

other theaters should emulate. His immense international research on his last project foreshadowed an unsurpassable definitive biography of Kirsten Flagstad. These are but the merest highlights of a rich career to be celebrated. Our publication is not the proper place to give his career overview and I am not qualified to do that. Instead, I would like to offer some vignettes from my contacts with Bob.

It all began at the Caruso stamp ceremony on the Grand Tier of the Met, on February 27, 1987. Along with other dignitaries, Enrico Caruso, Jr., and I gave our separate presentations about Caruso. Before the event I spotted Bob in the crowd and walked up to him with a jocular “Mr. Tuggle, I presume?” “Yes, and you are...?” “I am Andrew Farkas.” “My God!” exclaimed Bob. “No—just Andrew Farkas,” I replied.

This whimsical exchange set the friendly and light-hearted tone of our relationship. Our initial meeting eventually evolved into a long-distance friendship kept active with phone calls, e-mail, and the obligatory lunch in the Met’s subterranean cafeteria whenever I passed through New York. Beyond our common interests, our shared admiration for Caruso and Björling gave a firm footing to our relationship. Bob was also helpful to me in my research beyond what I had the right to expect. All the Met-oriented documentation in *JUSSI* found its way into the book courtesy of his personal help.

When on December 6 I called Bob at home, he told me about the “strange experience” he had had the week before. His arm and leg went numb and with great presence of mind he called 911. The quick response of the ambulance and prompt medication saved him on that occasion. He actually had a stroke, confirmed in the hospital, yet he recovered so fast that the following day he was well enough to be released and allowed go home.

With this incident he had used up the sixth of his nine lives—as we counted it on the phone. I remained very concerned and Bob was on my mind daily in the last six weeks. That’s why I rang him last Sunday, on January 17th. He sounded good and strong,

and assured me that he felt fine, he did not seem to have any significant after-effects from the frightening experience. We closed with the hope that the remaining three lives will serve him well for the next thirty years.

Bob died January 21st at approximately 2:30 p.m. of a massive heart attack at the hospital while undergoing some tests.

Bob was an exceptional person, an extraordinary authority in his profession and a wonderful human being. He could be kind, tactful and diplomatic, at the same time did not suffer fools gladly. His knowledge, erudition and competency gave weight and credence to his opinions and judgement, and his topical memory and broad experience made him unique even among men with an encyclopedic mind. As a person he was modest, polite, polished and pleasant, he could exhibit great kindness, and was helpful when help was needed and deserved. A man of integrity and character, he could also be judgmental when appropriate and would always buttress his statements and opinions with facts.

Bob saw Jussi Björling many times between 1950–1959 and I believe Jussi was his favorite among tenors he heard. It took very little arm twisting to persuade him to join us at our 2001 conference in St. Peter; he made a presentation and we joined forces on a panel discussion. This was a reunion for us: in 1992 we were two presenters (of four) at the New York Medical Society on a program about Caruso. We weren’t operatic two-timers—*JUSSI* was yet to be written and there was no JBS yet.

With the affection our membership felt for Bob we were not alone. From second hand information I gather that he was much loved and respected at the Metropolitan. During his hospitalization at a previous health crisis a couple of years ago, he received a “get-well card” with a staggering number of signatures, in the high several hundreds. To us at JBS he was a friend and we were certainly his friends. Dear friend, Bob, may you rest in peace. ■

Robert Tuggle on Jussi Björling

By Walter B. Rudolph

Some of you may be aware of the Stefan Zucker book, Franco Corelli and a Revolution in Singing: Fifty-Four Tenors Spanning 200 Years (2015). Robert Tuggle was asked for some comments about Jussi Björling to be included in the book.

In January 2015 I approached Mr. Tuggle about doing a presentation on Kirsten Flagstad for the Salt Lake City JBS-USA Conference. He gave serious consideration to the possibility, which was urged on by another Honorary Advisor, and close colleague, Andrew Farkas. In the end, it simply did not work with his schedule. But he did share emails with me with a few of his exchanges with Stefan Zucker. I share the following from one such email, forwarded to me January 16, 2015, but originally written to Stefan Zucker on May 15, 2014.

Robert Tuggle on Björling:

It was common knowledge in the 1950s that Jussi Björling had a bigger career and a bigger following than any other tenor.

In the 1950-51 Metropolitan Opera season Björling was the only tenor receiving the top fee of \$1,000 per performance. (The other \$1,000 singers were Kirsten Flagstad, Helen Traubel and Lily Pons. Bruno Walter was paid \$1,500 per performance of *Fidelio*, and \$1,000 for the Verdi *Requiem*.) Tenor salaries included: Richard Tucker, \$500; Giuseppe Di Stefano, \$600; Jan Peerce, \$700; Set Svanholm, \$850; Ferruccio Tagliavini, \$900. Mario Del Monaco was paid \$150 for his single debut appearance that season.

In 1951-52 both Björling and Tagliavini received \$1,000. Other tenor salaries: Del Monaco, \$650; Di Stefano, \$800; Peerce, \$700; Tucker, \$650.

In Björling’s last season, 1959-60, he received the top fee of \$1,500, as did Tucker. Del Monaco was also contracted at \$1,500 but canceled his contract. Other tenor salaries that season included Jon Vickers, \$750; Cesare Valletti, \$700, and Peerce, \$1,000.



Robert Tuggle

I heard Björling in person for the first time on November 14, 1950, in *Don Carlo*.

Having loved the recordings, I was shocked at the size of the voice, which often was covered in ensembles. Alone, it was more beautiful than any other.

I also heard him in *Rigoletto*, *Faust*, *Cavalleria rusticana*, *Tosca*, and *Trovatore*. In the *Rigoletto* "Quartet," he shaped and held the ensemble together in the same way that Callas would dominate the Sextet from *Lucia*. He could be effective as Manrico because of his rhythm and phrasing, not his volume. In the performance I heard, No-

vember 5, 1955 in Chicago, he and everyone else, Maria Meneghini Callas, Ettore Bastianini, and William Wilderman, was overshadowed by the golden glory of Ebe Stignani. In *Tosca* at the Met on February 27, 1957, there were no problems with volume and he was singing opposite Renata Tebaldi. My only disappointment with Björling was the last time I saw him, Turiddu in *Cavalleria rusticana* on November 16, 1959. I had just seen Jan Peerce opposite Giulietta Simionato as Santuzza and their interaction onstage was thrilling. (I've always assumed it was her own way of performing the role).

The excitement vanished as Björling barely related to her onstage.

Opera was only part of Björling's American career. None of the tenors mentioned had a comparable concert career. In fact, I can't think of a tenor since Björling who has given such a significant number of recitals. The recordings don't need my support. They always have been incomparable.

In concert at Carnegie Hall and Hunter College the size of Björling's voice made no difference at all. The awkwardness of his acting vanished, and the simple stage manner was endearing. Singing a prolonged high note, as at the end of "Nessun dorma," he would begin the note facing stage right of the auditorium and slowly turn in an arc that ended facing stage left, sharing the full gorgeous sound with everyone.

Death had nothing to do with Björling's reputation. It was not like the death of Callas, when suddenly everyone who had despised her felt free to admit that perhaps there were some virtues.

—Robert Tuggle

Donors

Again we acknowledge these extraordinary people, both members and non-members, who rallied to support the Salt Lake City Conference of The Jussi Björling Society – USA. We extend our deep appreciation for their commitment and generosity

Grand Gold Master (\$1500 or more)

Joel and Diana J. Peterson

Silver Master (\$500 - \$1499)

Mary Baiamonte
Judy Brady and Drew Browning
Ray and Liz Harsant
Caroline R. and Saylor S. Milton
Terry Williams

Bronze Master (\$250 - \$499)

Anonymous
Beatrice Bobotek
Andrew Farkas
Phyllis M. Frank
Don Goldberg
Nina Haro
Arnaldo J. and Laurel Iturrieta
L. Gerald and Darlene Pond
Young So
Seth Winner

Master (\$100 - \$249)

Alfred Baffa
Walter Daly
Francine C. Davis
Mark Elyn
Rev. Gordon Vogt
Frank L. Johnson & Peter C. Hammond
Louis D. Kaplan
Leigh Metcalf
Mary Thompson

In-Kind (\$300)

Daynes Music Company (Steinway)