

## MUSIC DIRECTORS

### Fritz Reiner

*Born December 19, 1888, Budapest, Hungary.*

*Died November 15, 1963, New York City.*

**MUSIC DIRECTOR (1953-1962)**

**MUSICAL ADVISOR (1962-1963)**



Fritz Reiner studied at the music academy in Budapest. His conducting debut was sudden-when the staff conductor at the Budapest Opera was taken ill, Reiner (then its young rehearsal coach) was thrust onto podium to direct that evening's performance of Bizet's *Carmen*. His full command of the situation subsequently led to his appointment as first conductor at the Laibach (now Ljubljana) National Opera.

From 1911 to 1914, Reiner was conductor of the People's Opera in Budapest and went on to head the renowned Dresden Opera. He achieved great success conducting the music of Richard Strauss and premiered many of the composer's works at Dresden.

Reiner came to the United States in 1922 and became conductor of the Cincinnati Symphony, where he remained until 1931; during this time he also was a frequent guest orchestral and operatic conductor in San Francisco, Philadelphia, and Chicago. In the 1934-35 season, Reiner organized the Philadelphia Opera Association and became its chief conductor. In 1938 he accepted the post of music director of the Pittsburgh Symphony, where he would remain for ten seasons until becoming principal conductor of the Metropolitan Opera.



*Reiner, Hillis, and the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and Chorus in March 1959.*

Having previously guest conducted at both Orchestra Hall and the Ravinia Festival, Fritz Reiner was no stranger to the Chicago Symphony Orchestra when he became its music director in 1953. Under his leadership, the Orchestra made several landmark recordings for RCA Records including Bartók's *Concerto for Orchestra*, Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben*, and Prokofiev's *Alexander Nevsky*. In 1957, Reiner invited Margaret Hillis to form the Chicago Symphony Chorus, which became the first permanent choral ensemble in the United States to be affiliated with a major symphony orchestra.

By 1960, Reiner's failing health began to restrict his concert work and he was forced to share his conducting season with several guest conductors. In 1962 he stepped down as music director and was named musical advisor and conductor for the 1962-63 season. Reiner and his wife Carlotta returned to Rambleside, their home in Westport, Connecticut, in the summer of 1963. His plans for guest appearances were limited to conducting in Chicago and at the Metropolitan Opera. In early November, Reiner had begun rehearsals for a production of Wagner's *Götterdämmerung* at the Met, but he contracted pneumonia and died in New York City on November 15, 1963.

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220 South Michigan Avenue  
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