

viewer afterwards wrote in the newspaper (he normally does cultural programs on national Swedish TV): "it was a fantastic concert. It was classical music, and yet the audience behaved like a rock audience! It was like a concert in a basilica in Italy."

The church was full as it is every year. But the audience was special this year. In the audience were Americans, Canadians, British people, an Italian, Harald from the Björling Museum and the curator of the Kirsten Flagstad Museum in Hamar (Norway), Royal Court singer Kerstin Meyer (who sang with Jussi), Stefan Johansson (top dramaturg of the Royal Opera of Stockholm), Niklas Lindblad (leading presenter of classic music on the national radio of Sweden) with wife Katarina (who came directly from singing at the Music at Siljan Festival in Dalarna) and Eric Anders (baritone who was honored as one of two students at University of Music in Stockholm. The other honored for solo singing that year was Håkan Hagegård).

The audience "raised the roof" of the church when, at the end, we all sang together in "Land du välsignade". Instead of flowers we give the singers small gifts.

Dan Shea gave Krantz his gift.

Kerstin Meyer gave Carlsson his gift.

Stefan Johansson gave Qvarfell his gift.

Katarina Lindblad gave Föllinger his gift.

Eric Anders gave the pianist, Lennart Eng, his gift.

And we all walked happily out of the church into the evening light of Sweden. We had a buffet in the nearby Voxna Mansion and in the evening we always have a concert listening to Jussi. While they still are around I try to have a singer who sang with Jussi be there and tell us what it was like to sing with him. This year Kerstin Meyer gave

## A warm note from Marion Merrill

Dear Dan,

Thank you so much for the current Jussi Journal. I was deeply saddened to learn of the passing of Anna-Lisa and Janet. I had often thought of Anna-Lisa as "mia sorella Svenska." Bob and I would often address her as such with great affection. We did stay in contact and Veronica Björling kept me up to date when Anna-Lisa no longer could.

Bob and I were in Stockholm on a brief cruise stop about 10 years ago and I did try to arrange to see Anna-Lisa then. But she had been hospitalized at the time with a hip operation, and we weren't able to see her.

As you know, Bob and Jussi had a very special relationship personally besides their artistic collaborations. We had and I still have warm memories of those times. While I only met Janet in Minnesota at the Gustavus Adolphus dedications and again here more recently in New York, I am saddened to learn of her passing and do extend my heartfelt sympathy to Anders and family.

Thanks for bringing me up to date, and with all good wishes,

Marion Merrill.

us a very, very nice talk about her and Jussi. And we all went to bed with Jussi's voice in our ears.

There will be a similar "Jussifest" on the 14th of July 2008. Anyone who is interested in joining us is welcome to contact me for information and help with booking of rooms and other things. ■

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The twenty-sixth of September 1953 was a great day: I was to sing Tosca for the first time with Jussi Björling. I admired him endlessly and was afraid I would not be able to please him. God knows, one had heard of all the peculiarities of great singers, and I was certain that Jussi would have many of his own. My fears proved to be unfounded. He was the most considerate and uncomplicated partner one could wish for, with a voice that mirrored the Swedish spring with fresh birch groves, blue sky, and dew-fresh grass. And beneath this smoldered an Italian fever like the lava of Vesuvius.

– Birgit Nilsson, in *La Nilsson*