she started to sing in a concert hall she was a woman who could cast her spell on everyone. And the Agnus Dei with its crescendos seem to endlessly, endlessly open and expand. And the aria *Erbarme dich* was no doubt in the *Matthäus Passion* in Japan the actual Highlight, although that is something I regret because the aria *Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben* could also be a central point. But without envy I have to admit the *Erbarme-dich-aria* that Marga Hoffmann presented, together with Kurt Guntner is unforgettable.

### **Julia Hamari**

Julia Hamari and I have quite a lot in common. We once recorded romantic songs because she wanted at all costs to make a recording with me. We tortured one another trying to find something for mezzo soprano and flute. She always regretted the fact that the *Aus-Liebe-Aria* was for Soprano and not for Alt. We then made a memorable recording of *Hirt auf dem Felsen* (Franz Schubert) which was adapted

for us-lower for her voice and an octave higher for me. It was a very pleasant experience. In Julia Hamari slumbered a very great singer. A world-class singer endowed with emotionality. Since then she has now become a significant pedagogue something not immediately expected from a lady with so much emotionality.

### **Ursula Buckel**

My principal soprano for the *Aus Liebe* aria was Ursula Buckel, who in her prime had the voice of a soaring angel. What links me to her are the association with all the Sopranos and their roles connected with the Richter era. In Japan she had complained about the dryness in the hotel rooms and I gave her the tip of leaving the bathroom door open and filling the bathtub with water so that evaporation could be achieved. She gratefully thanked me for this tip, the airconditioning dried out the humidity in the air very quickly. My memories of Ursula Buckel are of a fresh and uncomplicated nature.

### **Kieth Engen**

Kieth Engen as Christus was of course a great manifestation. I don't know why but Richters Singers had such a direct effect that it was hard to say singularly which one was better or stronger but rather that is was the particular expressiveness that each possessed in his own right. You could not go into detail. In any case Kieth Engen was for me the Christus in the Richter era.

### **Karl Richter on the Cembalo**

It was a fascinating experience to listen to Karl Richter on the Neupert-Cembalo in *the Passions*. He preferred a 16 foot pitch-Cembalo, and I regret to this day the fact that the 16 foot Cembalo is no longer „in “. The deep full sound which even in the Congress Hall of the *Deutsche Museum*, which is acoustically not easy, came with such a richness and at the same time delicate restraint. Richters ability of creating with the cembalo such an entity - was for me both unforgettable and unparalleled. It was similar with his approach to chamber music although there he was unpredictable. He would suddenly have a completely different and unexpected range of tones that had to be adapted to immediately. It could also happen that he did not have a register at all. That had happened to me as well. His *continuo* playing was spontaneous. I think for him continuo was more important than anything else. The left hand was always more important than the right, and I can remember playing an encore with him at a „Sonata Abend“- it was the andante from the e-flat-sonata. Normally the right hand had to do a lot of trills and was overloaded; but he played a prelude with six beats and then just a simple bass. Nothing more than required, no trills nothing. You cannot get it any more suggestive than what I heard there, I almost missed my cue.

### **Italian Tour 1964**

The Palermo tour that took us from the north to the south of Italy must have been in 1964. I think it was my first trip as solo flautist. *Die Schöpfung* from Haydn was the only piece on the programme. In Palermo itself a wonderful meeting took place with Italian colleagues who had been engaged to play the clarinette just for this one piece. Then the memory of Maurice Andre as he played together with Herrmann Baumann a sort of Balaleika concert during the crossing to Sicily on the ferry. I think Maurice Andre blew into the mouthpiece of Baumann's horn and Baumann moved the vents, producing a vibrating tone like a Balaleika, that sounded out across the sea. The atmosphere was unbelievably tranquil and warm, an undeniably subjective experience. Later we travelled over different routes to Florence. I have a very special memory attached to the concert in Florence. The choir as always, had to stand right through the performance, a matchless achievement. Later, thank God, made everything a bit milder. The whole choir stood on a high platform. All of a sudden, right in the middle of the performance of the *Johannes-Passion* Richter became very agitated and started to gesticulate in the direction of the choir. It was clear to see that he wanted one of the ladies to sit down and at that very minute the lady fell and almost landed in the orchestra. He had obviously intuitively sensed that someone could fall over at any

moment. This inner telepathic affiliation with his choir and musicians was a part of Karl Richter.

Apart from that the tour was very fascinating. Many of the Munich musicians were not able to take part because their orchestras would not give them the time off. So we had any number of strangers in the orchestra. On the other hand there were musicians from my orchestra in Hamburg but Karl Richter did not know them very well. There was a lot of musical tension in the memories but it was as well the end of a beautiful tour. For me this tour was very interesting because it was towards the end of this tour, that I got to know Hedwig Bilgram who was later to become my partner. She came to me and asked if we shouldnt do some sonatas together and that was how this tour brought us together. I believe it was my first tourwith the Munich Bach Choir. Exciting on all counts.

### **Japan Tour 1969**

Japan was, alongside many other highlights, surely THE Highlight. We were impressed by the interplay from the podium, Karl Richter's charismaand also by the interplay from the audience. It was to be the first unshortened version of the *Matthäus Passion* ever heard in Japan. We remember the wonderful saal „*Bunka Kaikan*“ filled to the very last seat, the audience had the text in German. When they turned the pages, we sensed it but we did not hear a sound. The concentration was fascinating. It was probably the most impressive Matthäus Passion that I had ever heard in my life. This unity between the audience and the musicians could not have been closer it was an entity. For me it was *the* Matthäus Passion experience. We travelled to Yokahoma as a chamber music Orchestra and there was a certain exhilaration due to the fact that we were just on our own, without the choir. During the tour in Japan, which was primarily a Choir tour we also had a concert without the Choir. Amongst other things we performed a Cembalo concert. Karl Richter always played „off by heart“. The cembalo concert took place just before the interval. During the interval we were all standing around together and Karl Richter said: “Oh well while I was playing I thought to myself, Karli your concert technic is rather good and out I was!” There are many such stories told about Karl Richter.

### **Spontaneous Performances**

Once when a young bass came to him, it was Nimsgern, and said: “Allow me to introduce myself, my name is Siegmund Nimsgern and I am to sing the *Hohe Messe*“. Richter answered :“Yes Yes we won't be doing a rehearsal. Have you heard my record?“ Nimsgern answered: „Yes of course, I know every note“. “Well thats not the way I am going to do it. Listen closely this evening“ Richter replied. That was the way Karl Richter was, you had to know him but even when you did not know him, you just had to send out your antenna and you knew exactly what he wanted.

To come back to Hedwig Bilgram, the situation could be as follows:Continuo was always very important for him. It could happen that he gave precise instructions: “I would like to have a deeper timbre here, I would like to have the 16fuß and this register here“ and yet you still had to adjust your antenna in the evening, so that you could sense if he perhaps wanted something completely different – Now he wants pianissimo and a slim Achtfuß. You had to be tuned into him.

And that was one of the secrets of his musicians. He didnt like long speeches and he couldn't speak long enough to be able to explain what it was he wanted. You werent allowed to ask questions either, you had to sense what he wanted and that it could be like this or like that, and the musicians who played with him had to develop these antennas or sensors and those who did not were not with him for very long.

### **Karl Richter in the 70s**

We never really noticed any difference in the tempi arrangements in the 70ies (after the heart-attack). He always had slower tempi. I detected perhaps a certain serenity towards the end. I was not aware of his clinical condition, I did not know just how ill he was. I had heard that he had problems with his eyes.

I was not aware of how dangerous his condition was. I had also heard that he himself had once said: "We Richters do not live long lives". I found it pleasant that he had introduced more tranquility into his Interpretations as a whole especially in the *Hohe Messe* and I had personally come to the conclusion that he had overcome the critical discrimination. That it was no longer important to him if good or bad was written about him. He appeared to me to have come to terms and was at peace with himself. That was my positive assumption. I had no idea how endangered he was.

### **The intervals between the passages, between Recitative and Arie**

What fascinated me most of all about Richter was the intervals between Recitative and Arie. They always differed. It could be "*Herr bin ichs, bin ichs, bin ichs*" - that meant you could stay seated and then the choral followed "*Ich bins ich sollte büßen*". Or it could happen that he followed up immediately. And these different intervals were always right. It didn't matter if it was a long interval or a short interval, the correlation was always right and always had a special meaning. That was the distinguishing feature of his interpretation, that in this form I would call unequalled. Always different, always right.

### **Schloss Schleissheim, Filmshots**

In Schleissheim I only took part in the *5 Brandenburgische Konzert*. I know it was in a room where it was acoustically recorded, and then the playback for the pictures was in another room. We produced wonderful lively music and when the picture and the music were put together it was exactly the opposite to what we had actually done. That was also something characteristic for Karl Richter. He was one with his music. He was full of life, everything he wanted the music to express was there. But reproduction, playacting and pretending, that was not his thing. The discrepancy could be seen and in my eyes made him even greater than if he had been able to present a Film that was only a "playback". No, the music had to be with him and then the picture was with him when the music took place, and not afterwards.

### **Presence of the Bach-Orchester**

Strange to say, I seldom took part in the big performances at Ottobeuren but I was there often as a listener because I was very interested in the Basilica itself; but I was there once and took part in a concert for Chambermusic. I am surprised when you say I was there very often, I always had the impression that I only showed up occasionally. That is interesting I was only once in Munich in 1963 at the National Theater, otherwise I always came from Hamburg and because I always left the scene of the event I always felt the intervals were much bigger. Had I lived in Munich, I would probably not have regarded the intervals as such.

### **Memories of Salzburg**

I remember Salzburg because we were supposed to perform a *Hohe Messe* there. The *Domine Deus* requires a Tenor. The date came closer and closer and there was no tenor to be had. I believe there was talk of flying Kesteren in, but there was fog and other drawbacks, and so we were without a tenor. What could be done? Should we drop the *Domine Deus*? Should someone from the choir sing? I believe Flickinger was supposed to sing, he was very courageous in the beginning, but the closer the moment came the more his courage waned. Richter then decided that all the tenors in the choir should sing the part. It was to be the strongest counterpart that I had ever had. That is what I can remember - very nice memories.

### **The Hohe Messe**

My memories of the "Hohe Messe" were always very varied. I experienced one of the loveliest in America. We had played the Matthäus Passion despite jet lag and the next day Karl Richter was present at the rehearsals and in a very bad mood he did not say thank you and was as disagreeable as he could be.

And then we had a *Hohe Messe* in the provinces (Hanover N.H.). Maybe he did not take it seriously, but it was so relaxed that it belongs in my memory to the loveliest. I thanked him at that time for this lovely *Hohe Messe* and I am not sure if he took me seriously, or thought I was being ironic, but that was not the case. I was truly impressed. When he was relaxed his whole performance had a very special closeness. It is again always the three things that I remember, *the Matthäus-Passion*, *the Johannes-Passion* and *the Hohe Messe*, and the memories run circles in my mind.

### **The educational Life-phase**

Things had developed organically with me. Either my orchestra career could or should have reached a higher point. I was primarily Soloflautist in the Hamburg State Philharmonic orchestra. There were contacts to the Berlin Philharmonic and a previous verbal exchange with the Music Academy in Detmold, I was at that time in my late thirties, for an orchestra musician no longer the youngest, for a teacher still rather young. I thought it over: if I pushed myself into the Berlin orchestra that would make me subservient again. In the meantime I strongly felt that I did not want to be subservient I wanted to do my own thing. So I made the decision to take the educational path in Detmold. I have never regretted it even though I would have liked to play one or the other Brahms symphonies. But two things especially have helped me in my recollection of the Orchester period

For me Karl Richter was **the** authority when it came to Bachinterpretation. He gave me the courage not only to interpret and to play Bach intuitively but also analytically. That is why I have developed a special relationship to Bach both as a musician and as a teacher. During my Orchestra-period the Orchester-concert-time was of course **very** important, but I was in a double-function orchestra that performed not only opera, but concerts as well, giving me an inexhaustable memory source for the work with the opera singers. It was the same thing with Bach, the work with Richter provided the basis for my educational activities. Apart from that the experience and knowledge of intuitive singing brought more than just the pure concert literature. All this led me to Detmold via Munich, where I spent 15 years at the Music Academy. From there I went to Tokyo and back again. That is a huge span of time, work and experience, inseparably connected with Karl Richter and connected inseparably with my opera activities.

### **To conclude**

It's all such a long time ago. The enthusiasm that maybe two years ago would have been unrestrained and instantaneous is not there anymore. But the memories, maybe the most important in my "musician-life", they are still there that is for sure; but I had to develop and did develop my own pedagogical initiative, that resulted in a changed tempi-conception without anything being at fault, as said-the intervals between Recitative and Aria were always varied but always right. And Karl Richter's tempi were always right. Every moment. But nonetheless something fundamental had changed for me. You could maybe call it an age phenomenon. In contrast to Karl Richter whose tempi became more tranquil, It was the same with Celibidache, But actually many slow passages were played faster the older the interpreter became. I think that is the case with me and why I have become faster. But it is an instinctive process, not a rational one.

At the moment I am occupied with something which connects me to the flute because it was always my first love. We flautists always suffer due to the fact that there is not a very big choice to be had when it comes to Literature. We have very good Literature but not major Literature, in any case not in abundance. And I believe that an interpreter, wanting to advance further needs a greater challenge than can be had at the moment. We have the B-minor Sonate from Johann Sebastian Bach, the A-minor-Solapartita but we need more works of comparable greatness. That is why I am working on a study for flautists and publishing the Cello-Suites arranged for the flute. This conflict with these very complex and great works has maybe played a part in the transformation of the tempi or evoked other tempi-concepts or possibilities. That is the ever present preoccupation with music, with Bach's music, one changes imperceptibly.

And these imperceptible changes are probably the most important. And the unsolved question, how would Karl Richter have changed imperceptibly if he had lived longer? The question remains unanswered.

### **Das Instrument**

During my orchestra days, and I include the time spent with the Munich Bach Orchestra, I had a Menert Flute, a German product which was especially suited for Bach because of its special timbre, and which met up to my standards. Later I had a Muramatsu-Flute which naturally had many more developments, the intonation and the measures are more balanced although in the long run it does not depend so much on the instrument. I don't give concerts anymore. With 60 I ended my active concert participation. But I have to be fit for my students, every now and again have to be able to blow something for them.