

The comparison to Toscanini's version ten years earlier, also on RCA, is inevitable. With the exception of Licia Albanese as Mimì, Beecham's cast seems to me in every way superior, younger-sounding, fresher of voice. Many parts of the ensembles, particularly in the beginnings of the first and second acts, are similar in tempo, but it is in the individual arias where the differences are especially telling. Albanese could be among the most expressive of Mimìs, but with Toscanini she and Jan Peerce, her Rodolfo, sound as if in a vocal straitjacket, with little freedom in phrasing, little joy or abandon in climaxes. Beecham, on the other hand, chooses daringly slow tempos for the soprano and tenor arias, testing the breath control of his singers but allowing for effects - De Los Angeles' "Ma, quando vien lo sgelo" and Bjoerling's "Ma il furto non m'accora," for example - that are thrilling in lyric expansion. Bjoerling's almost brazen brilliance and ease and De Los Angeles'

seductive femininity carry the day. She was a mistress of detail, as in her flirting "Curioso?" in Act I, and "Sono andati" in the last act is simply heartbreaking. Moreover, all this is accomplished without exaggeration or gurgling tears. In this case less is definitely more. And while Amara may have complained about the slow finale in Act II, the end effect is stunning.

Most record-company executives these days have been somewhat astonished that the CD transfers of opera recordings from the 1950s and '60s have sold so well, often at the expense of current releases with state-of-the-art digital sound. What they fail to realize is that the artists of that generation had mastered their craft. Repertory was chosen with an overall sense of artistic purpose, of the suitability of singers and conductors to the task at hand. Recently an executive, when asked why a mediocre *Aïda* was recorded by his company, replied, "Because we needed one for our catalog"—a

comment you never would have heard from the people in charge in the '50s. Kayes and Mohr at RCA, Goddard Lieberson at Columbia, John Culshaw and Terry McEwen at Decca/London, John Coveney, Walter Legge and Dario and Dorle Soria at Angel/EMI—fortunately, their legacy remains etched in sound grooves for all to hear. ■

* *This occurs during a few bars of the Bohemians' chaotic Act I shouting: listen for yourself to the key measures www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWxoukaoWPg*

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Editor's Note: November, 2018 marked the 80th anniversary of Jussi's debut at the Metropolitan Opera, November 24, 1938, as Rodolfo.

Remembering Torbjörn Lindqvist

By Harald Henrysson



Torbjörn Lindqvist

Filmmaker Torbjörn Lindqvist died on November 2nd at 75. For JBS members in Sweden and the US, he is surely best known for his film issued during the Björling centenary, *Jussi i Våra Hjärtan*, which was also his last. The film was distributed in the US by *Kultur* as *He Sang with a Tear in His Voice*, and was well-reviewed by *Opera News*, among others, which said it was "well written and directed," and "an endearing portrait of one of the very great singers."

I got to know Torbjörn better during work on the film, which he did with deep commitment. I came to respect and admire him a great deal. He had long suffered with serious health issues, but was always friendly, optimistic, full of ideas and generous. Especially during our long drives I heard a great deal about his multifaceted

careers, both in the film world—since teen years and all over, as projectionist, cinema operator, photographer, director, scriptwriter and theater owner—and as revue manager, with over 30 presentations in Borlänge and Falun. He was the worthy recipient of Dalarna's culture prize in 2008.

In the last few years, Torbjörn's health issues had worsened, and he lost much strength and mobility. We spoke many times on the phone but were unable to meet again either at the JB Museum in Borlänge or the first-rate Cinema and TV Museum in Säter at which he had been very active.

The Thor Bear in Bäsna (his joking allusion to the actual meaning of his name, and the village outside Borlänge where he lived, which I remember him using) will be very much missed by his family and many friends. ■