

Edda Moser

geb. am 27. Oktober 1938 in Berlin

First Engagement

My father died on 14. August 1967. I had received an engagement through the Deutsche Grammophon, that Orfeo von Gluck was to be recorded with Fischer-Dieskau and Janowitz and I was to sing the Amore. I had of course prepared myself beautifully. One day after my father's death I had to appear in Munich and that was that. I had spoken with my father and said to him: "You know, maybe it's a good thing if I stay with you for a while, because you are not feeling very well at the moment". I had to present myself to Karajan, and afterwards there were the recordings with Richter. My Father said: "You must go", and that was the last thing my father said to me, and it became my life's Motto: "You must go". And no matter how miserable I felt I always thought of those words: "You must go". And that is what I always did. Richter knew that my Father had died, it was in all the newspapers, and he had offered me his condolences. I said to him: "Please don't be angry with me. If I don't listen to the corrections. I would like to ask you to do that for me, it upsets me too much." It was really hard work, singing the Amor. Richter granted my request, and for this I loved him deeply all my life.

The Phenomenon Richter

He had an inner tranquility and understatement. I have always believed that there are no overstatements in Heaven and Richter was heaven. He radiated an enormous calmness, and when he made a certain gesture then that was the way it was meant to be. When I think of the fuss that some conductors make these days just to produce a "forte", it makes one almost feel ill, when one compares how Richter with a few movements could open heaven. I think he only chose people who did not need help musically. He just had to look and give the cue, and at the most sometimes said "misterioso" and that was it. And then what he had expected took place. If Richter had to correct or to say something it was a sign that something was out of tune. For Richter you simply had to flow. There was a glow, the whole body had to sing, not like today where the voice is only half available. He always wanted opera voices that could really let go. Voices that could lament that could rejoice that could suffer and that could, while singing, laugh and be joyful or full of grief and sorrow, that was what he wanted. And whoever could deliver all this lived in the lap of luxury. He of course did not want any Wagner voices, a Birgit Nilsson would not have come into question, but someone who could sing Mozart and I sang Mozart with body and soul, that was what he wanted. And I think as well that my voice suited him and his way of conducting.

Working with Record Companies

It was a pity that I could not have more recordings with Richter because I worked with EMI. In those days I was still with the „Deutschen Grammophon“, because I sang a lot of Hans Werner Henze. It was there that I walked so to say into Richter's arms Thank God. But I had an exclusive contract with EMI, and I had made the complete Mozart recordings (with Karl Böhm) through which other recordings came my way. But Thank God during the Concerts live recordings had been made so I have the documentation that I was allowed to sing with Richter.

Repertoire with Karl Richter

I did not do very much Bach with Richter, Beethoven's Missa Solemnis yes, Elias von Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy in Ottobeuren and Dvorak Sabat Mater, things which, basically called for a bit more Opera-applomb. And he engaged me for just such pieces. Of course I sang the Matthäus-Passion, the

Johannes-Passion, Weihnachtsoratorium and h-moll Messe with Richter, primarily in Munich. But we were repeatedly abroad, in Paris, in South America. That both formed me and made me demanding, so much so that after Richter died I never sang Bach again. That was no longer possible.

Once again: The Richter Phenomenon

I don't know if this Richter-phenomenon can be explained or if He can be explained. I don't think so. To try and explain or describe him is only ever half the truth. He had a very special way about him, he had an enormous eroticism for example when he played an accord. He himself always sat at the cembalo and it was very exciting to experience just what took place, it was flabbergasting. If you had heard other performances with other conductors, then what built up during Richter performance, the emotions, the bliss and the longing was expressed in a romantic fashion was incomparable. Many people even those in the audience see it differently these days, even those taking part in competitive concerts these days see it differently, whereby in Leipzig a completely different way of singing is wished for. These days I could never win a competition with my way of singing and I would not have the ambition to sing the way these people would want me to. My performance was such: Bach had 21 children, and they must have come from somewhere. And it was the same with Richter: this masculine, obligatory: "Here I stand, I cannot be otherwise. So help me God", that was how he felt inside. He was also a very religious person. I had heard the story being told about the Bach Coffin. Richter himself had told me that he had accompanied the entrance of the coffin into the Thomas Kirche just by coincidence! That was his way of making music out of this world. And I always say, that after Mendelssohn-Bartholdy he was probably the only great Bachconductor. I cannot explain it I can only say: I could only sing with him.

Ottobeuren

He was of course frantically nervous and thought „Good gracious!“ There was after all always over 3000 people in Ottobeuren and no Press, because he had rather a difficult relationship to the Press. He always said he never read the Press but then you would see him with a new paper sticking out of his coat pocket. Nobody ever mentioned it. But in Ottobeuren, in bavarian country it was possible to perform this kind of music. The Press did not have to be there and that made everything easier for us. We could sing more freely. Of course we were afraid that we would not come up to the musical standards required but we were inspired we knew he would let us sing. When someone sang a lovely soprano a Fermate was allowed for as long as required. And he could depend on us, we never violated the boundaries of good taste.

The Munich Bach Choir

The Bach choir never sang out of tune. The sopranos were always in the right pitch. It used to make me mad when first of all the sopranos started too low, and secondly that these days it is modern for choirs never to sing out fully (to the maximum). When the Bach Choir sang „Barrabam“ or „Wahrlich, dieser ist Gottes Sohn gewesen“ ,they were allowed to really get going. There is no other choir in the world that does it like that. I have sung with all the most known and reputable choirs, but the Bach choir sang with such transparency and without this exaggerated vibrato, the voices were young and could really let go. Today when you listen to choirs, for example at the academy in Cologne, the choir is not so fully equipped and it is a crying shame, that we do not have enough singers. Nowadays the music making is different, but the academy choir never had this power. A choir needs energy, and that was always guaranteed with the Bach Choir. The choirs today even the professional choirs, never sing with a truly stunning Forte, it is always a half forte, and that is a pity The Munich Bach Choir always sang to the maximum and it was always clear. That can be heard on the gramophone records. The choir is always pure and clear and that is, I think is, of crucial importance.

I never took part in Choir rehearsals, I only saw how from my point of view, that, when he gave the cue, what he wished for happened. When he worked with other choirs it was different. For example we were in Paris with him for Haydn's „Schöpfung“. The choir was so lacking in discipline and held their music so high that they couldn't see him, which for him was almost painful. His own choir was then for him a refreshment. These French choirs are so undisciplined. Actually it was a disgrace that they never realised what a great musician he was. They never understood. But in France discipline is very marginal anyway. Sad to say.

Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy

Of course Richter grew up in the great Bach tradition of the Dresdner Kreuzchor, but Mendelssohn appealed to him very much. The sweetness of the music and the enormous drama in the choir was what appealed to him, he could express himself fully. He had done so with Bach and one had the feeling it could not have been better, but then when he conducted Mendelssohn or when he expressed himself in the „Missa solennis“ from Beethoven, completely different sources that he had within himself could start to flow. He had accompanied the complete Bach Passions himself on the cembalo. That was something astounding, but naturally Mendelssohn in the Romantik provided an even bigger expansive possibility for him.

Respect and Distance.

My respect for him was immeasurable. I was awestruck. I was aware of his greatness from the very first second. Naturally I loved him too, as a man. He had this very certain charisma, but I never spoke to him privately. Now and again he would make remarks like „I am happy to see you again“ but never a proper conversation, although I am sure it would have been possible. One took a seat next to him when he played the cembalo but there was an agreement that no word was ever spoken. And I too had this agreement with him. I was at that time just too shy to dare. I just sat beside him, he played, and the connection was there. But the connection was always in the music. That is why he always repeatedly fetched me. He needed the absolute, indisputable and inviolable and that was what I could offer him. It was absolutely impossible to escape his spell. We were once in Naples and had already rehearsed for weeks: „Jauchzet Gott in allen Landen“ BWV 51. The evening before the concert I prayed to God to send Fire and Floods - or some kind of catastrophe. I was so nervous because it was so difficult to sing. When I came to the Concert all dressed up in my evening gown, Richter approached me with his suitcase. I asked „What is wrong“? He answered: „Cancelled! Strike!“ and one was so disappointed, no Flood - or Fire - or catastrophe, but a strike! The concert was cancelled and we were miserably unhappy. It only happened sometimes, usually it always worked out.

Rehearsals and Performances

The choir sang everything off by heart. When we were at the Salzburg Festival, I was there and thought: This choir sings everything off by heart, they aren't glued to the notes like those singers in Paris. They knew it and sang it out lustily to him. And he naturally conducted everything off by heart anyway. He often played the cembalo without looking. I mean it was such an achievement we just thought, that is the way it is, that is the way it has to be. We did not feel that it was anything sensational. We all sank into a Karl Richter's bliss and then it just happened. I don't know, I will never be able to explain Richter. I also sang the Mass in B-minor with him: Once the duet with Peter Schreier. Schreier whispered „That is simply wonderful!“ Richter said while conducting: „What did you say?“ During the performance! I froze, Peter Schreier just gaped. It was such a close relationship all around.

Richter's Death

There is a story told that explains and at the same time does not explain. There was this wonderful violinist Otto Büchner. Richter and Büchner were like brothers because they were so alike. After Richter's death I called Büchner up, sometimes it is good to weep together, and I wanted so much to mourn. I watched the concert shown on the television for Richter's 75. Birthday. I looked all around and in all the corners to see if I could see Otto Büchner but without success. There was a woman on the television and I asked her: „How is your husband“? She answered: „He is not not well at all. He is deeply depressed“. I answered “It is no wonder, I can understand that all too well. I, thank God, have had other things to distract me. But the sorrow is understandable“. I asked her: “How did Richter die“, and she told me „He was on the telephone to my husband from Hotel Vierjahreszeiten. They telephoned one another every day. They spoke about their plans and so forth. Richter was still in bed and said to my husband, just a moment. I am going to hang up, someone is knocking at the door, I will call you back. But he never called back. Nobody knew what happened, nobody knows who knocked on the door because a second later Richter was dead“ Who knocked? We don't know.

Musical simplicity

I come from a family where the Bachtradition was cultivated as a matter of course. I grew up in Weimar or better said in Saxony and Thuringia. From the very beginning I had been at ease with this musical simplicity. My parents had brought me up in this simplicity of verbal expression and Appoggiatur (suggestion) or which tempo - or maybe the coloratura. There was no discussion. Richter began and I followed. It was not only a question of understanding one another but of making music together, and there was never any trace of doubt. In those days I was flexible, I knew if the coloratur should be faster or slower. And I never had the feeling “Oh God I can't keep up“ or so.. Richter's simplicity was enormous when it came to tempo. I never had any problems.

Once again: Rehearsals and Concerts

When he was there he had time. We all met for the respective concerts. Nobody knew what the other one was doing currently. We were all busy singing and performing in all corners the world, or he was conducting somewhere. When had the dates, the rehearsal times were arranged. Sometimes we only came for the general rehearsal and made music together. When he said that something had to be repeated it was top priority as far as correction was concerned. Now and again such and such was right and the another time it was not. Sometimes. It could happen that everything was different again. He sat at the cembalo and played and improvised and gave us our cues etc. but the tempo was always right. It was never a tempo where you would be afraid of not having enough breath, something that can be experienced often these days. One evening could be faster, another evening could be slower depending on how he felt. It was always exactly the way he wanted it to be. For example I had an experience with Bernstein which I found appalling. In the morning at rehearsal he was fabulous and wonderful and you had the feeling that everything was alright, and then in the evening it was completely different. It was so unreliable, the tempo was different, Bernstein was conducting Mahler and it was frightening, you held your breath and thought this is not like rehearsal this morning, it is completely different. And it made me hopping mad. I thought this is so unreliable, it should not be allowed I should not be treated like this, it is despicable. It was never like that with Richter.

Anna Reynolds

Once during that time I witnessed how Anna Reynolds could no longer sing because a conductor had, in the truest sense of the word so deeply offended her. It was appalling to see how desperate she was, and despite all our efforts to help her voice remained mute. Our sympathy was profound because we all had at some point or other sung with her, but we were not able to help. Anna and I always sang the

Rheintöchter together with Karajan as conductor. It really hurt me to see her this condition. When the same thing happens to you, then you really know how much she had suffered. But I am glad to this day that I was there at her side. We sang an oratorium together, it was in Amsterdam and it was not easy. And when your voice does not function the way you want it to you then you realise how the other person had suffered.

Julia Hamari

I travelled a lot with Julia Hamari. We were often in South America and in München and to phonographic recordings. She is very hungarian, very very Hungarian. But very nice and very professional.

Peter Schreier and Theo Adam

I grew up with Schreier and Adam. We were always bumping into one another and I was in Paris a lot with Theo Adam. I never felt very well in Paris because I hate French food. I sometimes went out for a meal with Theo we always had good conversations and he could explain lots of things for me. In Leipzig we took part in the original production of Fidelio „Leonore“ together and in Dresden as well-very great moments. I simply sang with Schreier. Most of all we sang a lot of opera, all the Mozart operas. Die Entführung is a very difficult Partie for Konstanze. He once said to me “Your bosom is quite wet“! It was the beads of sweat from the Todesduett Schreier told me that he was in Dresden on the 13th and 14th of February. We always sang the „Missa solemnis“ from Beethoven every year in memory of this appalling and unforgivable Day of Horror. He explained and showed me a lot that is why I was close to Schreier right up until his death.

Kurt Hausmann

Ach Kurt Hausmann, wonderful! I was always with him in South America, he was always very charming, because I never dared to go out on my own, we used to go very often together to the „Fleischbratereien“. He explained to me what one had to do there. First of all one tasted what one wanted and when eight pieces of meat had been tried it was time to go home. He was a divinely gifted oboe player. To listen to him and to Otto Büchner when they played! My God, makes living without them very hard.

Johannes Fink

Johannes Fink was once flown into South America because they were threatening one another with knives! A Cellist or the musician playing the bass viol made so many mistakes that Van Kesteren gave him a disapproving look the cellist went at him with a knife. Richter of course just disappeared immediately, because everybody thought there was going to be a knifing. That was why Johannes Fink was flown in it was the only solution. We certainly experienced a lot of strange things sometimes.

In Fear of the Bach Choir

Fundamentally I am always rather nervous, so I was always in fear of the Choir. I will never in a thousand years be good enough for them I thought. They are so spoiled and so hard to please I never thought that maybe the Bach Choir would be interested in me. Now I very often receive letters from people who had heard me sing in those days with Richter and they write very pleasant letters when they have seen me on the television. Very very affectionate very kind, but at that time when I used to sing in the Bach-Chor, I was always afraid. They used to look down on me a bit. Oh well I was relatively young then, just like a little flea, but I admired the Choir without end. My God it was fantastic the way they did everything. But I never thought at that time that they would show interest in me later on.

Matthäus-Passion-in the name of Love

Yes! There are many difficult arias! The aria "Aus Liebe" (In the name of Love) in the Matthäus passion is devilishly so. Nerves of steel are required! But I was always courageous. The singer and the voice should not belong to this world, that is what I try to instill into my students. But not all of them can achieve this. The voice-one must have the feeling that it is not an instrument, but something very lonely and lamenting. This Loneliness in the voice, that was something Richter understood! He knew what was meant! Ach! My God! that was something simply fantastic.

Singing Tricks

From home I had learnt the disciplines and various methods that I needed to sing with him. I also know all the tricks needed for keeping your mouth moist during a long wait. For example in Brahms "Ein Deutsches Requiem": it lasts four movements until you finally have your cue. You have to very carefully bite the sides of your tongue. This immediately makes the tongue moist and helps you safely through the waiting. I never needed to suck sweets because of this trick and I never had the feeling that my mouth was dry. One can also sing very softly with choir, nobody can hear you. I was always so concentrated during rehearsals and performances, heaven only knows what would have had to happen before I noticed anything. I knew that Richter stood there I had my notes and I could sing - and nothing else mattered to me.

Memories

Richter could always make such wonderful comments. When we flew back from abroad, we always hoped that Richter would fly back with us, and we all flew Lufthansa-always. He always flew Swissair. He used to say that he always refused the food on Lufthansa. Wenn we flew 12 hours or more it was always a pity that he did not fly with us. We always flew back at the same time but he always flew Swissair. Why this was so, is for me to this day incomprehensible. I thought it was wonderful with Lufthansa we were always spoiled and pampered. But he just did not want to. In the meantime I have changed a lot. When I first began the one who impressed me most of all stood at the beginning of my path, and the others that followed him were in comparison always of a lesser importance. But I was not mature enough to be able to take advantage of the situation or the acquaintance or the informal verbal exchange. All that sort of thing did not take place with me. It would not have made him any less sympathetic for me, but it was simply the respect that I had been taught at home, it influenced my professional conduct as well. When Domingo came by everyone made small talk with him. I did not make small talk. I did my work and then I went home. And that was that.

Opera

It may sound vain but my "Donna Anna" in "Don Giovanni" and my "Königin der Nacht" in the "Zauberflöte" set standards. To this day nobody has been able to sing "Die Königin der Nacht" the way I did. It was a stroke of luck and a great honour too that the Voyager 1978 was sent off into space containing a capsule with my rendering of "Die Königin der Nacht", making me a representative of mankind on earth. I have seen many performances where the "Die Königin der Nacht" has been sung very courageously; but this great Drama that I had, without harming the "F" has up to this day never come to pass. And this is the reason why I have never been forgotten, because the "Die Königin der Nacht" and "Don Giovanni" Film will be handed down from generation to generation. I was in absolute "top form" at that time and the Film was my absolute "top form" rendition and recording of the "Die Königin der

Nacht“ and „Donna Anna“. And that is why it is such a shame that the “Entführung aus dem Serail“ was never recorded. At that time we had a phenomenal Ensemble: Peter Schreier as Belmonte, I was Konstanze, Gruberova „Blonde“ etc. Kurt Moll had of course Grammaphon recordings and we wanted to record with EMI and Moll was not available. The Producer said: „Nee, not without Kurt Moll“ and then I said: „Record it and put it in a tin box, and in five years when Moll has time you could produce it“. They did not do it however and I regret it to this day.

I did one of the „Rheintöchter“ with Karajan, as well as concerts. Good, the Rheintöchter are maybe not so significant, but we were an Ensemble. Helen Donath, Anna Reynolds and I something that you don't often find these days. And I did a lot of Concerts with Bernstein, Opera with Böhm, a lot of Mozart with Böhm, with Nagano, I sang Salome from Strauss, I certainly encountered very good conductors. I met all the great conductors of those days. Except Solti sad to say, I never met him. He was the only one I did not sing with. Otherwise I sang with everyone who had made a name for themselves. They were all very good, but Richter outshone them all. He would have liked to have done Opera. We always used to say: „Why don't you do Opera?“ Nobody has asked me“ was his reply.

Karl Richter and Richard Wagner

I think he could probably have done Wagner very well in his full-blooded manner he would have really been able to come to life. I am sure that he had a lot of dormant power just waiting to be put to use. I am sure he would have conducted Wagner. „Tannhäuser“ and „Holländer“ in any event. I am not sure if he would have done the Ring, although I could imagine him conducting Tannhäuser. There was so much life in him!