

A Peculiar Jussi Autograph

by Walter B. Rudolph



Walter B. Rudolph holding Kirsten Flagstad's spear (Ring) and Mary Ellis Peltz in the Metropolitan Opera Archives (1980)

In 1936 Mary Ellis Peltz became the first chief editor of *Opera News*, a position she held until 1957 when she founded the Metropolitan Opera's archives. She served as director of the Met's archives from 1957-1981.

My initial contact with her was by letter during the early 1970's, related to my musicology thesis on *verismo* opera. In 1974, I arranged for the loan of the Manrico tunic worn by Jussi Björling in *Il trovatore* at the Met for a Björling Tribute given at the University of Minnesota, Morris. It was a frigid day in February of 1980 when I was guided into the bowels of the Metropolitan Opera House. There I finally met Ms. Peltz in her domain of the Met Archive.

This was one of those unforgettable moments. I asked her about various things, including my thesis operas, *Francesca da Rimini* (Riccardo Zandonai) and *L'amore dei tre re* (Italo Montemezzi). I examined those files; we talked about Jussi Björling; and she showed me Kirsten Flagstad's spear from *the Ring*.

Finally, it occurred to me that she might recommend where I could find a Jussi

Björling autograph. I told her I was a young father with two children, so it was likely I could not afford one anyway, but just to see one would be satisfying.

She thought for a moment and replied, "Well, there are several little shops close by the Met that specialize in that kind of thing. But if you have a few minutes, let me look for something that might interest you." She shuffled off and was gone probably twenty minutes. When she returned she extended her hand, saying "this isn't exactly what you

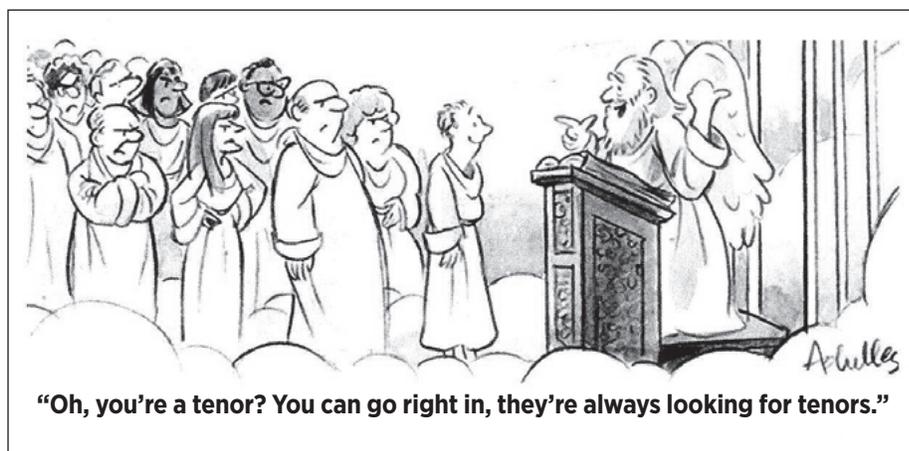
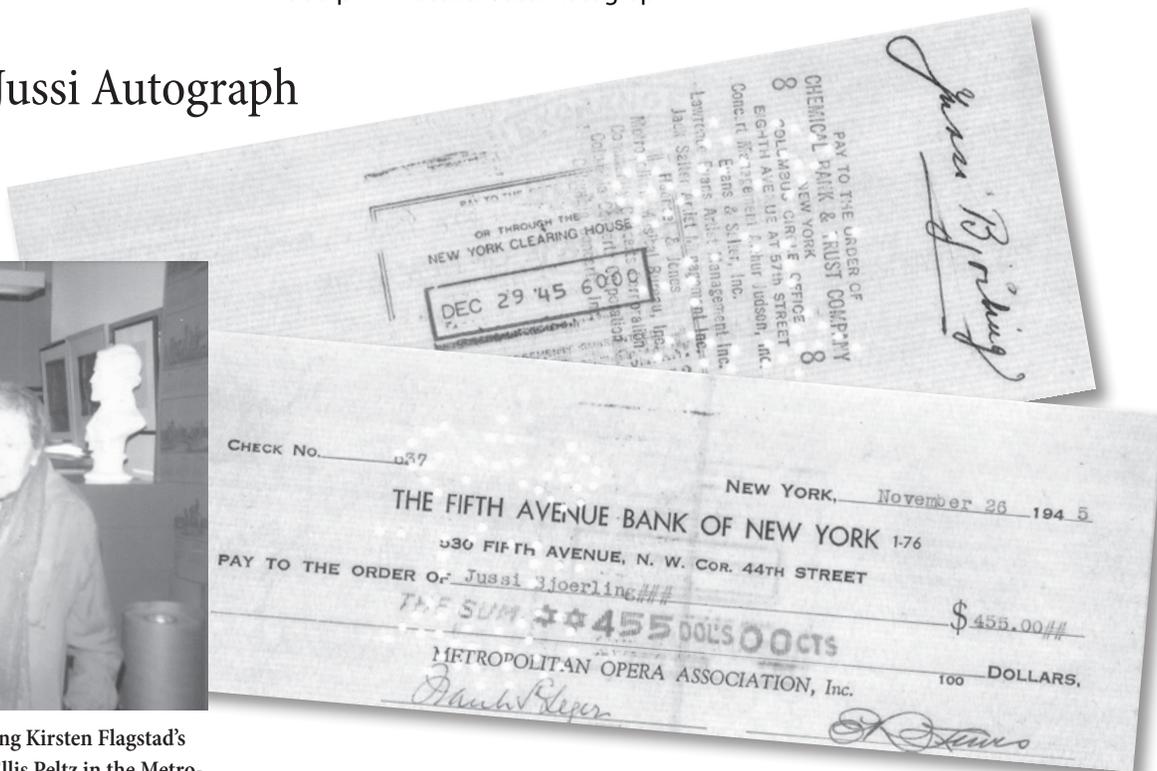
had in mind, but I could give you this?" I was speechless.

I was hesitant to turn it over, afraid of disappointment, but without reason. There was his signature, probably inscribed with the Montblanc pen mentioned by Harald (see page 23).

A perfect memory of a generous lady.

Mary Ellis Peltz died the next year (1981). ■

Editor's note: Today JBS Advisor Robert Tuggle is Director of Archives at the Met



"Oh, you're a tenor? You can go right in, they're always looking for tenors."

PAT ACHILLES