

**Erinnerung an / mit Anna Magdalena Bach
Christiane Lang Drewanz**

translation David Kern

B.U.

My dear Mrs. Drewanz, I called you a few months ago and asked if you would be willing to speak about Anna Magdalena and you immediately, spontaneously agreed. You also said you would be ready to come to Paris for this conversation. And this is a very beautiful and touching meeting and coincidence because the adventure with Anna Magdalena and the Straubs all began in Paris. I have a text here, but I only have the French translation of the well known Bach film text by Straub from '66 where he wrote: "Luckily no portrait of Anna Magdalena remains. It's well known that there was one, but Wilhelm Friedmann lost it.

One day in Paris on stage at the Lycée Voltaire where Kurt Thomas was conducting Bach Motets we saw among the sopranos or sopranis... How does one say it actually?....

Sopranos...

...sopranos a girl and it was 'love at first sight'. Her hands, that was the first thing I saw of her, it was her hands. She was from Berlin and was living in Frankfurt at the time. In the meantime, she had married a Choir director and he had become music director in Darmstadt. She had had children and so I liked her even more."

So that was in Paris. Maybe you could recount how you remember it and when it was. You see, I don't know.

C.L.D.

It was '57, that was the year during which I was an au pair girl in Paris. And luckily I had evenings free. I knew that Thomas was coming with the chorus. He had asked me to sing with them. At the time, I was already in a relationship with Hans Drewanz and he came along to visit me. But that was just by chance and he also sang with us. We both can only remember that it was in St. Eustache and it was the St John Passion, But it could be that - you see the motet evening was beforehand, the one that Straub attended twice. I can't tell you anymore. It's impression fighting against impression. For my the beginning was always St. Eustache. And always, when I've gone by there, I've thought about this, this big day that was so big for me.

Then at the end of the year, it was quite late by then when I was already back in Germany studying. I received a letter from Thomas. Mr. Straub had written him. I don't know anymore. Third from the left how did he put it?

Among the sopranos, "...we saw a girl and it was 'love at first sight'".

And then we ... then Thomas established this contact and I called them. Of course I found this unbelievably cool. Of course, as a young girl as a young woman. I had never done such a thing in my life. Then we met. He came to Frankfurt with Danièle and explained everything to me, what there was to do and that I had to play everything live, because of

course I had had no idea of his concepts. Also he was just getting started as a director. And then I said "Good, I'll do it gladly".

Then he asked me or he asked my husband, what organist or Harpsichordist he could suggest, and my husband knew Ennulat and then I drove over there to Frankfurt a few times. But that was all very short because it ended very quickly because there was no money. And then...

B.U.

But that means it was already '58...

C.L.D.

That was '58 yes.

B.U.

...that you began to prepare for this...

C.L.D.

Yes In '58 I prepared. I also requested vacation, so to speak, from my director, because the shooting fell right in the middle of the semester, and he also said:

"Of course, Johann Sebastian Bach, naturally, do it." It was all set up and it didn't take place. I was very sad.

And then - that was really very beautiful - they wrote. - We had always had loose contact by letter, I love to write letters, or by telephone. And then they telephoned they would be coming through Darmstadt and when would Hans be conducting. And he had an concert one weekend, they would come too and we naturally though it was simply a friendly visit. And the next afternoon they were with us outside after the concert to eat. And then suddenly they both said "That was a test and we find that now you're all the more right because now you have children and also because you have a husband who's in this business."

So then slowly I understood this idea, or this life of Straub, who only does what is coherent. So that was the beginning of my recognition of his work. But the curious thing was that I was so busy with my husband, the career, the life, the music life in Darmstadt and the Children, Katia and Viola, that I didn't have so much desire anymore. It had fizzled out for me. Then my husband read the book. How do you say it? Script no? Straub read it there. And then my husband said. "You absolutely have to do it. It's outstanding." And then he convinced me. And then I did it.

B.U.

That's really an unusual thing, that a man pressures his wife to do such a thing. It's great.

C.L.D.

Yes, I don't know. I was just so fulfilled by the life I was leading. By the way, I wanted to say earlier because I said "Mrs. Drewanz". Of course then I was... I had simply become Mrs. Drewanz. But Straub wanted the film to say Christiane Lang.

I didn't like that at all. I didn't want it that way. And he explained to me: "You have to understand. I want to have the name Lang in the opening credits because my great model is Fritz Lang."

B.U.
That's great.

C.L.D.
Yes, And then just like always I - He always won. - with his soft stubbornness - and the we both said OK. But once in a while it comes out as Lang-Drewanz. But this was very very characteristic for Straub, with this name Lang.

B.U.
In what year are we with this test?

C.L.D.
Now this is 67. In spring. Then one thing followed another.

B.U.
And before the shooting, did the whole troop come together or not until...?

C.L.D.
No, In what's it called?... In Eutin we all met for the first time.

And it was very beautiful in this castle in Eutin. We could go into all the rooms and I believe I lived there part of the time. And I also met Leonhardt there. He was very reserved, but there was an instant inner agreement. I was just extremely afraid of his musicality and his professionalism, next to my bungling playing. In general that was a burden, because in the meantime there were very many great artists... I didn't exactly live with them but I experienced them and at home I hadn't played any music at all. It's just not right when there's so much professionalism there.

B.U.
And Leonhardt was watching over your shoulder there...

C.L.D.
And how!

B.U.
...while you were playing.

C.L.D.
Yes, yes. And the minuet in Eutin went well and then it got difficult in the Lüne Closter.

B.U.
With the Gavotte?

C.L.D.
Yes and by the way, on the day he was with us in Darmstadt he also got Katia out of us. Then he said "But Katia has to do it too".

Yes the scene where Leonhardt plays the Goldberg Variations belongs to my all time

favorite scenes.

That's for me, I find, the most beautiful.

Also this moment when our daughter, lost in playing with the puppet, gets up when I play a wrong note. It's such a moment so full of truth and once more I understood Straub. It's also such a strong impression for me. He was really wonderful with Katia. Katia had a cloth puppet, Caroline, and he stole it from her - she just told me this - and he ran around all the rooms just behind her, all exited. Then he hid it behind a big painting, she searched for it and found it, with many, many puppet dresses. Then she sat herself down so concentrated, you see she just had to try all the puppet dresses.

B.U.

I saw the film once more yesterday and thought, it's perfectly appropriate that one hits a false note when one's practicing.

C.L.D.

That's right.

B.U.

I find it so. I know that that is something that was criticised, that Anna Magdalena played like a dilettante. Yes when one practices one makes mistakes.

C.L.D.

She was a dilettante.

B.U.

Yes she was dilettante, it fits.

C.L.D.

I didn't say that to myself at the time, but rather I was very unhappy that it didn't go well right away. But they all were patient with me.

B.U.

And what did Leonhardt say?

C.L.D.

Not so much, not so much, no. In any case no criticism.

B.U.

How did it continue after Eutin?

C.L.D.

Then we went to Lüne. I think I went home in between, or, I don't know, but it doesn't matter. And in Lüne we all lived together in a hotel. And there, because of eating together etc., I got to know Mr. Hochet really well...

B.U.

Louis Hochet

C.L.D.

... and Piccone. And I remember a crazy scene in the hotel hall, around midnight, Straub and Piccone were arguing about the concept, the music comes before the image. And I think the world was falling apart for him.

B.U.

And Piccone was the cameraman.

C.L.D.

Yes that's it. And it lasted half the night. We kept peeking out from time to time. Then Danièle said "Shhh". But it was very beautiful, because somehow... It simply had to come to that. Because during the shooting and after with the orchestra, I can remember, in Stade, it was always a problem for Piccone to stand back. And the music always had to come first. For him in film the image comes first.

B.U.

Were you with them there as well?

C.L.D.

No I wasn't with them there. But we all went from Lüne to Haselhof, No? That came first. Haselhof castle, there we all lived together again, in the castle. Then came this beautiful, this wonderful letter scene. And that too was a give and take without words between Leonhardt and I, and that brought us closer to each other. Yes really that was very beautiful.

It was a huge amount of work in this castle. The old Ladies and Gentlemen to whom the castle belonged said afterwards "If we had known how many cables had to be laid through our old library we might not have said yes."

B.U.

And then came the work on the text. How was that then?

C.L.D.

Yes.

That took place in a very sober sound studio. I think at the Rundfunk in Munich. And I started to read in my own way.

I didn't prepare anything for myself beforehand. But I wanted to read it with lots of emphasis. Then he waved to stop and said "No, No, completely simple, linear, very quiet, without emotion without any ups and downs. You have to imagine it like a cantus firmus that's always there, but that should only be noticed, but that never takes center stage".

So then we started and he stopped me quite a few times. Then somehow after about a half hour or 45 minutes I understood. Then it was so beautiful that I already knew while speaking that Now, it was good. And then that was also good.

So I had completely adjusted myself to him. His had this... he could convince people, unbelievably, or he can thank god. He doesn't let them go until he achieves what he wants. But one doesn't feel violated in any way. Rather one feels led there. And it was so

much fun. Then I was completely... I was always looking forward to the next day. We did it in pieces. Because he didn't always get the studio. He had to fight for everything.

We always asked ourselves, Hans and I, how it was possible that a person, who came from film could have such a talent for the genius of the future, because neither Harnoncourt nor Leonhardt were famous as they are today. Well today things are so over the top. But they simply weren't famous. He discovered them at some point. For example we didn't know about Harnoncourt before then. And Leonhardt probably not either I think. Wenzinger, he was known, yes. But it was just a trace, for these people. They all... and the singers too, I've often thought... These were all people who've had a career, continuing up to today.

B.U.

Bob van Asperen was also in the film.

C.L.D.

Yes, also. And today people think, yea, he went for all the famous people. That's not true.

Besides that, I believe, that whenever artistic work comes about - I've spoken about this often with Hans - there is a kind of, ... a very strong relationship builds between the people - I know this from him and his singers - It has nothing to do with... I don't know the word... something happens between the people and afterwards it's over, it's over too. But I believe the closeness is necessary when people do something together, and want to get something across. Do you understand what I mean to say? Yes. And one has to accept that. One has to accept that as a wife. And he accepted it too, and surely he sensed it. He was with with us in Haseldorf.

B.U.

That's what I meant earlier when I said it's so rare that a husband pushes so to speak, invites his wife to do something outside of his circle of influence and lets her flourish... That's what I meant.

C.L.D.

I didn't see it that way. Good.

B.U.

That he permitted it and not only permitted it but desired it. That's really a beautiful proof of love.

C.L.D.

Yes. But also because he was convinced.

B.U.

Could you speak at little more about the rapport between Straub and Leonhardt, the way you remember it? On the one hand, Leonhardt had two roles so to speak, as actor and the role of musical interpreter. Can you say more about how that was?

C.L.D.

The way I perceived it, it was very unified. He was, he played and was a musician. And I believe that he wasn't acting at all. But I really can't judge so well because for me he was a harpsichordist and not an actor who played Bach. I felt that the relation with Straub was very close. And in general what was so great about Straub was that he could transmit to the people with whom he worked that "I want you. You are irreplaceable." And that makes people very free. You see, they were completely themselves. Understand what I mean? There are a lot of people who say anyone is replaceable. Straub gave one the feeling - and it was surely that way with Leonhardt - he wants me and I can be the way I want to be. It was that way for me, powerfully. He could get that across to everyone. And I don't think there was a difference between the musician Leonhardt, Bach or the actor. But that is my point of view. He is... as a cinema person he sees things differently. I thought about it again today, we were all living in the spell of these two people. I think it was good that way. That communicated itself to us and we gave it back. At that time we could do it.

B.U.

You spoke of this atmosphere that came about when people are together and working. This very special, it arises during the moment of working and makes it possible. and you were looking for a word, yes this erotic moment that's present....

C.L.D.

Yes eros. There's eros between people. I was also trying to make that clear, because I learnt it from Hans and the singers, those particular, there was a great deal of it in the air. And those who weren't involved had to go away. It was no one else's concern, just those two. It was surely that way for Anna Magdalena. And...

B.U.

For the historical?

C.L.D.

Yes, with the historical, for sure, yes. And I don't think that she was so simply structured. Just housewife etc. We say that now. Who knows, who knows how she was thinking with. She lived with him too. Composing, working, directing and so forth and so on. With his frustration with..., with all these people in front of the Thomaskirche. That didn't go by her unnoticed. And this moment of eros, if I may use that term again, played out again, in the work, in the film. And because of that, it's a love film. I said it already. It wasn't about Bach or Leonhardt, rather it was something outside of us all.

It's clear to me again because of this discussion that at that time, I indeed did something for myself alone. And this strong inner movement that I'm feeling again at this moment, because I relive again, showed it again, doubly. It has never been so clear for me. I mean I've done many things in my life besides my life with Hans, and outside, I've also been very active politically, and so forth, I don't want to speak about that, but this story was something completely for me alone - and that has really only become clear for me now.

The three exclamation marks in my little book, after I played the Gavotte for Mr.

Leonhardt, they speak louder than any memory.

B.U.

Do you have the little book here.

C.L.D.

Wait a second, I think so, in the back of the cabinet.

B.U.

Can you tell us something or read from your book? Is there something?

C.L.D.

Maybe I can...

The diary. So I'm looking now.

It's written here: 'Lulu at the Kranichsteiner Music Days', that was about my husband. Then comes Bach film in Stade. Oh no that was in Stade already. It was much earlier. It says: '8 o'clock shooting begins' Early isn't it? "6 takes. It went really well and gives me great joy".

Here, here the day before, before the shooting began it says: "Bach film in Eutin, Menuette. Spinet has a gorgeous sound. Live in castle. Costume fitting, then play for Leonhardt. three exclamation marks." I'm sure I was trembling there. Then came this first shooting day. And then it says: "The scene listening to Concentus Musicus Wien." There I only wrote "Scene listening to 5th Brandenburg concerto, very good." There were no problems there. All I did was sit there and listen. Then came Leonhardt and Harnoncourt again "Viola da Gamba sonata, Bach film gorgeous". It says. Then was the setup rehearsal in Preetz, "Klosterkirche Preetz until 6 PM" It says "very complicated". We know that. And then it was over. And about... then it says "Stade" in there. And then comes the time in Munich.

B.U.

For the voiceover.

C.L.D.

Yes. And the "Tempo di Gavotta" is there again. That was a week and a half later, on September 18th. Then there's a lot written. Once more and in between there are 4 exclamation marks "Tempo di Gavotta". And I can remember there were at least twenty takes, I kept on making mistakes. Then it went pretty well until this one mistake and then came this moment with my daughter Katia. It was so good that it came. I think it was like that in Bach's homes, they were constantly hearing music and they were always simply listening to it. It also was like that with us at home, the children heard music all day long because my husband was always studying music at the piano, mostly operas. Should I go on with this...? What's left is nothing important. "Scenes with cousin Elias. Window and bed scene Haseldorf", but there's still "Bach film, letter scene with Sebastian". There's a thick cross there. It was surely very important and beautiful for me. In Haseldorf we - In Eutin I don't know where the others lived, but I believe Leonhardt was in a very nice hotel in Eutin - but in Haseldorf we lived all together, I just remembered it was on the top floor under the roof. There they had these guest rooms ,

this old couple this prince, and we all lived there, it was very cheerful, it made the atmosphere so loose. Evenings, we were invited to dinner with the prince. And Leonhardt was very relaxed there, and so were both the Straubs. That was a beautiful evening. It got to be so informal.