

## The President's Pen

By Terry Williams



Terry L. Williams, JBS-USA President

When Wally Rudolph suggested including a “Top Ten” survey in the November Newsletter I thought it an interesting idea but did not give it much thought - then. In fact, it was not until Wally reminded me of it by reporting toward the end of December that he had received a member’s entry that I began to give it more thought. Pick my five favorite songs and arias, in order, and my three favorite operas, in order. Piece of cake, right? I mean, how much time could that take? Well, let me tell you, a lot. But it was great fun.

I started by looking at every Jussi Björling LP and CD I own (which is not a small number) trying to select my “favorite songs.” I did the same thing to select my “favorite arias.” Several hours later I had nine songs and eleven arias. I had to be ruthless to winnow them down to 5 and 5. I then spent several more hours listening

to as many as six different versions of one song or aria to select the final entrant. The operas were much easier. But more about that in a minute.

I selected my five songs and arias, ranked in order from 1 - 5. Many of my finalists, perhaps most, are live performances. The studio recordings are terrific, but there is just something special about “live” that cannot be beaten. Which is why all 3 of my operas are live performances. I have submitted my survey entries to Wally and hope many of you have also. I cannot wait to see the results. When I finished I realized just how much fun it had been compiling my entries but also that I had not heard some of the selections in a long time. If I began the selection process today would my choices differ? Almost certainly, and that is part of the fun too.

In the November Newsletter I reported that we began the much needed overhaul of our website. The project, under the very able leadership of Sue Flaster, is well on its way to completion early this year. This is an expensive but very necessary undertaking. In the November Newsletter we asked for special contributions earmarked just for the website overhaul. I am pleased to acknowledge such a gift from Phyllis M. Frank. Thank you, Phyllis, for your generosity. Additional contributions from others who are able and willing to help defray the cost of this important project would help considerably. Please contact Allan Buchalter, our Membership Vice President, or our treasurer, Janel Lundgren, to arrange details. We will thank you in a future publication.

Harald Henrysson wrote a very scholarly, yet most readable and enjoyable, article chronicling the efforts of Jussi’s father, David, in pursuit of a singing career. Photos accompany and enhance his work. We are most pleased to include the article in this edition of the Journal.

Andrew Farkas marked the 80th anniversary of his birth last year. This edition of the Journal celebrates that milestone in his life. His long-time friend, colleague, and fellow Floridian, Dr. James A. Drake, has written a most wonderful tribute to

Andrew. We know Andrew for his tireless work on behalf of our Society since its inception, and especially as the co-author of Jussi with Anna-Lisa Björling. Dr. Drake introduces us to many other aspects of Andrew’s extraordinary life and many notable accomplishments. At our June, 2015, conference in Salt Lake City, Utah, Dr. Drake gave an excellent presentation about Richard Tucker. He is the author of *Rosa Ponselle: A Centenary Biography and Richard Tucker: A Biography*, among others.

Richard Copeman, my counterpart with the Jussi Björling Appreciation Society - UK, recently obtained a program from Jussi’s March 7, 1959, recital at Hunter College in New York City. The original owner of the program (who presumably attended the recital) annotated it with the encores Jussi sang. Richard very graciously agreed to let us publish it. Long time member and prior contributor to our publications, Ed Walter, attended the recital. He has written an interesting article that accompanies the program.

We acknowledge with sadness the passing of the American soprano Roberta Peters on January 18. She was a singer who possessed a remarkably beautiful voice which she used with surpassing ability during a career that spanned more than three decades. The late Ms. Peters was a colleague of Jussi Björling. She recorded *Rigoletto* with him in 1956, along with a cast that included Robert Merrill in the title role and Giorgio Tozzi as Sparafucile.

Finally, our “mini” conference in DC next November is taking shape. Sue Flaster updates us with more details about the conference as well as a limited edition CD that will be available just to members. Please be sure to mark your calendars now so we will see you then.

Thank you for your loyalty and ongoing support. Your Society could not exist without you. ■

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