

(1) News of our JBS website: monitor the progress at www.jussibjorlingsociety.org.

During the next few weeks you'll be able to watch our new website under construction, updating some of the old articles and adding new design features, articles, photographs, and – finally – **sound clips**. Webmaster Michael Mayer is helping us revamp the previous site, and we urge you to browse the current status of the “.org” site and offer your ideas about what else to include (for now, you can send those to this editor at dshea@chorus.net).

We've already noted that by clicking on <Events> you can find articles on the 2004 International Congress in Sweden: one by Sue Flaster that surveys the entire Congress, another by John Steane on “Björling in London” with sound clips chosen to illustrate the lecture; as well as a summary by Kendall Svengalis of Jürgen Kesting's lecture. That lecture deserves a few sound clips of its own, since Messrs. Steane and Kesting coordinated their use of audio-examples in our program (their lectures came consecutively on our session for September 10), and we plan to include more of the music as we update the website.

Another interesting addition to this website is Harald Henrysson's chronology of Jussi's performances, presented in an illuminating way for us by Enrique Gilardoni. He organizes his version of the database in order of first performance by Jussi of each role. Browsing through this database, one gets a distinct impression of how hard-working this tenor was, at first during his 20s and 30s as he learned all but two of his 55 operatic roles – not to mention several hundred songs – and then in the last decade of his life when he continued to perform and extend his basic operatic and concert repertoire in many public appearances and recordings.

We look forward to making this website a useful and attractive resource for all those interested in the life and career of Jussi Björling. This certainly was our experience with the previous website, organized more than six years ago by Mickey Dove, which to date has had over 65,000 hits and has been responsible for bringing many new members to our Society.

(2) News of recent and new recordings of interest.

All members of JBS-USA and JBAS-UK during the current year should have received the new Bluebell ABCD103 set with rare and previously unreleased operatic performances by JB from the archives of Swedish Radio, 1934-51. Our chapters of JBS helped underwrite this release by committing to purchase almost 600 copies of the 2-CD set, which at least in the US is not available except by mail order purchase from Europe.

Although some of the contents of this set is of greatest interest for the serious Björling collector, since for instance the complete Act I of *Aida* suffers a bit from its somewhat tubby sound (even if surprisingly good for 1940), rather ordinary soprano, and strange-sounding Swedish vowels, still there's no doubt that there is much glorious singing to admire whenever Jussi is onstage. This is especially true for the complete Act II of *Roméo et Juliette* from 1943, which catches both our tenor and soprano Schymberg in magisterial form! And if Jussi's first recorded version of “Nessun dorma” is not quite up to the more famous later versions, it's still of inherent interest and absolutely, thrillingly splendid in itself. All together, there are scenes from some 20 operas, from Atterberg to Verdi, and valuable documents all.

Here is some feedback provided by our members:

Vern Kenney (MN): “I was delighted with the quality of the transfers, especially the two ‘Sweden Calling’ excerpts: Just wonderful. I think my favorite, though, was the complete Act II of the Royal Opera's *Roméo*. What gorgeous, impassioned singing! I couldn't help but wonder at the stinging applause from the Swedish audience – in today's opera houses such a performance would be greeted by a huge ovation.”

Jerry Beezley (NJ): "It is a great coup that this material has been made available thanks to the hard work of all parties concerned. It is especially wonderful to hear Jussi early in his career. While it is difficult to pick favorites here, clearly the "Addio all madre" from 1944 is exceptional. The Roméo scene is a treasure, quite different from the Met version from 1947. All told, a triumph!"

Mark Elyn (WA): "Thank you very much for the absolutely exquisite CD set of our vocal idol – hearing this 'new' material and just listening to that voice continues still to be a real inspiration."

[Note: Mark sang with Jussi in 1958, in San Francisco and Los Angeles, in *Don Carlo* and as Ferrando in all-star performances of *Trovatore* with Leontyne Price at the start of her career.]

Steve Vasso (NJ): "I've just now listened through the new Bluebell set. It's truly fantastic – such power and passion! Grazie tanto."

Greg Fitzmaurice (NC): "There's often been discussion about Björling as Radamès and the only recordings we've had to go on were the 1955 RCA *Aida* and a few excerpts from the 1936 Vienna production. Now Bluebell has given us more of an answer to this question, and I find Björling wonderful in the part and am thrilled to be able to hear his voice in this music. Anyone who loves Björling can't live without this 2-CD set."

Jorge Robert (FL): "I'm ecstatic with the 2-CD set JBS has mailed to me, what a great recording this is! Thanks to all those who make possible the JB Society."

Walter Daly (FL): "We are so accustomed to his magnificent voice and flawless technique that it struck me, while listening to the 1940 first act of *Aida*, that Jussi was still a young man of barely 29 years singing so nobly. Could the 1944 'Addio alla madre' be perhaps the finest example of the power and beauty of the human singing voice ever recorded? Wow!! And all thanks to the extensive and scholarly notes provided by Harald and Sue, which adds so much to our listening enjoyment! We are so blessed to have their passion for and knowledge of Jussi to share with us."

Kristian Krogholm (Norway): "I should have mentioned in my review for the Bluebell set that the 1944 'Addio all madre' is indeed special: I have listened to it at least twice every time I've visited the Museum! Those dramatic high notes certainly are overwhelming. In my opinion no one else, absolutely no one – alive or dead – can match such notes, and certainly not so effortlessly."

Well, what do we follow this release with, now that Bluebell has "vacuumed out" so successfully Swedish Radio's archives of Björling in opera? It turns out that there are **still** a few concerts of songs and arias (including a very rare Lohengrin Grail-narrative) that could be made available – and Bluebell is working on this project, for possible fall 2007 release. JBS hopes to be able to support that project too.

In the meantime, there is a truly beautiful hour-long broadcast program produced by Walter Rudolph and KBYU-FM's Classical 89 radio station, that is based on the sessions and music of our 2004 JBS Congress in Sweden: We have asked for permission to distribute that CD to our members, and the answer will depend on some legal agreements now being sought by KBYU.

We promise to try to make both these CDs available to our members, and as soon as possible. Stay tuned!

And on another front, we have now submitted an offer to NBC for the rights to publish 19 radio concerts featuring JB (some 12 of which do exist in good sound at the **Library of Congress** – see Sue Flaster's report in our JBS Journal, #14). For this project all three JBS chapters have promised support. **Stay tuned!!**