

# RECORD REVIEW: Jussi Björling In Song Testament SBT 1427

by Greg Fitzmaurice, recordings editor



To my knowledge, this is the first release by Testament of a Björling album and it is to our good fortune that they've chosen the LP, RCA LM 1771, "Bjoerling in Song", to base it on. For those not familiar with Testament, it is a company which obtains licenses from the original recording companies to release recordings that the original company has no plans for. As a result, Testament is allowed to use the original master tapes for the re-issue, which is important because that generally results in a recording superior to others which have had to rely on copying earlier commercial issues.

The "Bjoerling In Song" LP has always been one of my favorites, where Jussi could communicate directly to the listener without the interference of other artists, orchestral climaxes, interludes and the like. The songs here were Björling concert staples and are by Schubert, Brahms, Liszt, Wolf, Grieg, R. Strauss, Sibelius, Sjöberg, Rachmaninoff, and Tosti. Recorded in 1952, all are given superb performances and are quite simply a treasure of Jussi at his very best. I have compared the

Testament transfers to the original LP and to the Naxos Björling Collection, Vol. 5, and feel that these are better in every possible way. The sound is clear and bright and free of any distortion and Björling's voice is imparted so well, you'll almost feel he's in your living room. If you love this album as I do, I urge you to buy this CD without hesitation. As an added bonus, unlike the Naxos issue, the songs on the Testament CD are presented in the same order as on the original LP – a significant plus in my opinion.

In addition to the "Bjoerling In Song" LP, Testament has included eight of the tenor's original Swedish HMV recordings on this CD – as well as two very important recordings which have *never* before been released in any format: Björling's test recordings of two songs, "For You Alone" and Leoncavallo's "Mattinata," made for HMV when he was only 18. These are sensational recordings and their discovery is cause for celebration by all Björling enthusiasts. While he's clearly not the singer that he was to become, still the basic Björling sound is there, and these recordings – coupled with others on the CD from 1929 to 1952 – are a great way to trace his vocal development from the young singer he was to the consummate mature artist that he was to become. With the exception of the two test recordings, all of these recordings have been issued before on various labels. I have compared a few of these to transfers on EMI and Gala and Pearl, and consider the Testament transfers to be preferable to all of the others. Roger Beardsley who did these transfers and Jon Samuels who did the

"Bjoerling In Song" transfers are to be soundly congratulated for their great work!

There isn't enough space here to list all of 26 items on this CD, but many of our readers will appreciate knowing the reference numbers from Henrysson's *A Jussi Björling Phonography*. Those are: 7-11, 21, 26, 82, 83, 154, 183-198. Unfortunately no texts or translations are included, but the photos on the front and back of the booklet are all first rate. CD notes are by Richard Copeman of the Jussi Björling Appreciation Society. ■

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to a moving speech by Yrsa Stenius, who spoke for over an hour with wonderful flow and without notes, about Jussi's triumphs and hardships. Many of us who listened were deeply moved and had tears in our eyes afterwards. I recorded it, but when checking if it was time to turn the tape I noticed it had got stuck. I changed tape and was able to record the last part. How unfortunate I did not get all of it!

Before the speech she told me that her book is finally being translated into English. I did read her book on Jussi when it was first published in Sweden (2002) and was captivated by it.

After a buffet lunch there was the customary visit to Stefan's family house to study the old paintings, by local artists. ■

—Per Bäckström