

2002 Was a Very Good Year for Jussi-Appreciation: A Summary of Successes during the year.

First, we can assure you that our JBS Conference in New York City was a big success: Read a summary in the separate *Conference Report* enclosed with this *Newsletter*. More complete reports, with photographs, will follow in the next issue of our *Journal*. And the **videotape** will soon be available: see an announcement in the *Conference Report*.

Our best advertisement for the Conference came in *Opera News*'s issue of October 2002, where the "Opera Watch" column announced in bold caps:

"The **JUSSI BJÖRLING SOCIETY** will host a four-day conference, celebrating the life and work of the Swedish tenor and many of his Met contemporaries, at Manhattan's New Yorker Hotel, October 24-27." Readers were urged to consult the Society's website, and a photo of Jussi as Don Carlo was captioned: "MANHATTAN TRIBUTE SET FOR PRINCE OF TENORS."

Mickey Dove noted that the JBS website attracted over 2000 "hits" in the days immediately following publication of this issue of *Opera News*.

A new CD from RCA Classics Coming in 2003

The Conference continues to help generate exciting consequences: our favorite is the news, announced during the Conference by Daniel Guss of RCA/BMG, that RCA's "reDiscover" series of classical CD-releases would feature a new CD of Jussi's complete September 1955 Carnegie Hall recital. This **new CD** will include **eight items never before heard**, including an especially brilliant version of "Come un bel dì di maggio" from *Andrea Chénier*, three Sibelius songs and three others by Grieg and Sjöberg. Mr. Guss played the *Chénier* aria and Sibelius's "Svarta rosor" for our conference audience, who agreed that the sound was significantly warmer and more representative of Jussi's voice, than what comes across on the old RCA LP of excerpts from this concert. Look for this to hit the stores by September 2003.

And 2002 turns out to be another year of **many new releases** of CDs devoted to Jussi's always-popular recordings!

1. Let's begin with a truly **NEW** release, an absolutely first-class performance of *Il Trovatore* from 1957, recorded at the theater by "a member of the chorus," and released during December '02 by the Swedish label **Caprice**, #22051, as Vol.1 in a new series from the "Swedish Royal Opera Archives." The sense of occasion is palpable, the sound is quite good indeed, and the four main soloists are in superb form. This release also includes highlights of a December 1959 performance of *Manon Lescaut* – again in good sound and with Jussi in spectacular form, in the last months of his life.

2. **Bluebell** adds to its "Jussi Björling Series" with #ABCD 092, "Fram för Framgång" (the title of Jussi's 1937 film – think of this as a Swedish version of the USA musical show called "Fame"). This is a much-needed collection of the vocal excerpts contributed by Jussi to three films and four radio broadcasts, and transcribed here in **excellent sound** for Bluebell. Aficionados will especially prize the two complete broadcasts of 1944 and '45 conducted by Tor Mann, with the slowest/longest versions of "Che gelida manina"

and “Nessun dorma” (clocking in at 5’26” and 4’5” respectively). And Jussi’s 1957 broadcast performance of Rangström’s dramatic song “**Tristans död**” is stunning, absolutely *hors concours*.

3. Naxos has started releasing its “**Jussi Björling Collection**” of CDs, with **Vol. 1** titled “Complete Opera & Operetta Recordings in Swedish, 1930-38” presenting 25 items in good transcriptions based on original 78s contributed by distinguished Swedish collector Harold Löwing. Here you’ll find Jussi’s first, Swedish versions of arias from *Rigoletto*, *Roméo*, *Prince Igor* as well as *Fanal* and his famous versions of arias from *Der Bettelstudent* and *La belle Hélène*.

Vol. 2 in this series is titled “Songs in Swedish, 1929-37” and includes the rare early version of “Somnarnatt” as well as Jussi’s convincing Swedish version of the Chilean song “Ay, ay, ay” from 1936, when he was just 25.

All the above CDs already are available in Sweden (you can get them from the **Museum**, via the website www.borlange.se/kommun/jussi/ or via harald.henrysson@borlange.se or write to the Museum at 25 Borganäsv. 25, SE-78433 Borlänge, Sweden). Certainly the Naxos CDs will be more generally available soon, and we can hope that the others will be as well.

That’s enough for now on record-releases: We want to point out that there’s even a **new book** out in Scandinavia this autumn, by Swedish-Finnish writer **Yrsa Stenius**, called “Tills vingen brister – en bok om Jussi Björling” (Until the wing breaks – a book on Jussi B.). The book has been somewhat controversial but reviews seem usually very positive. Here’s a review from the internet, by Bjorling-list member Per Bäckström: “I have just finished Yrsa Stenius’ book. I have seldom been so moved by a book as this. It’s obvious how [much] she admires Jussi and tries to understand him and what happened to him. My own understanding and love for Jussi deepened. I could hardly put the book away, when I needed to do other things.”

And JBS member Ben Swahn of Mequon, WI, suggested that Stenius’ book was a useful complement to the biography “Jussi,” by Anna-Lisa Björling and Andrew Farkas.

We’ll want to get further information about this new book! In fact, we already have offered copies of several articles on this book to some of our Swedish-literate members, in hopes that they will translate the most useful ones for us.

One of the **missions of our JB Society-USA as well as the JBAS** is to help translate and make available some of the **interesting material on Jussi** in Swedish and other languages. Of course, JBAS member Gail Campain is well on her way to completely translating the entire Bertil Hagman “J.B. Memory-book,” and JBS is very proud that her translations have graced the pages of our *JBS Journal* since 1999.

There’s much more that we could talk about, but these examples make the point well: Interest in Jussi Björling, as man and as artist, has not diminished over the years, and in some ways seems to be increasing! We are confident that JBS-USA and JBAS serve a useful role in helping promote Jussi’s name and work, and **we thank you for your support in allowing our organizations to function!** – *The officers of JBS and JBAS*