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FERENC FRICSAY – A PIONEER IN TURBULENT TIMES*

Rarely can a conductor's life have been so fatefully intertwined with the historical and cultural upheavals of the 20th century as was the Hungarian Ferenc Fricsay's. Inevitably it left its mark on his art.

(*This was the title of the 80th birth anniversary exhibition that in 1994 travelled to Berlin, Munich, Szeged, Budapest and Vienna.)



He was born in the early days of the First World War, in Budapest on 9 August 1914, the only son of Hungary's highest-ranking military musician. His childhood and adolescence, devoted to music as they were, were largely unaffected by the devastation of war, unlike his home country. His father Richard Fricsay, who had taken part in the premiere of Dvorák's *Stabat mater* as a young violinist, soon took his son's wide-ranging instrumental tuition in hand (piano, violin, clarinet, trombone and percussion). Blessed with perfect pitch, Ferenc was accepted to study at the Franz Liszt Academy at the age of 14, having passed a stiff examination. It was then one of the most important, long-established and most demanding music conservatories in the world. Here he experienced Béla Bartók, Ernst von Dohnányi, Jenő Hubay, Zoltán Kodály and Leó Weiner, to name only a few. And it was here that he was given a thorough grounding in both the foundations of the European musical tradition and approaches to contemporary music. Conducting and composition were his main subjects. From 1930 his father entrusted him with the task of conducting the junior department of his symphony orchestra, consisting of gifted 14- to 16-year-old musicians. And from this time date a string quartet, an orchestral suite, a violin concerto and some choral and vocal compositions. With this almost fairy-tale training – by the standards of today – the young Fricsay acquired an artistic competence which sowed the seeds of his phenomenal later success.

After passing his diploma exam with flying colours in 1933, Fricsay turned down the offer to become a répétiteur - without conducting duties - at the Budapest State Opera and instead applied for the vacant military bandmaster position in Szeged, Hungary's second-largest town, with a university and garrison. One of his predecessors there was none other than Franz Lehár. The 19-year-old Fricsay was chosen out of 57 applicants; he also assumed the direction of the Szeged Philharmonic Orchestra.

This was a time of ferment. Whereas the military bandmaster with his brass band performed in town squares – in accordance with the Hungarian military music tradition of bringing classical music to the populace, they played versions of Beethoven symphonies that he had transcribed himself, for example - , the chief conductor of the Philharmonic energetically set about completely rebuilding concert life. Much intensified rehearsals improved artistic standards so drastically within a short time that conductors and soloists of international repute such as Bartók, Dohnányi, Failoni, Ferencsik, Kodály, von Mata?i?, Mengelberg and Sándor were happy to accept invitations to perform in Szeged. Fricsay always rehearsed concerts for guest conductors too, so he soon got to grips with works such as the Bruckner and Mahler symphonies. The summer festival in Szeged also gained new impetus through him. 1936 was the year of two Fricsay premieres, of his Great Mass in C and his incidental music to Madách's play The tragedy of mankind, the great Hungarian poet-philosopher's masterpiece. Also in 1936 he founded the opera section of Szeged's town theatre, a rather smaller counterpart of the Vienna Court Opera. Fricsay enhanced the attraction of his opera productions by inviting prominent guest singers from the Budapest State Opera. News of his success travelled to Vienna, where in 1937 he was invited to conduct a concert with the Wiener Symphoniker.

From 1942 a dark shadow was cast: Fricsay (who was Jewish on his mother's side) faced court martial for "assisting Jews", notably by engaging Jewish artists. After the German occupation of March 1944 the danger increased. Fricsay was in the sights of the Gestapo, so he fled from Szeged with his family and went underground in Budapest.

In January 1945, when German occupiers and Soviet troops were still fighting in parts of Budapest, an emissary of the Budapest City Orchestra, today the Hungarian National Philharmonic, visited Fricsay and asked him to conduct a concert scheduled for the end of the month in a largely intact theatre near Fricsay's hiding-place. This engagement resulted in an invitation for him to assume the chief conductorship of the orchestra alongside László Somogyi. At last, on 26 April 1945, he gave his long-awaited debut at the Budapest State Opera with Verdi's *La Traviata*. Fricsay became first conductor there and remained with the company until March 1949. It held a premier position among international opera houses, not least because Otto Klemperer conducted there frequently. It was a lucky chance for Fricsay that his older colleague was happy to take him in hand and go through the complete Mozart symphonies with him.

1947 brought an invitation for the City Orchestra to appear at the Vienna Festwochen, an event with repercussions. On 26 June Fricsay conducted works including Bartók's *Two Portraits* and Dvorák's *Symphony No. 9 "From the New World"*. Herbert von Karajan was in the audience. He recommended Fricsay to Gottfried von Einem, who was desperately seeking an assistant to the already ailing Otto Klemperer to prepare the premiere of his new opera *Dantons Tod* at the forthcoming Salzburg Festival. After being approached by the composer and studying the score the following night, Fricsay agreed. In the middle of the Salzburg rehearsals Klemperer finally cancelled. Fricsay stepped into the breach. The first premiere of a contemporary opera at the Salzburg Festival was an enormous success and gave the 33-year-old Hungarian his international breakthrough.

Offers came in thick and fast. But only one interested Fricsay. He signed a contract as guest conductor at the Vienna State Opera. In more than 40 performances during the two following seasons he had, however, to bow to the demands of a repertoire opera house. Constant changes of personnel on stage and in the orchestra pit, and being forced to conduct works he had not rehearsed himself, became torture for him, in spite of the participation of many singers whose reputation today is legendary. For him this was a betrayal of operatic art and he felt reduced to the role of a mere time-beater. So he abandoned Vienna after his second great Salzburg success with the staged premiere of Frank Martin's *Le Vin herbé* in 1948, when Berlin – more precisely West Berlin – summoned him. Heinz Tietjen, the general director of the State Opera, wanted to engage Fricsay as permanent music director at the Charlottenburg opera house, while Elsa Schiller, a Dohnányi pupil with a professorship from the Franz Liszt Academy, who had escaped death at the Theresienstadt concentration camp and was now director of classical music at the newly founded RIAS (Radio in the American Sector) radio station, wanted him as chief conductor of the RIAS Symphony Orchestra founded two years previously. She was well aware of his outstanding qualities as an orchestral trainer.

Getting Fricsay to Berlin was an adventure in itself. The city had been largely destroyed in the war and was surrounded by the Soviet occupation zone. Its western part had been subjected since the end of June to the blockade imposed by the Soviets and was dependent on the legendary “airlifts” for supplies. Once more world peace was threatened. In Hungary, too, political circumstances were changing. The Soviet liberators had become occupiers. In order to provide the Hungarian citizen with an exit visa, cultural authorities in Berlin arranged for Fricsay to be invited to conduct a concert with the Berlin Rundfunk-Sinfonie-Orchester belonging to Berlin Radio, which was under the control of the Russian occupation forces. It was housed in the largely undamaged historic Funkhaus on the Masurenallee, a Soviet enclave in the British sector. So Fricsay's actual Berlin debut on 6 November 1948 was for East Berlin radio, with a typical Fricsay programme: Kodály's *Dances of Galanta*, Martin's *Petite Symphonie concertante* and – as with his Vienna concert of a year earlier – Dvořák's “New World” Symphony. The Berlin audience was smitten, as it was at his originally intended debut with the premiere of Verdi's *Don Carlos* at the Berlin City Opera on 18 November. Fricsay's glowing and feverish conducting was to be heard in many repeat performances and made clear that the opera was chosen as a tribute to newly-regained freedom of thought and as a clear challenge to the occupation forces in the eastern part of the city. The premiere also marked the operatic debut of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, a 23-year-old baritone in the role of Marquis Posa, who was to become one of Fricsay's closest musician friends.

On 12 December 1948, Fricsay conducted his first concert with the RIAS Symphony Orchestra. This encounter was to prove the most decisive in Fricsay's artistic career. Working with this orchestra, which was renamed Radio-Symphonie-Orchester Berlin (RSO) in 1956 and is now the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, became his life's task. The majority of the re-releases in this edition are an eloquent testimony to their collaboration. That Fricsay was able to add a fourth Berlin debut on 16 December 1948, this time with the Berliner Philharmoniker, was due to Eugen Jochum's cancellation, not willing to risk travelling to Berlin during the blockade.

In the same month of December, Fricsay signed two further contracts that were to play an important part in his life: simultaneously he became general musical director of the West Berlin opera house and chief conductor of the RIAS Symphony Orchestra, and he signed an exclusive contract with the Deutsche Grammophon Gesellschaft, becoming one of the few internationally renowned artists never to record for any other label.

Hardly was the ink dry on the contracts when Elsa Schiller and Ferenc Fricsay set about rebuilding the RIAS Orchestra, because neither its size nor its collective technical level satisfied the radio station's needs or indeed met international requirements. Supported by the financial elbow-room provided by the American-subsidized RIAS and the active intervention of Elsa Schiller, it was soon possible to recruit around 30 of the best musicians from the long-established Staatskapelle Berlin for the RIAS Symphony Orchestra. This had happened by the time of Fricsay's official inauguration in June 1949. The new, enlarged RIAS Symphony Orchestra with around 100 permanent players was able to begin work with its chief conductor. In a former cinema auditorium, the Titania Palast in Steglitz – the only large concert hall available after the destruction of the Alte Philharmonie by bombs – the concert of 12 June 1949 was the first to be broadcast by the RIAS. It included works by Hindemith (*Symphonic Metamorphosis*), Falla (*Nights in the Gardens of Spain*, with Gerty Herzog as soloist), and Beethoven (the Fifth Symphony).

The next season of 1949/50, for which yearly subscription tickets were introduced, revealed completely changed emphases in programming and the choice of soloists, throwing down the gauntlet to the Berliner Philharmoniker. From then on conductors such as Leo Blech, Karl Böhm, Antal Dorati, Eugen Jochum, Paul Sacher and Georg Solti were regular guests, to be joined later by Ernest Ansermet, Otto Klemperer, Igor Markevitch and Eugene Ormandy. From the mid-50s younger conductors such as Wolfgang Sawallisch, Bernard Haitink and in particular the up-and-coming prodigy Lorin Maazel appeared more frequently with the orchestra.

Apart from those artists who refused to appear in Germany because of their suffering under the Nazi regime or who were not allowed to perform in Berlin for political reasons, the soloists at the concerts (including some prominent members of the orchestra) were all those of note at the time: the pianists Géza Anda, Claudio Arrau, Wilhelm Backhaus, Robert Casadesu, Alfred Cortot, Shura Cherkassky, Walter Gieseking, Friedrich Gulda, Annie Fischer and Clara Haskil; the violinists Yehudi Menuhin, Wolfgang Schneiderhan, Christian Ferras, Johanna Martzy, Erica Morini, Tibor Varga and Gioconda de Vito; the cellists Enrico Mainardi, Antonio Janigro, Pierre Fournier and so on.

Most of the singers came from the Berlin opera houses, a connection which turned out to be very beneficial. Singers such as Erna Berger, Lisa Otto, Marianna Radev, Anny Schlemm, Rita Streich and Sieglinde Wagner and Peter Anders, Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Josef Greindl, Helmut Krebs, Walther Ludwig, Josef Metternich, later Ernst Haefliger, or in Fricsay's last years Oralia Dominguez, the young Pilar Lorengar, Donald Grobe and Ivan Sardi belonged to the "inventory". They were joined by "outsiders", first Elfriede Trötschel and later Irmgard Seefried, Maria Stader, Hertha Töpper, Kim Borg and Gottlob Frick. Fricsay was responsible for some of these engagements, Elsa Schiller's connections and the Adler concert agency for others, the latter drawing on international links it had built up before the war. Since Fricsay and Elsa Schiller were both of Hungarian-Jewish origin, they contributed to breaking down prejudices against Berlin remarkably quickly, a factor that cannot be sufficiently emphasized.

By the mid-50s the typical Fricsay ensemble had crystallized, made up above all of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau, Josef Greindl, Elisabeth Grümmer, Maria Stader, Ernst Haefliger, Géza Anda, Annie Fischer, the husband-and-wife team of Irmgard Seefried and Wolfgang Schneiderhan, Gerty Herzog and Margrit Weber, and in later years Yehudi Menuhin. When these artists appeared with the orchestra under Fricsay's direction, their performances were personal, expressive, memorable and prescient, as this Edition eloquently shows.

After Fricstay had conducted his third Salzburg premiere of a contemporary opera, Carl Orff's *Antigonae*, in August 1949, again with great success, he made his first recordings for shellac discs in September and December of that year – with DG equipment, but not for that company but for the Dahlem Music Society of Berlin, whose prime movers were two Schoenberg pupils, the musicologist and author H.H. Stuckenschmidt and J.Rufer, the editor of Schoenberg's complete works. The Society had the purpose of presenting its recorded anthology of German contemporary music to universities, libraries and influential music lovers in the USA, to show that music there had developed in spite of 12 years of Nazi rule with its concomitant bans of unwelcome composers. Unfortunately only part of this collection has survived (it also included choral works not conducted by Fricstay). The recordings from it on CD 12 (part of Boris Blacher's *First Piano Concerto* with Gerty Herzog as soloist), 19 (Egk: *Little Abraxas Suite*, 2 *Ballet Variations* by Henze and the *Finale* of Fortner's *Symphony of 1947*) and 22 (K.A. Hartmann: *Adagio* from *Symphony No.2* and G. von Einem: *Geschwindmarsch* from *Dantons Tod*; excerpts from Orff's *Carmina burana* will follow in Part 2 of the Edition) already show the technical finesse of which Fricstay's ensemble was now capable.

In the same month of June that marked his official debut with the RIAS Symphony Orchestra, he also made his debut as general musical director with the premiere of Beethoven's *Fidelio*, selected for its political implications. Not without reason was a performance of this *Fidelio* chosen by delegates to be the centrepiece of the first "Congress for Cultural Freedom" organised in West Berlin to worldwide acclaim. At the beginning of the congress, which was supported by the American government and the German Federal government in Bonn, Fricstay provided the opening and closing music framework with the Berliner Philharmoniker. It was with the Philharmoniker that Fricstay had begun recording for DG in September 1949 (CD 36: J.Strauss: *Blue Danube Waltz* and *Perpetuum mobile*), CD 41: Tchaikovsky: *Fifth Symphony*). On New Year's Eve 1949 he continued with the RIAS Symphony Orchestra the Berlin tradition of performing Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, and kept this up for several years.

Although Fricstay's tireless work kept him more than fully occupied in his two Berlin posts, he still found time for guest appearances, for which invitations increased. In 1950 he conducted Mozart's *Le nozze di Figaro* at the Edinburgh Festival, and made his debut at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires with Orff's *Carmina burana*. Also in 1950 began a four-year period of intensive work with the North-West German Radio Symphony Orchestra (now the WDR Symphony Orchestra) and its radio station in Cologne, which he conducted at both public concerts and many broadcasting sessions, notably the sumptuously cast complete recordings in German of *Figaro* (1951) and Verdi's *Il trovatore* (1953). Also in 1951 Fricstay conducted at the Teatro San Carlo in Naples, where he gave *Fidelio* with Peter Anders as Florestan and Bartók's *Duke Bluebeard's Castle*, both directed by Günther Rennert.

Through ever more concerts in Berlin and constant radio productions for RIAS, which was building up an extensive archive of music that could be broadcast at a moment's notice, the RIAS Orchestra had attained a level that yielded little or nothing to German and international competition. From 1951 on Fricstay and the orchestra undertook extensive tours, professionally organised by the Adlers and generally combining German and Western European venues, becoming one of the most important cultural ambassadors for West Berlin, particularly since they normally toured with several different programmes, unlike today's normal practice.

In 1952 Fricstay was finding it more and more difficult to fulfil the contractual obligations attached to his two posts. Coordinating rehearsals alone became ever more complicated. In the opera house there was dissatisfaction with Fricstay's notorious refusal to conduct performances of works he had not rehearsed himself, to have his own productions taken over by colleagues who were in his view unworthy, or to have singers with whom he did not want to work foisted upon him for his own performances.

When the Senate finally accused him of negotiating with Walter Felsenstein, managing director of the Komische Oper in East Berlin, Fricsay annulled his contract with the City Opera in early June, but remained chief conductor of the RIAS Orchestra and saw his conduct receive official approbation with the award of the prestigious Berlin Art Prize. Freed of opera duties, he intensified his recording activity with DG and increased his touring. At the Salzburg and Lucerne Festivals he stepped in for Furtwängler, who had had to cancel orchestral concerts through illness. After that he returned to Lucerne's Vierwaldstättersee for the Festival every year. In 1952 he also conducted the Concertgebouw Orchestra, the first of many guest appearances in Amsterdam. Concerts in Rome and Milan, Paris, Zürich and Stockholm and regular activity with Ansermet's Orchestre de la Suisse Romande and in particular with the Wiener Symphoniker completed the picture.

In 1953 Fricsay embarked on a sensational concert tour of the USA, from Boston and Houston to San Francisco. In Boston he conducted a programme with compositions by Haydn, Bartók and Tchaikovsky on four successive evenings. On the Pacific coast he directed the San Francisco Symphony Orchestra in eight concerts with three different programmes, including Brahms's Piano Concerto No.2 with Arthur Rubinstein as soloist. The concert in Houston was greeted so enthusiastically that Fricsay signed a contract for several years as Efrem Kurtz's successor there, which meant that his old "double" contract with the RIAS Orchestra lapsed. However, he continued to work with that orchestra at concerts in Berlin, including its ambitious participation at the annual, internationally renowned Berliner Festwochen festival, for tours and for gramophone recordings for DG, which if anything increased in number. A contributing factor to this new development, of existential importance to the orchestra, was Elsa Schiller's move to DG in the previous year as director of classical recordings - often supervising Fricsay's recording sessions herself - as was the support of Ernst von Siemens, the then chairman of the board of directors. For it had been noticed in Washington that the RIAS Orchestra was the sole orchestra to be state-financed by the USA, so the agreement was abruptly terminated, leaving the orchestra to look urgently for outside financial support. Even though the Houston tenure began spectacularly with soloists such as Isaac Stern, Elisabeth Schwarzkopf and Astrid Varnay, scarcely had it begun when it foundered. The board of the Houston Symphony Orchestra not only tried to interfere in artistic matters affecting the chief conductor, but failed to keep promises they had made. In 1955 Fricsay asked to be released prematurely from his contract.

The next offer was not long in coming. The Bavarian State Opera contacted Ermatingen, the village on the Swiss side of Lake Constance where Fricsay and his family had moved in 1952. He signed a contract as artistic director in May 1955, to take effect from the 1956/57 season. During the opera festival he gave his first concert with a programme devoted exclusively to Richard Strauss. His opera debut in Munich also took place before his contract began, in May 1956 with Verdi's *Otello*. Audience and critical reaction was overwhelming. One month later, Fricsay, who had already visited Israel once in 1954 and conducted Verdi's *Requiem* with the Israel Philharmonic in several Israeli cities, made his second concert tour of the country with the same orchestra. This time Handel's *Judas Maccabaeus* and a concert performance of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* were the works on the programme. Again, reactions were both enthusiastic and deep.

Ferenc Fricsay, as the new "Bavarian artistic director", conducted his official first performance with Mussorgsky's *Khovanshchina*, simultaneously the Munich premiere of the work. Here he drew on his time at the Budapest State Opera, whose famous stage designer, Gusztav Oláh, was invited to Munich. During preparations and rehearsals news arrived of the uprising in Hungary. On the day of the premiere Fricsay's friend Oláh knew he could not return to Budapest. Fricsay, who was also made homeless by the crushing of the rebellion, devoted his first Academy concert on All Saints' Day to the Munich premiere of Kodály's *Psalmus hungaricus*, dedicating it to the victims of the Soviet invasion. With this work Kodály wanted to recall "that the Magyar people throughout their history experienced long periods of captivity, oppression and violent rule imposed by outsiders" (K.H. Ruppel).

For his engagement in Munich, Fricsay aimed to plug glaring gaps in the repertory and build up the Verdi and Mozart repertoire afresh. In addition to these first performances, there were Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, Berg's *Wozzeck* – with countless orchestral rehearsals – and Stravinsky's *Oedipus Rex*. Although audiences were always on his side, Fricsay became the target of sections of the press. The general manager Rudolf Hartmann would have preferred to have engaged Joseph Keilberth instead. Fricsay, who had consciously left the Wagner repertory to Hans Knappertsbusch and Strauss to Karl Böhm, whom he specially invited to Munich for the purpose, was nevertheless sensitive to the constant criticism that he was neglecting Munich's two "household gods". He scheduled a *Tannhäuser* with Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau in the role of Wolfram, but then had to read in the State Opera internal newsletter that the general manager, who also resented Fricsay's ties to Berlin, had cancelled the Wagner opera. And when Fricsay discovered during initial rehearsals for a new production of *Tristan* that Hartmann was already negotiating with Keilberth behind his back, he angrily threw in the towel and amended his contract as artistic director to that of a guest conductor. However, for the re-opening of the rebuilt Cuvilliétheater, the most important Rococo-period theatre in Germany which had been destroyed in the war, he conducted a much-acclaimed *Marriage of Figaro* and – as Eurovision's first transmission of a public concert – a gala performance of a Johann Strauss programme to support the rebuilding of Munich's National Theatre.

At the end of 1958 Fricsay suffered a life-threatening illness. After two serious operations at the end of December and the beginning of January he had to convalesce for about nine months. During this time he decided to rejoin his old orchestra, now the Radio-Symphonie-Orchester Berlin, on a permanent basis, although Berlin was undergoing a second crisis after Khrushchev's ultimatum of November 1958 demanding that the four-power administration be abandoned and Berlin turned into a "free city".

Fricsay's return to his old chief conductor podium at the beginning of September 1959 was shattering. Before his RSO stood a terribly thin, fragile, almost transparent figure, who had nevertheless sacrificed none of his boundless energy. He threw himself into his work as if he knew that not much time was left. After two "reconciliation" concerts on 13 and 14 in the concert hall of the Hochschule für Musik - which the Berlin orchestras had been using for performances since 1954 instead of the Titania-Palast - where Beethoven's *Egmont Overture*, Bartók's *Piano Concerto No. 2* (with Géza Anda) and Tchaikovsky's "*Pathétique*" Symphony were played, Bartók's *Piano Concertos Nos. 2 & 3* (CD 1) and the Tchaikovsky symphony (CD 43) were recorded in the Jesus-Christus-Kirche in Berlin-Dahlem, which the RIAS sound engineer Heinz Opitz had discovered in 1949 as an ideal recording studio where many important recordings had since been made. The Bartók Concertos disc later received the coveted Grand Prix du Disque, as the equally benchmark recording of his *Concerto for Orchestra* had in 1959 (CD 3): it is considered a reference recording against which all others are still measured today. At the end of the month Fricsay conducted the inaugural concert in the new Large Broadcasting Hall of the Funkhaus (now occupied by Sender Freies Berlin) in the Masurenalle, where he had given his Berlin debut almost 11 years previously. This concert was also a media event of the first rank. The live broadcast of Kodály's *Psalmus hungaricus* and Mozart's *Great Mass in C minor* was the first-ever stereo live broadcast on German radio. In October he renewed his ties with the Berliner Philharmoniker, with whom he performed Mahler's *Kindertotenlieder* with the now 34-year-old Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. Afterwards Fricsay and the orchestra proceeded to the Jesus-Christus-Kirche, where they recorded Dvořák's *Symphony No. 9 "From the New World"* (CD 17). This disc – also a reference recording – was to become one of DG's most successful.

As if the previous months renewing acquaintanceship with Berlin had not been tiring enough, Fricsay managed to visit Vienna via Hamburg and Geneva before the year's end. Following an invitation by the NDR radio station, in the Hansa city he conducted in November the NDR Symphony Orchestra and NDR Chorus and RIAS Chamber Chorus in Kodály's *Psalmus hungaricus* and Rossini's *Stabat mater* in the Musikhalle (now Laeiszhalle). This performance was particularly successful in demonstrating that Rossini's late work, rescued practically from oblivion and performed many times by Fricsay throughout Europe, is above all the expression of Italian piety.

In Vienna Fricsay renewed his partnership with the Wiener Symphoniker, with whom he had given the Austrian premiere of *Psalmus hungaricus* almost 12 years before and now did the same for Gottfried von Einem's *Stund* enlied at the beginning of December. At the end of November he had begun the project of recording a large cross-section of Mozart symphonies for Deutsche Grammophon in the Musikvereinssaal with the same orchestra. By 8 December, Symphonies Nos. 39 K. 543 (CD 28) and 40 K. 550 (CD 29) were in the can, thus bringing to a close the first exhausting working period after Fricsay's pause through illness, although he was still not fully recovered.

Even though the intensity of this new beginning was unparalleled, it only foreshadowed the heights achieved in Fricsay's final years, almost indescribable and strength-sapping as they were. At the beginning of 1960 the Berlin Senate, remembering the double contract of 1948, asked Fricsay to resume the chief conductorship of West Berlin's opera house. In the following year it was due to move back to the Bismarckstrasse in Charlottenburg from its provisional quarters at the Theater des Westens. The Bismarckstrasse had been the home of the old Deutsches Opernhaus, and the new theatre being built there was no longer to be called City Opera, but as Fricsay himself suggested, Deutsche Oper Berlin. He turned down the contract offered, but agreed to become artistic adviser and to conduct a number of performances there.

Viewing the year 1960 as a whole it is difficult to realise how Fricsay, still in uncertain health, was able to fulfil all his concert, operatic and recording obligations, considering all the organisation involved. And yet he made recordings that still set the standard by which all others are judged. In May 1960 Fricsay and his friend Géza Anda – in a human and artistic symbiosis foreshadowing that between Abbado and Pollini – recorded the Brahms Second Piano Concerto following a concert with the Berliner Philharmoniker (CD 13). Eberhard Finke, the erstwhile principal cellist of the orchestra who played the solo in the 3rd movement of the concerto and was also to do so in DG's recording of Anda partnered by Karajan, related how Fricsay, unlike his conducting colleagues, asked to see him specially and went through the solo, explaining courteously how he viewed its tempo, tone colour and expression. The chamber-music transparency and intimacy of the concerto as interpreted by Fricsay were unique in Finke's memory.

There was a similar situation a few days later. Again in connection with a concert, this time with the RSO, Beethoven's Triple Concerto, hitherto little performed and recorded, was recorded with Wolfgang Schneiderhan, Pierre Fournier and Géza Anda (CD 5). The recording, later to be awarded a Grand Prix du Disque, is emblematic of Fricsay's style in various ways. Unlike most competing recordings, Fricsay uses a reduced orchestra and chooses soloists noted for their lean tone. Ample string vibrato is taboo. A unique art of mutual listening by soloists and orchestra emerges. This is a completely pared-down Beethoven sound, again with a chamber-music-like transparency that reveals all the musical subtleties of the work. In August of the same year Fricsay performed the concerto again at the Lucerne Festival with the same soloists, and at the Salzburg Festival 1961 for the last time, at his orchestral concert with the Wiener Philharmoniker.

At the beginning of June 1960 Fricsay repaired to the Jesus-Christus-Kirche for further recordings with the RSO and Maria Stader and Margrit Weber, both of whom belonged to Fricsay's inner circle. With the Swiss pianist he committed Rachmaninov's virtuoso Variations on a Theme of Paganini and the 10 Bagatelles for Piano and Orchestra by Alexander Tcherepnin, the Russian composer, pianist and composition teacher in Chicago, to disc (CD 20). With the Budapest-born, Swiss-naturalized Maria Stader and a chamber formation from the RSO he achieved a rendition of Mozart's motet *Exsultate, jubilate* K. 165 and *Laudate dominum* from *Vesperae solennes de confessore* K. 339 that in its lucidity and expressiveness adds up to a Mozart for all time. The recording went round the world. Maria Stader once told the author that at her next American engagement after its release people continually addressed her as "Mrs. Exsultate". Similarly, Claudio Abbado told me that he appreciated Fricsay above all as a born Mozart conductor, mentioning Maria Stader and the recording in that connection.

Magnificent and unique in another way was an event of June 1960 that was an epoch-making milestone of musical transmission. Inspired by the ethnological folk-music researches of his compatriots Bartók and Kodály, all his life Fricsay was concerned to make the music he loved known to wider circles. In 1953 he used the launching of German television at the Düsseldorf Radio Exhibition as an occasion to collaborate with his RIAS orchestra with the Berlin cabaret group "Die Insulaner" in a shared programme reaching many new listeners. Now he had the opportunity to conduct a normal orchestral rehearsal of Smetana's symphonic poem *The Moldau* with the South German Radio Symphony Orchestra in front of hidden TV cameras and then perform the work in concert. This made the process of bringing music to life, normally known only to the initiated, familiar to an audience of millions, thus opening up a new way of approaching classical music through the resources of television. Fricsay, with his remarkable gift of making musical processes intelligible in pictorial language to professional musicians and amateurs alike, was the ideal presenter. The broadcast of 24 June 1960, unfortunately cut down to the statutory hour's length (CD 45 in the only slightly abridged audio version), also went round the world and is readily available today on all manner of internet forums. In the 1950s in America Leonard Bernstein had discovered the television medium for classical music, but Fricsay was the first in Europe to understand the value of presenting music not only aurally on the radio, but allowing it to be visually experienced on television as a way of awakening interest in classical music among those who would not normally listen to it, and going beyond the mere televising of concerts.

The year 1960 saw Fricsay, in fulfilment of his guest contract, return to his old Munich habitat to a resounding welcome. Following some cast changes and intensive re-rehearsals he conducted in the period from March to the beginning of September *Otello*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *Un ballo in maschera* and *Figaro*, as well as his last Academy concert in Munich in May shortly after the Brahms Piano Concerto No.2 recording in Berlin, where he directed the same soloist, Géza Anda, in the same composer's Piano Concerto No.1 and Symphony No.4. A special high point of this last working phase in the Bavarian State Opera was the Holland Festival guest appearance with *Wozzeck*, of which these forces had given the Munich premiere in 1957. On 5 September, during the opera festival, the former "Bavarian general musical director" conducted *Figaro*, his final Munich performance. With the Mozart opera fresh in his mind, Fricsay began on 12 September the complete recording of *Le Nozze di Figaro*, albeit now in the original language and with cast changes. It took 10 days and will be included in the Part 2 of this Edition. During the Berliner Festwochen in the same month, Fricsay and the Berlin RSO resumed their tradition of presenting all-Stravinsky programmes. Fricsay conducted the *Symphony of Psalms*, the first performance of the *Movements for Piano and Orchestra* which he had had commissioned from Stravinsky with the dedicatee Margrit Weber as soloist, and *Oedipus Rex* as the main work. He demonstrated once more that alongside Pierre Monteux and Ernest Ansermet he was one of the composer's most authoritative interpreters. A few days earlier he had recorded the *Movements* with Margrit Weber for DG (CD 38).

At the beginning of October followed the oft-postponed recording of Beethoven's *Symphony No. 7*, planned as part of a complete recording of the composer's symphonies that was interrupted by Fricsay's illness. He probably conducted this Beethoven symphony more than any other apart from the Ninth, and had just given it at an RSO subscription concert in September. Here, in this unique interpretation characterized by lean sonic transparency and inimitable inner tension, Fricsay's lifelong dedication to Beethoven and this work in particular achieves an intensity and maturity that makes it one of his most beautiful and moving legacies. In conversation with the author about his view of Beethoven, Carlo Maria Giulini revealed that this was his favourite Beethoven interpretation.

In his last RSO subscription concert of 1960 Fricsay turned for the last time – and in Berlin alone for the fourth – to Verdi's *Requiem*, a work that was always at the heart of his repertoire. Witnesses at the concert in the Haus des Rundfunks in the Masurenallee testify to its galvanic impact. Again, this performance will appear in Part 2 of the edition.

The year 1961 was even richer and even fuller, with concerts in and outside Berlin and with many gramophone recordings. February saw two RSO subscription concerts, one with an all-Beethoven programme featuring Géza Anda as soloist in the Third Piano Concerto, and one with Arthur Honegger's dramatic psalm King David, a work that was also at the heart of Fricsay's repertoire and that he had often performed, both in other cities and at the Berlin Festival in 1952. In between there were gramophone recordings: Gottfried von Einem's First Piano Concerto with Gerty Herzog at the piano (CD 12) alternated with a Johann Strauss family anthology at the sessions (CD 35). In this recording Fricsay summed up all his Strauss concerts from Szeged to Berlin. He performed these light-music treasures with the same precision and affectionate concern for detail and transparent sound as he did a Mozart symphony, without taking away their volatile lightness. Already in September 1951 he had discovered the Waldbühne, the former boxing arena of the 1936 Olympic Games seating 20,000, and inaugurated it as a classical music venue with a lively Strauss programme with the soprano Erna Berger assisting. The recordings he made between 1949 and 1952 of Strauss's music also remained available into the stereo era. The secret of the success of his Strauss interpretations may reside in the fact that he understood, as only few did – and it was similar with his Mozart – how to bring out the difficult-to-describe “laughter through tears” phenomenon at the appropriate moments, without descending into sentimentality. His special gift for Strauss was, of course, not lost on the Viennese. When we were both searching fruitlessly for the unfortunately lost tape of the October 1961 subscription concert, Otto Strasser – for many years on the board of the Wiener Philharmoniker – told the author that after that year's re-acquaintance, the orchestra was planning to invite Fricsay to direct a forthcoming New Year's Concert.

At the end of March Fricsay continued his planned Mozart symphony cycle in the Musikvereinssaal with recordings of Symphonies No.29 K. 201 (CD 28) and No.41 K.551 (CD 29). With the last three Mozart symphonies he created an image of the composer that reveals three of his most prominent traits. Whereas from the viewpoint of a 20th-century citizen such as Fricsay, Symphony No.39, and particularly the introduction to its first movement, seemed to reveal the chasms in Mozart's personality and the great G minor symphony a dark, ineffably melancholic side, the last C major symphony gave its creator's radiant Apollonian aspect its full due. Here Fricsay made a decisive contribution to contemporary Mozart interpretation – very personal to be sure, but with an unmistakable stringent expressivity. These recordings alone mark out Fricsay as one of the great Mozart conductors of his time.

Two concerts on 23 and 24 April – including Kodály's Dances of Galanta and Tchaikovsky's Violin Concerto played by Yehudi Menuhin – were the prelude to an almost three-week-long tour of Western Europe by the RSO, its chief conductor and Menuhin. A special train took the musicians to 13 cities including Munich, Copenhagen, Hamburg, Düsseldorf, London and Paris. Menuhin alternated the Tchaikovsky Concerto with performances of the Brahms and Bruch (No.1). In London the BBC made a recording of a specially organised TV concert in its own studios, with Rossini's overture The Silken Ladder, Bruch's Violin Concerto and Beethoven's Leonore III Overture. The tour concluded with a farewell concert in Berlin, in which Tamás Vásáry, not Menuhin, was the soloist, in Liszt's Piano Concerto No.2. The centrepiece of the following RSO subscription concert – alongside an eminently important work for Fricsay and one often performed by him, Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra – was Brahms's Double Concerto with Wolfgang Schneiderhan and János Starker, which was simultaneously recorded for DG (CD 13). This was a further instalment, following the Second Piano Concerto set down more than a year before, of the Brahms project that had been long planned and prepared in many concerts. Already tentative dates had been set for recording all four symphonies. But they, like contractually projected Bruckner and Mahler recordings, were never to happen.

No sooner back in Berlin, Fricsay set off on a ten-day tour of Austria: to Vienna for the festival there and for the 35th World Music Festival of the International Society for Contemporary Music, and also to Graz and the border town Passau. Two programmes were performed, one of Bartók including the Second Violin Concerto with Menuhin, and a Beethoven programme including the First Piano Concerto with Géza Anda as soloist. Both tours, which really made up an entity, allowed orchestra, conductor and soloists to coalesce into an unprecedented harmony. Not only that: 16 years after the catastrophe of 1945, in the unsurpassable international acclaim they received, with their convincing and outreaching musical message, they also showed Germany and West Berlin in a sympathetic light to the rest of the civilized western world. There was no going back.

In July Salzburg beckoned. Fricsay conducted the opening performance of the Festival in the Grosses Festspielhaus: a new production of Mozart's *Idomeneo*, his first encounter with the Wiener Philharmoniker since the Festival concert of 1952. Fricsay was earmarked to conduct a new Mozart cycle - there were concrete plans for a new *Die Zauberflöte* with Oskar Kokoschka as stage designer. Some of the new productions were conceived as co-productions with the Deutsche Oper Berlin, such as a new *Figaro*. *Idomeneo* cemented Fricsay's reputation as a Mozart conductor.

In mid-August at the Lucerne Festival Fricsay gave the world premiere of Kodály's *Symphony*, in the presence of the composer. For the conductor this re-acquaintance with Kodály, whose works he championed like no other in concert halls all over the world, on disc and in many radio recordings, was a special moment. In September there was a further special moment: the opening of the Deutsche Oper Berlin. Fricsay himself described the performance inaugurating the new opera house during the Berliner Festwochen as the climax of his artistic life. His joy was barely overshadowed during rehearsals by the GDR's building of a wall across Germany and Berlin, sparking a new Berlin crisis endangering world peace. At times American and Soviet tanks faced each other threateningly at the border crossing points from West to East Berlin. It is therefore not surprising that Fricsay, remembering the experiences of 1949, wanted to conduct a new *Fidelio* in the following year. But that too was never to happen.

Politically and culturally the celebrations surrounding the opening of the rebuilt Charlottenburg opera house in its new architectural guise unleashed such worldwide enthusiasm that the oppressive mood generated by the building of the Wall was temporarily banished. One reason was that the premiere itself became an international media event. Not only was *Don Giovanni* broadcast by all German and many international radio stations, but for the very first time an opera performance was televised by Eurovision. Fricsay's conducting of the *Overture* was shown live, the rest in a recording of the dress rehearsal.

Also during the Berlin Festival Fricsay conducted two concerts, on 9 September including the German first performance of Kodály's *Symphony* (CD 25) and Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony*, and on 30 September featuring Gottfried von Einem's *Ballade for Orchestra*, which was also immediately recorded for DG (CD 12), as well as another favourite work for the last time, Rossini's *Stabat mater*. Maria Stader, Oralia Dominguez, Gabór Carelli and Walter Kreppel were the soloists.

Almost a year after recording the *Seventh*, between the concerts Fricsay continued his planned complete recording of Beethoven symphonies with the Berliner Philharmoniker with the *Fifth*. Here too his lifelong engagement with Beethoven's oeuvre is palpable, and here too he achieves his ideal in sound, aiming at chamber-music transparency, uncovering the work's structure, and pared-down leanness. This recording has no false pathos. Without lessening inner tension, the relatively slow tempi make the recognition of details that otherwise might go unheard easier and achieve a density of expression that makes it seem as though this oft-maltreated work is being performed for the first time.

Two more media events followed. After the enthusiastic reception that greeted his *The Moldau* television programme, he decided to continue the Stuttgart experiment, but now with his “own” orchestra. In the Large Broadcasting Hall of the Funkhaus in the Masurenallee, from 30 October to 1 November a rehearsal and a performance of Paul Dukas’ *The Sorcerer’s Apprentice* and from 13 to 15 November a rehearsal and performance of Kodály’s *Háry János Suite* took place and were recorded for transmission on Sender Freies Berlin television.

The Kodály television production had already been preceded on 2 and 3 November by the gramophone recording of the *Háry János Suite* (CD 25) and the *Hungarian March* (Rákóczy-March) from Hector Berlioz’s *La damnation de Faust* (CD 10). That precisely this March should be Fricsay’s last recording seems apt considering that he often used it as an encore when on tour with his orchestra.

November marked what turned out to be Fricsay’s farewell to Berlin concert life. On the 10th, 11th and 12th he conducted his final subscription concert, Haydn’s *The Seasons* – again a cornerstone of his repertoire and the pinnacle of his work as an outstanding Haydn conductor (cf. several Haydn symphonies on CD 23-24) – with Maria Stader, Ernst Haefliger and Josef Greindl as the soloists and with Karl Forster’s Choir of St. Hedwig’s Cathedral, a choir that Fricsay often called on during his Berlin years for works for chorus and orchestra. There was only one more appearance by Fricsay with his orchestra. The German federal government had cancelled the press ball due to the intensified division of Germany brought about by the building of the Wall on 13 August. Instead, Fricsay and the RSO Berlin were invited to give a concert in the Beethovenhalle in Bonn. Bonn’s most famous son was honoured with performances of his *Egmont Overture*, *Piano Concerto No.1* with the Berlin pianist H. E. Riebensahm and – as so often in the past – the *Seventh Symphony*.

There were still guest appearances in Geneva and London to come. At the beginning of December, after his final concert, during which he gave the London premiere of Kodály’s *Symphony* with the London Philharmonic Orchestra, Fricsay again fell seriously ill. He died after long months of intense pain and a number of serious operations on 20 February 1963, not yet 49, of a gall bladder perforation that was diagnosed too late.

Over 50 years have passed since this inestimable loss for the world of music, but Fricsay’s art and reputation live on. In 1978/9 DG honoured its former exclusive artist with an important Fricsay Edition in which significant radio recordings were incorporated. His achievement and that of the Edition were recognized with the award of the *Großer Deutscher Schallplattenpreis* in 1979. For the conductor’s 80th birth anniversary in 1994 there was a “Ferenc Fricsay Portrait” on 11 CDs which contained further radio recordings and received the *Preis der deutschen Schallplattenkritik*. The conductor was honoured on what would have been his 90th birthday with the release of *Ferenc Fricsay: A Life in Music* on 9 CDs.

The Deutsche Grammophon complete edition, in two parts, containing all the recordings released by that company, is a welcome opportunity to re-examine Fricsay’s historical role against the background of his life as a musician. If the actual extent of Fricsay’s repertoire, extending from Abel to B. A. Zimmermann, only becomes clear when radio recordings are taken into account and when opera house and orchestra performance data are scrutinized, the present recordings clearly show that Fricsay during his relatively short career had built up an unusually wide repertoire. And yet in all the concert programmes since 1948 the name of J.S. Bach is practically absent. Maria Stader related that Fricsay more than once scheduled performances of the *St. John* and *St. Matthew Passions* in Berlin, but then cancelled them, feeling that he “was not yet ready” for them. Instead, he conducted – but only in the years 1954 and 1955 – the two Handel oratorios *Judas Maccabaeus* (a Festival concert) and *Samson*.

The list of recordings in this edition makes it clear that Fricsay, from the start of his exclusive contract, was the most influential participant in the changeover from shellac to mono LP and from mono to stereo. The edition also permits us to trace his artistic development from the first to the last recordings, and by comparing those made before and afterwards, to examine the effect of his first serious illness in 1958/59 on his music-making, for long a discussion point among music critics.

The many recordings of works by Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, as well as by Russian composers (CDs 10, 20, 21, 33, 38-43) and especially by the Hungarians Bartók and Kodály, show his significant contribution to their propagation. Above all, it was Fricsay who made his Hungarian mentors well known in Europe's concert halls.

Erik Werba, Irmgard Seefried's distinguished accompanist, in his afterword to Fricsay's short monograph of 1962 *About Mozart and Bartók*, paints a picture of Fricsay that belongs to the past, but demonstrates how an artist's life, by aspiring to a broadly-based humanism, should serve as an example for the future: *"Fricsay is his own man; he has his own personal destiny, which took him from Budapest via Vienna to Berlin, always at the fault lines of a conflict that deeply affects us all and that cannot be dismissed with the catchword "politics". He has his personal affinities, which extend from Mozart to Kodály, from Beethoven to Brahms to Bartók, from the multifariousness of art to the unity of life. But Fricsay achieves this synthesis without violence. The most important Hungarian conductor – which he is – along with the German tradition becomes a European humanist with an unclouded, free view of the world."*

Berlin, March 2014

Lutz von Pufendorf

Translation: Alan Newcombe

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