



## Edition Ferenc Fricsay (XI) – G. Rossini: Stabat Mater

aud 95.587



American Record Guide September/October 2009 (Greenfield - 2009.09.01)



A remarkable offering on several counts. First, there's the sound, which is unbelievably good for a 1954 concert performance. Yes, the brasses can be brittle in fortissimo passages, but there's plenty of orchestral detail and even some surges of warmth now and again. Even more impressive are the four solo voices, which come across with startling immediacy. So should this wind up being of interest, don't let the sonics deter you in the least.

What will affect you the most, I suspect, is Fricsay's conception of the piece and the artistry he brought to it. A devout Catholic, he loved this Stabat Mater, programming it numerous times in an era when no other conductor active in Germany would go near it. He approached Rossini's handiwork with reverence, refusing to simply ladle on the marinara and let the operatic games begin. His soloists do not have big, juicy voices, though the bass is plenty dark and deep when the occasion calls for it. Indeed, there's an intimacy to the singing that seems more suited to an oratorio than to opera. The voices are beautiful as well – bel canto. So while Haefliger may not leap tall phrases at a single bound, his 'Cujus animam' is warm, humane, and more prayerful than most. (With a pretty convincing high D-flat tacked on for good measure, I might add.) Maria Stader's 'Inflamatus' is less a fiery anticipation of Judgement Day than an inner cry for the soul to be cleansed. And never has the 'Qui est homo' duet sounded more compassionate, with the alto and soprano knowingly contemplating the mother's anguish as her son undergoes the agony of the cross.

In some of the most powerful conducting I've heard in a long time, Fricsay builds it all up interlude by interlude, aspiration by aspiration, and prayer by prayer into a true journey of faith. It's a revelatory performance that hangs together tautly, yet every word of text is savored and no rose is left unsmelled. Our perceptions of Rossini, I suspect, have been colored by the familiar idea that his Stabat Mater is a superficial affair where hot tunes trump any and all yearnings of the spirit. Think again. Under the baton of a great conductor, yet another bit of "conventional wisdom" bites the dust.

Audiophile Audition June 07, 2009 (Gary Lemco - 2009.06.07)

Audite restores the live recording of 22 September 1954 from the University of the Arts, Berlin, when Ferenc Fricsay (1914-1963) assembled many of his favorite soloists for the 1842 Stabat Mater of Gioachino Rossini. Even today, the work treads a nervous tightrope between "strict" liturgy and Rossini's extroverted, operatic style. The composer's having arranged a drinking song for "Cujus animam gementem/contristatam et dolentem. . ." (Her grieving heart/so full of tears. . .), utilizing the old technique of contrafactum, both awed and angered many scholars and auditors, who found the text unfit for proper contextual worship. Yet, by varying his tempos and employing a popular idiom, Rossini avoids the monotony Dvorak encountered in his own setting of the Stabat Mater, as a series of adagios. In the present recording, a lyrical Ernst Haefliger intones the magical aria, which often imitates Mozart's and Bellini's bel canto style, ascending to a high D-flat. Its huge leaps and martial air, its long-held, high tessitura,

nonetheless, yield to the maestoso indication under Fricstay to reveal much of its intended lamentation.

Fricstay adopts fairly brisk tempos throughout, so the duet “Quis est homo qui non fleret” (Who is it who would not weep) between Maria Stader and the swarthy-toned Marianna Radev moves with a kind of Verdi-esque character, almost a scene from *Il Trovatore*. The precision of the orchestral background—strings and intruding brass—add a pathos of breathtaking beauty to the fateful text, which has the soli rising in a unison that might have inspired *Lakme*. Visceral text painting occurs as Kim Borg illustrates the scourging of Jesus in the aria “Pro peccata suae gentis/Vidit Jesum in tormentis.” Borg’s descending line resonates with grueling sadness as we witness the forsaken Jesus yield up his dying spirit. A grim chorus chants, a cappella, “Eja Mater, fons amoris,” (O Mother, source of love), to which Borg lends his plaintive voice, beseeching the burning power of faith. The huge Quartetto, “Sancta Mater, istud agas/Crucifxi fige plagas” (Holy Mother, fix your crucified Son’s wounds in my heart) opens with a swaggering, march-like aria for tenor, to which Stader adds her lustrous voice so as to share humanity’s grief. Its duet at “Donec ego vixero” (. . .as long as I live) assumes a grand scale, the other two voices added over string pizzicati in imitation of the latter parts of Mozart’s *Requiem* to resolve in vocal sprezzatura at “Fac me tecum plangere” (Let me weep with thee).

Alto Radev has her extended moment in “Fac ut portem Christi mortem” (Grant that I might bear Christ’s death), shared with horns, woodwinds, and strutting, string leaps followed by quick figures suggesting flames of ardent faith. The famed soprano aria with chorus, “Inflammatum et accensum” (Inflamed and burning) allows Stader to display that flexible, streamlined coloratura which made her a leading Mozart exponent. The chorus and tympani invoke visions of Apocalypse, here mitigated by feminine mercies. The a cappella choir slowly, carefully intones “Quando corpus morietur” (When my body dies), to rise in ecstasies for “Paradisi gloria,” the joys of Heaven. We conclude with only four words, “In sempiterna saecula, Amen.” The last is first, shot out of Fricstay’s cannon, followed by a strict fugue that embraces—forever and ever—the diapason of humanity. The trumpets and tympani salute with a four-note motif that nods to Beethoven. Massive, polished, stylistically eclectic, the *Stabat Mater* of Rossini receives a reverent, if mannered performance from one of the few German-tradition conductors to approach it in the days after World War II.

[Fanfare](#) Issue 33:3 (Jan/Feb 2010) (Jerry Dubins - 2010.01.01)

fanfare

This is Volume 11 in Audite’s “Edition Ferenc Fricstay,” a superb, ongoing series dedicated to remastering and restoring to the catalog many of the coveted live and studio mono recordings made by this near legendary conductor, mainly in the early to mid 1950s. His overlapping stereo recordings for Deutsche Grammophon continued up to the time of his death in 1963 at the age of 48.

It’s been said, facetiously, that the *Requiem* is Verdi’s greatest opera, the implication being that the composer couldn’t tell the difference between a “Libiamo, libiamo ne’ calici” and a “Liberate me.” I choose not to believe that of Verdi, but of Rossini, I’m not so sure. For if there is a musical setting of a sacred text that surpasses the incongruity of his *Petite Messe solennelle*, it would have to be this *Stabat mater*. And while the score, taken on its own, is not entirely frivolous, it is operatic through and through, and not really in keeping with this most deeply moving hymn to the suffering of the Virgin Mary.

For this performance, Fricstay assembled an all-star, world-class quartet of vocal soloists known for their outstanding work in many of the sacred choral masterpieces by Bach, Haydn, Mozart, Cherubini, Bruckner, and Dvořák, as well as for their appearances on the operatic stage. One would expect this broad range of experience and diversity of singing styles to find a happy medium in a reading of Rossini’s *Stabat mater*, and to convey a modicum of balance between the stile antico, which the seriousness of the text calls for, and the music—“A drinking song under the cross,” the title of the booklet essay calls it (a reference to the *Cujus animan gementem*)—which is largely at odds with it. And on balance, this is what we get, though without text in hand, one could be excused for mistaking a passage or two for an excerpt from *William Tell*.

Fault lies not with the soloists, choirs, orchestra, or Fricstay who, as was his wont, moves things along at a quickened pace; the liability is entirely Rossini's.

Peter Uehling's essay, the crucial points of which seem to jibe with other accounts I've read, tells us that the composer began work on the Stabat mater in 1831, but then lost interest after having written six of its 10 movements—1 and 5 through 9. A Spanish cleric and friend, Giuseppe Tadolini, completed the score, which eventually wound up in the hands of a French publisher. Rossini was not pleased to discover this unauthorized publication and decided to offer his own newly completed version to another publisher. By this time Tadolini was dead, but his publisher sued. Eventually, Rossini won the case, and it's in the composer's final 1842 version that the work is heard today.

As archival material that documents the accomplishment of one of the great conductors of the 20th century, not to mention the artistry of some of its finest singers, this release will be indispensable to Fricstay collectors. The sound on this disc, however, does not match the excellence of that achieved on Volume 10 of this series, a 1951 studio recording Fricstay made of the Brahms Violin Concerto with Gioconda de Vito, reviewed in 33:2. The current recording sounds a bit constricted, recessed, and muffled in the loudest passages.

It's hard for me to imagine anyone being truly desperate for a recording of Rossini's Stabat mater, but if it's the piece itself you're interested in, there are quite a few later ones available in far better sound and in performances at least equal to if not superior to this one—Kertész with Lorengar, Minton, Pavarotti, Sotin, and the LSO comes to mind—but again, this is for Fricstay fans and for those collecting the Audite series.

Financial Times July 2009 ( - 2009.07.01)

The Hungarian conductor Ferenc Fricstay, who died in 1963 aged 48, was one of the...

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Gramophone October 2009 (Richard Osborne - 2009.10.01)



This is not a reissue of Fricstay's memorable 1954 DG recording of Rossini's Stabat Mater but a live performance given with identical forces in Berlin's Hochschule für Musik three days later. The recording, transferred directly from Deutschlandradio studio tapes, is first-rate, dear and immediate, an occasional touch of sibilance notwithstanding.

Anyone familiar with Fricstay's celebrated 1953 DG Verdi Requiem will know how fiery and expressive his direction is. And how scrupulous. No Italian conductor on record has dared to take Rossini's tempo markings in the work's opening and closing movements as literally as Fricstay. The Introduzione in particular benefits enormously from his swift and involving reading. Text matters as much to Fricstay (a devout Roman Catholic) as it did to Rossini, whose reading of the Latin poem was more comprehending than the "What's he doing writing religious music?" brigade could begin to imagine.

Even the assiduous Fricstay has trouble keeping tabs on Kim Borg in the "Pro peccatis" (which lacks its opening drumroll) but elsewhere his deeply felt moulding of the text draws memorable responses from his singers, not least Maria Stader in a thrilling and mercifully unoperatic "Inflammatu". Ernst Haefliger's account of the "Cuius animam" is one of the finest on record, die final top D flat perfectly sounded.

Though this ensemble of Berlin choirs was probably as fine as any in Europe at the time, the perils of live

performance take their toll in the unaccompanied "Eja mater" which ends up a semitone sharp (the choir is better in tune in "Quando corpus morietur"). This, however, is a small price to pay in an otherwise accomplished live performance that has about it the true blaze of faith.

Journal de la Confédération musicale de France Mai/Juin 2009 (Jean Malraye - 2009.05.01)

Dès l'introduction, FRICSAY installe son interprétation dans une perspective à la fois dramatique et intérieure. Le casting formé de fameux spécialistes des années cinquante est au top. Fuyant tout italianisme, sauf peut-être dans le grand air de ténor aux allures d'aria d'opéra. (difficile de l'éviter, à la vérité!), confère au chef d'œuvre rossinien une force tout en expressivité. Le phrasé est admirablement soigné.

Ópera Actual Julio 2009 (Albert Torrens - 2009.07.01)

El binomio Gioachino Rossini y música sacra siempre plantea a los intérpretes el dilema entre una versión intimista, como corresponde a una obra pensada en principio – aunque esto no sea del todo cierto en este caso – para la iglesia, o bien dejarse llevar por la escritura marcadamente dramática propia del maestro de la ópera que fue el compositor de Pésaro. En este caso, además, se añade la circunstancia de que el director Ferenc Fricsay es de origen húngaro – y por lo tanto de influencia germánica – , como alemanes son casi todo el resto de artistas. El resultado, si se tiene en cuenta que se trata de una grabación en directo realizada en el año 1954, es una versión muy particular de una obra que se está habituando a escuchar de forma distinta, aquí con algunos giros vocales que incluso parecen pasados de moda, pero que los comentarios del librito informativo acompañatorio intentan sin duda justificar. En cualquier caso, pues, un interesante documento sonoro.

Pizzicato N° 195, 9/2009 (Alain Steffen - 2009.09.01)

*pizzicato*

Vier weitere Veröffentlichungen aus dem historischen Archiv, wobei aber nur zwei wirkliches Interesse verdienen. Kaum erwähnenswert bleibt Karl Böhms Auseinandersetzung mit der 7. Symphonie von Ludwig van Beethoven, zumal uns Böhm andere und wesentlich bessere Beethoven-Aufnahmen geschenkt hat. Behäbig in den Tempi, flau im Klangbild und ohne rechte Dynamik und Spannung entspricht diese Siebte hundertprozentig dem Klischee von 'Väterchen Böhm'. Strauss' Burleske mag ebenfalls nicht so recht überzeugen, vielleicht weil der damals nach einem eigenen Stil suchende Friedrich Gulda nicht viel mit Böhms traditioneller Orchesterarbeit anfangen konnte und die Interpretation somit unterm Strich recht unschlüssig daherkommt.

Auch Fricsays Einspielung von Rossinis Stabat Mater gehört nicht zu den Meilensteinen dieses genialen Dirigenten. Und das liegt nicht einmal am Dirigenten selbst, der allen Klischees zum Trotz einen spannenden und reliefreichen Rossini dirigiert und sich demnach nicht mit reinem Schönklang zufrieden gibt. Allerdings passen die vier Solisten, insbesondere Maria Stader und Ernst Haefliger stimmlich ganz und gar nicht zu Rossinis geistlichem Werk. Da ist einfach zu viel Mozart und zu wenig Rossini. Zudem gehen beide Sänger bis an Grenzen, die uns dann einige unschöne Momente bescheren. Etwas besser sind Marianna Radev und Kim Borg in den tiefen Registern. Doch der Mangel an Homogenität im Solistenquartett wirkt sich durchgehend negativ auf die Gesamtkonzeption aus.

Herausragend dagegen ist die Einspielung der Klavierkonzerte Nr. 19 & 20 von W.A. Mozart. Man kennt

Haskils Stil, aber in jeder ihrer Aufnahmen betört diese Pianistin den Zuhörer mit ihrer ungeheuren Sensibilität und ihrem Sinn für Schönheit und Stil. Fricsay, selbst einer der großen Mozart-Interpreten der Fünfzigerjahre, ist ein idealer Partner für Clara Haskil und so präsentieren beide einen hochrangigen Mozart, der nichts von dem zuckersüßen Wolfgang wissen wollte und demnach durch seine Modernität seiner Zeit weit voraus war. Und dennoch: Die schönste Aufnahme dieses Doppelalbums ist Beethovens 4. Klavierkonzert das unter Haskils Fingern eine schier göttliche Dimension erreicht. Obwohl der heute vergessene Dean Dixon sich Beethoven eher mit einer sehr dynamischen und sportlichen Lesart nähert und so einem Konzept nachgeht, das sich grundlegend von dem einer Clara Haskil unterscheidet, so bildet gerade diese unterschiedliche Basis ein solides Terrain für eine der sicherlich spannendsten Beethoven-Auseinandersetzungen der Discographie. Dean Dixon war übrigens der erste afroamerikanische Dirigent, der an der Spitze von renommierten Symphonieorchestern stand. Wegen seiner Hautfarbe hatte er es allerdings in Amerika recht schwer und so konzentrierte er sich hauptsächlich auf Australien und Europa. 1970 kehrte er allerdings nach Amerika zurück und wurde triumphal gefeiert. Der 1915 in New York geborene Dirigent starb 1976 in der Schweiz.

Scherzo Julio 2009 (Enrique Pérez Adrián - 2009.07.01)



Prosigue el sello alemán Audite (distribuidor: Diverdi) con su magnífica edición dedicada al inolvidable Ferenc Fricsay. En esta ocasión son sólo dos álbumes los que llegan a nuestra redacción, los dos igual de sorprendentes: uno, porque se trata de un doble dedicado a obras de Mozart, compositor favorito del director en el que Fricsay cuenta con Clara Haskil como inigualable pianista mozartiana, y el otro, porque es la obra de un músico no especialmente relacionado con él, Rossini, cuya extraordinaria grabación del Stabat Mater hecha en vivo por la RIAS el 22 de septiembre de 1954 se publica ahora por primera vez (había otra grabación de Fricsay del Stabat Mater hecha también en vivo en 1953 en la que había alguna luminaria vocal como Elisabeth Grümmer, pero la crítica no fue especialmente benévola con este registro – cfr. Rossini, de Fernando Fraga, Guías Scherzo-Península, 1998, págs. 152-153).

El primer álbum contiene las siguientes obras de Mozart: Conciertos n.ºs 19 y 20, éste por duplicado en grabaciones en estudio y en vivo, diversas obras para piano solo de Schumann por Clara Haskil, más un relleno en vivo, el Cuarto de Beethoven en el que Haskil es acompañada competentemente y sin ningún problema por Dean Dixon al frente de la RIAS (2 CD Audite 23421, grabaciones de 1953-1954). En nuestra opinión, se podía haber encontrado otra grabación de Fricsay para completar el álbum antes que la inclusión de la página beethoveniana, pero bueno, ahora ya no tiene remedio. Milagrosas las tres versiones de Mozart, un prodigio de equilibrio, espontaneidad, justa expresividad y sonido cantabile, no hay en la discografía conocida por el firmante otras versiones iguales. Las páginas de Schumann por Haskil (ocho piezas de las Hojas de álbum más las Variaciones Abegg) son marca de la casa, y el Cuarto Concierto de Beethoven era la pieza concertante de este autor favorita de Haskil. En resumen, excelsos Mozart y Schumann, imprescindibles para conocedores y para aficionados con el suficiente rodaje.

El Stabat Mater de Rossini cuenta con los siguientes solistas: Stader, Radev, Haefliger y Borg, diversos coros y la orquesta de la RIAS, todos dirigidos por Fricsay (Audite 95.587, 1954). Como en el caso de la Lucia que vimos el mes pasado, ni las competentes voces son para repertorio italiano ni los precisos y objetivos modos del director húngaro en principio eran aptos para esta página (por idioma y expresividad, Giulini, por ejemplo, en cualquiera de sus dos registros conocidos – Testament anuncia otra versión con la Filarmónica de Berlín – sería una batuta más adecuada). Sin embargo, la lectura que se comenta hipnotiza al oyente, al menos así le ha sucedido al que suscribe, y a pesar de sus tempi relativamente rápidos, de su estilo alejado de Rossini y de unos solistas más germánicos de lo deseable, cuenta con unos medios perfectos para dar vida a esta página muy convincentemente tocada, con exacta rítmica y elástica y precisa expresión, por no hablar de la soberbia orquesta. A destacar, entre los solistas, la modélica intervención de Maria Stader. Muy buena grabación monofónica y no menos buenos comentarios en alemán y su traducción inglesa firmados por Peter Uehling.

Por tanto, Mozart imprescindible y curioso Rossini, quizá más apto para los no rossinianos que para expertos en el músico de Pésaro. En todos los casos, excelentes grabaciones monofónicas de la RIAS de los años cincuenta convenientemente reprocesadas.

Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung 30. März 2009 (Lars von der Gönna - 2009.03.30)

Passion ohne hohles Pathos

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www.classicstodayfrance.com Mai 2009 (Christophe Huss - 2009.05.01)



Ferenc Fricsay est toujours à l'aise pour "faire parler" les oeuvres sacrées. Dans ce concert de septembre 1954, il brasse les phrasés avec une ferveur et un élan si volontaires que l'outrance guette (cf. Quatuor "Sancta Mater istud agas"). Mais, a contrario, que de musique dans la manière d'éteindre ce mouvement!

Ce sont ces moments qui font la valeur de cet enregistrement, qui ne peut s'imposer dans son ensemble. Certes Fricsay dirige le Stabat Mater de Rossini avec l'ardeur qu'il met à dramatiser Rigoletto de Verdi, mais il y a, on le sait, dans les enregistrements choraux et vocaux des années 50 des risques de rencontrer plusieurs choses surannées.

Le gros problème est inmanquablement le chant choral. Et c'est le cas ici lorsqu'on entend l'attaque minable des basses dans "Eja Mater, fons amoris". La première minute du "Quando corpus", très atonale, est aussi quelque chose d'assez ésotérique dans le genre.

Ces seuls mouvements suffisent à reléguer cet enregistrement (une mono spectaculaire, pourtant) au rang de version pour historiens. Parmi les solistes, Marianna Radev et, surtout, Kim Borg sont les plus impressionnants. Borg est sans faille, Radev presque autant, à part une certaine propension à "tuber" les sons dans les forte au dessus de son registre médian. Stader est étonnante d'engagement, alors qu'elle a un profil vocal "limite" pour ce type d'oeuvre. L'autre distribution inattendue est celle de Haefliger et, là, cela se passe un peu moins bien. Mais le facteur négatif majeur reste le chœur, alors que les deux gros atouts (au sens de prestations qui ne se rencontrent pas ainsi ailleurs) sont Fricsay et Borg.

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