

Tribute to Ferenc Fricsay, the conductor

by Josef Müller-Marein

We mourn the premature end of an uprising career

Ferenc Fricsay has not even reached the age of fifty years. He died in Basel, after he had lived in his house at Ermatingen (Lake Constance) in extreme privacy. Sometimes he gathered all his strength to conduct in a big city, such as in Berlin, one of the most important orchestras with whom he was familiar. These moments were always special events / experience of art, which none of the participants forgot. Certain moments he thought, was convinced, he could recover. However, the vital forces left him imperceptibly and inexorably, in a constant diminuendo.

No conductor has been granted such an upright increase: At the end of the war he was a Hungarian military conductor, five years later he was worldwide known. But very rarely a young musician got such a formation as he did: his father, Hungary's most senior military captain, conducted not only marches and waltzes, but also symphonies. He was a popular phenomenon in his country, respected by the masters Bartok and Kodály and loved by the population. He taught his son Ferenc the use of nearly every orchestral instrument. The father gave him the opportunity to visit the famous Music Academy of Budapest and also to conduct an orchestra in very young age: "The Scholars of the First Honved Infantry Regiment Band", which was assembled of young candidates for military music.

Ferenc Fricsay was dressed in the uniform with the "Lyra badge" during eleven years – reluctantly: He often stumbled over his long sword. And if he had not had so much sense of humour, charm and genius, plus his highly estimated father, his military career would probably have ended badly. (I am mentioning this because Ferenc Fricsay reported all about splendidly once in anger, once in laughter.)

Although he was very young at warfare, he became a prominent conductor of the Budapest Opera and then at the Staatsoper of Vienna. He conducted in Salzburg, than became General Music Director in Berlin, later in Munich. But one thing he never tolerated: the routine, the superficiality of repertoire (sloppiness), "conducting of any music". - His artistic standard was too sophisticated (ambitious) to agree conducting operas, which he had not rehearsed himself. That's the reason why he didn't endure on "glorious" music employments and left.

But he always returned: To the Rias Orchestra, which he had built up and developed into one of the most brilliant existing timbre, - to the Opera of Berlin as well - as to the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra conducting concerts. His maternal friend Professor Elsa Schiller, the artistic director at the "Deutsche Grammophon", gave him the opportunity to make recordings. These are sumptuous performances of interpretive art, and keep Fricsay's magnitude alive and spread it all over the world.

For Fricsay's friends it was shocking to realize that the persistent illness plus the forced retraction aroused in this ingenious artist a silent attention not excluding any sphere: neither philosophy, literature, fine arts nor architecture.

He wrote a little book about Mozart and Bartók: A testimony of clairvoyant sensitivity. He was pious. His distance of daily live changed to spiritualization. He was a pure flame, which burned off at an early age, and whose radiance will lighten our live for long.