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First Contact 1956

I believe it was in Ansbach. I don't know, which year (1956), but it was the first time that Richter came to Ansbach and for me it was the first time too. The director was at that time Dr. Weymar. The first I ever heard from Richter were the Goldberg Variationen. I did not know this work, but I was present at the general rehearsal with him. He played it for me and I was very impressed. It was like a sort of vision from the complete work. I had never heard Bach played like that before. I was also at a concert, that was strongly criticised by the Bach specialists of the time, Carl Seemann and Edith Picht-Axenfeld. They stood up during the concert and protested "That is not Bach!" But I found it wonderful and I was deeply moved. I believe that in the same year Bach-Cantatas were performed or maybe it was the year after, I can't remember exactly. Two Cantatas made a very strong impression on me: *Brieh dem Hungrigen dein Brot* (BWV 39) and a much later Cantata: *Liebster Gott, wann werd ich sterben* (BWV 8). There is a prelude with the complete Orchestra, plus the death bell. The choir and orchestra were almost overly sentimental. But it was my first encounter with Bach. And then later there was the Johannes- and Mathäus-Passion and the H-moll Messe was added.

Rehearsals

Karl Richter and I had made friends and I admired him and his special way of rehearsing. A rehearsal for him was always an experiment. And not as one said in English "Rehearsal" or in French „Repetition“, following the same pattern. He altered the pattern from one Rehearsal to the next, sometimes the tempi, sometimes even the gestures, and that reminded me strongly of Furtwängler, who I knew very well from Berlin and who I loved and admired very much.

Tours with Jean Pierre Rampal

The next tour was to South America, during which we played a lot of chambermusic together. Before that we had the same programme in Berlin, with my friend Jean Paul Rampal. Then we played both in Lyon and Metz. And there is a story to tell. After the concert we were invited to a meal. Naturally it lasted until 3.0'clock in the morning. The next day we flew to Montpellier, and Jean Pierre Rampal said: "Oh there is a wonderful little Restaurant not far from here which serves seafood. It was in Bouziges. Within ten minutes he had rented a car. Karl Richter accompanied us and we ate shrimps and oysters. That was something that Karl Richter would never have eaten on his own. Jean Pierre Rampal said to him: "Karli, you have to take it like this, wait a minute, I will give it to you." There was another Concert, I believe it was in Paris. We made a wonderful trio. We improvised a lot - with the tempi as well. Very often we gave two to three encores just sightreading. But with one trio we played rather badly, I broke it off and said: „We will play it again the next time.“

Musikmaking

Musicmaking, playing this kind of music was taken very much for granted. You didn't think about style or tempo, no, that came in the Concerts.

Reading the score

Then we had a tour of South America also with Chambermusic. We stayed in the same Hotel on the

Copacabana in Rio de Janeiro. Before the concert in the afternoon Karl Richter called me in my room "What are you doing Aurèle? I answered: „Nothing special, come over to me.“ I went over and he was reading a score. A big score. At that time his eyesight was very bad. He had very strong glasses and a magnifying glass as well. He read one movement from the Missa Solemnis from Beethoven and he had learnt it in ten minutes.

Getting to know a new Organ

Karl Richter was engaged to inaugurate a new Organ, with which he was not familiar. I accompanied him. At the beginning he just took a good look at this organ, four manuals and so and so many stops, and then he began to play. With such assurance, finding exactly the distance from the different stops. Sometimes reaching the key of the highest manual with his nose. And I thought Oh Oh Oh! that is ingenious! I asked Karl Richter „How long did you need before you knew the Tabulature?“ „Half an hour, then everything is there“

Richter's Memory

It was the same with his memory in the Passionen, where he played the Recitative which he knew off by heart on the Cembalo. Once, a singer, by mistake missed his cue and Richter carried on at once and sang the part. Nowadays I am amazed that Karl Richter is never heard anymore, because I believe he would be up to date again.

Interpretation Yesterday and Today

A comparison to Furtwängler: Last week I listened to one of his last recordings, a Concerto grosso von Handel. It is manned with 18 violins and ten Contrabass and that made a very big impression. I ask myself why not so? It is the period of J.Robin (French Court gardener (1550-1629) the period of Versailles. Why always reduction to be original. We have learnt so very much about interpretation of Baroque-musik for example from Harnoncourt, but very often I miss the Jubiloso of this music.

Karl Richter's Last Concerts

I had the good fortune of working together with Richter on his last concerts. We travelled as a duo through many German towns. Frankfurt, Munich of course, Nuremberg and in the north of Germany too. The last concert was in Wilhelmshaven. He was so very tired. After the concert I stayed in his room and ordered a beer. He said to me: „Aurèle, please take a look in the bottom my suitcase, there is a piece of paper there. And the piece of paper was copy of Luther's Testament. And we tried to translate it into French. I can still remember the last phrase: "We are all beggars“.

Aus Liebe will mein Heiland sterben (Matthäus Passion)

"For love my saviour is now dying" is an aria for Sopran, Soloflute and two Oboen d'amore. I had played this aria very often with Richter and Ursula Bukkel. It is a wonderful aria. And why is it a wonderful aria? Every Key in Bach's days was a symbol. The Quarte stood for decisiveness, Quinte was neutral, Sexte was always outgoing for Love. Every interval had a meaning.

Kantate BWV 8, Bass-Ari

There is a wonderful Aria in the cantate *Liebster Gott, wann werd ich sterben*. It is for Flute, Orchestra and Bassbaritone, which Dieter Fischer-Dieskau sang. And this joyful anticipation of death is in A flat,

a radiant tonality. It made the strongest impression on me as music and also in the way in which Karl Richter conducted.

Sonata for Flute in B-minor BWV 1030

We played the b-minor Sonata von J. S. Bach very often. I loved the sound of the Neupert, with 16 Fuß, with pleno. Richter told us that Bach had inaugurated such an organ in Sachsen. He was the inspector. The organ had a 32 Fuß as well as a tremolo-stop which Richter loved and which today is called a romantic tone. Once during a recording of the b-flat-sonata in Munich we rehearsed a bit beforehand. Richter asked: "Aurèle, why are you phrasing so much, you have been phrasing for the last 30 years and you know it. Let it flow. That was his skill, letting the music flow.

Orchestrasuite B-minor BWV 1067

I had played the b-minor Suite very often with Furtwängler all over Europe and with a very big instrumentation. But the Polonaise had a double and I did it differently to the original. And Furtwängler said: "Ach you are composing?" He did the Badinerie with his big philharmonic orchestra. It was so hushed, I have never heard it played like that again. And with Karl Richter it was the same, one did not need to speak it was taken for granted.

Visionen

In the way he conducted the Matthäus-Passion he created, and I can't put it any other way - a vision of the complete work. From the first note to the last. He knew his Bible off by heart. I had noticed that in Freiberg in Sachsen, where he grew up, and where his father had an important position in the Lutheran Church. I went to a concert in the church in Freiberg. A wonderful Church with the famous church Porch; I believe there is a copy in Boston. In the church itself are wonderful Veit Stoß sculptures and a Silbermann-Organ. The concert was made up of Bach's compositions and was about the name Bach from Robert Schumann (6 Fugues about BACH, Fuges for 4 and 5 voices and double fugues for Organ and Grandpiano op. 60, 1845). At that time in Berlin I had not yet noticed, that Germany was a great nation, and above all Sachsen. It was the zenith of Germany's greatness. It was about the same period. that Goethe was in Weimar and one only took notice of what took place in the music but forgot what was going on in the world.

The Munich Bach Choir

You know, that was pretty easy, because that was the best choir I had heard. What else had I heard, in Berlin the Academy of Song. Shortly after the war, 1948 or 1949 the Thomaner were invited to sing in Schaffhausen, and the choir was conducted by Günther Ramin. Ramin was a great personality, but it was Karl Richter who sat at the cembalo, and I did not know Richter at that time. But it was the Thomaner's Singing that made the greatest impression on me. And that was how it was too with Richter and the Bach Choir. Above all the diction, one sang a text, one sang the bible. There was enthusiasm and it was very young people, young voices. I had never heard anything to compare with it before, except the Thomaner choir. The enthusiasm of the young people and of the orchestra was transmitted to everyone because Richter lived for the music.

When is a human being Happy?

I recently read a book about Spinoza, and there was one phrase that stays in my memory. "When is a human being absolutely happy? When body, soul and spirit are in harmony" And that is the only thing

from Spinoza that I could really understand well. And I believe it applies for many musicians and for Richter too. A dimension was always missing in other encounters but in his music he found everything. On the cembalo for example when he played the Goldberg-Variations. He walks on to the stage with a stoop, then he starts to play, first his head raises and then his whole body too. Elsewhere he would be tired or bad tempered, but never ever with his music.