

always sang that scene particularly beautifully but I do think, as I do of 'Ah si, ben mio' that this is the best, this is the most refined of him. In a way it's the most musical and creative.

And I do believe that in these recordings of this time, the late 1930s and particularly as it happens the studio recordings of that particular day [in 1939], we really do have Björling the artist at his most creative. I would say, in a way at his most mature. Oddly, at the time everybody was saying "He is immature now, he will develop". Well, I don't think he was immature then, and I rather feel that that was the time when he was singing with these things which they so loved then: these delicate shadings, these creative touches in songs which we don't always associate with him very regularly.

Here I really will end, with one which was recorded on that same day and which I did hear him sing in

London, Richard Strauss's 'Morgen'. You'll hear how beautifully he takes these soft notes in a head voice, which you don't expect your operatic tenor to do, with the imagination which he was sometimes criticized for lacking, and an imaginative, creative sensibility. I have the feeling that this little group of recordings, made on that particular day (July 15, 1939), operatic and lieder, actually goes far to represent the best of him. [RECORD 9]

Records played:

- 1 *Rigoletto* La donna è mobile verse 2 (1936) Naxos 8.110701
- 2 *Trovatore* Ah si ben mio (1939) EMI CDH 7 61053 2
- 3 *Trovatore* Quale d'armi fragore (Covent Garden 1939) Legato Classics LCD173 2
- 4 *Trovatore* Se m'ami ancor (as above)
- 5 *Bohème* Ebbene no (Metropolitan 1948) MYTO 916.47

- 6 *Pagliacci* O Colombina (Grona Lund 1950) Bluebell ABCD057
- 7 "Adelaide" Beethoven, first section (Carnegie Hall 1955) RCA 53379 2
- 8 As above, First 3'44" (1939) RCA 40626 2
- 9 "Morgen" Strauss (1939) Naxos 8.110789 S

Editor's note: We hope these wise words from John Steane, characteristically enthusiastic in his historical reach, will make you want to seek out his complete lecture [a transcription is posted at jussibjorlingsociety.com] and pull out these recordings to play along with your reading: almost like being there! (And if you need some of the recordings listed here, by all means write to Harald Henrysson at the Björling Museum, or to me: D.S., 3337 Conservancy Lane, Middleton WI 53562, USA, or via email: dshea@chorus.net.) ■

Scholium. In the current issue of our *JBS Journal*, #14, mailed to you in February 2004, we mentioned another remarkable stage recording of *Trovatore* with Björling, from 1957, available for the first time on Caprice CDs. In our *Journal* article we quoted Andrew Farkas's review from *The Opera Quarterly*. Now just a few lines from Roger Pines, writing in *International Record Review*:

"The voice—ah, the voice! Jussi Björling's voice matured like a fine wine. The silver tones we know from the Swede's 1930s performances eventually turned to burnished gold, while retaining that uniquely effortless vocal production. This 1957 Manrico from Stockholm's Royal Opera finds him in sovereign form, soaring through even the most taxing passages; for example, 'Mal reggendo,' which has virtually strangled many a fine tenor, is dispatched spectacularly, likewise Manrico's entire Act 3 sceneBjörling's wonted, always remarkable caressing of legato phrases brings a loving sweetness to quieter episodes. As with so many artists, the stage invariably brought an extra degree of involvement from Björling that few studio performances could duplicate."

And: "The well-recorded filler material from a 1959 Stockholm *Manon Lescaut* is exceptional. [His Des Grieux] is thrilling here. Every emotional gradation, from captivating intimacy to hair-raising explosiveness, receives an extraordinarily heartfelt response—the final scene would draw tears from a stone." ■