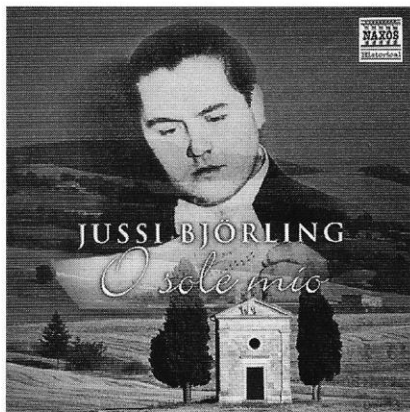


# Naxos, Jussi Björling Collection #8: "O sole mio"

by Kristian Krogholm



A new great CD from Naxos in the JB Collection with careful restorations and transfers by Stefan Lindström, whose reproductions include some surface noise but consequently leave more of Jussi Björling's voice. Seldom have the old 78s been transferred to CD with such clarity and total balance, always maintaining Jussi Björling's voice in absolute focus. Mr. Lindström is always faithful to the actual sound of the source, never trying to create anything other than what is on the original recording, thus obtaining a more truthful result

This CD contains songs in Italian and English recorded between 1937 and 1952, the two sacred arias from Stabat Mater and the Verdi Requiem and the rest of the juvenile quartet recordings made back around 1920 (including a solo which I always thought to be by Jussi, but according to the always informative notes by Harald Henrysson, it is not).

Some of the recordings present on this disc have obtained status as classics, and are ample evidence that Jussi Björling's voice possessed, more than perhaps any other singer past or present, the ability to produce an effortless

free flow of tones—from low C to high C—without ever compromising musicality, regardless of the score's technical difficulties.

The first five recordings would be enough to satisfy any lover of great singing. Much can be forgiven when the singer can produce such sound as this, even the somewhat strange home-made Italian like "malinsonia" (malinconia) in "O sole mio" or "sòrridermi ancora" (full accent on the first syllable) in "Ideale". But his singing of "O sole mio" brings out the true beauty of the melody while his singing of "Ideale" is beyond comparison. A beautiful legato like a river of pure silver, the voice soaring easily to a brilliant climax before the ever-so-tender concluding *pianissimo*. Difficult to imagine the piece sung better. Then "Mattinata" with the effortless leap up to a gorgeous high C, always keeping the musical line in focus, and two minutes of great singing which will remain unequalled. Jussi Björling sang "L'alba separa dalla luce l'ombra" for the first time on radio in 1948. The studio recording of the Tosti song made a year after resembles the Caruso version of 1917. Both tenor performances have the same ease and crescendo towards the climax. Perhaps Caruso's studio version has more of that tremendous power which Jussi later created abundantly in various live performances, and which would more than equal the impact made by the Neapolitan. The 1950 Gröna Lund (Bluebell: Gröna Lund concerts vol. 2) version is ample proof of that.

You might enjoy making comparisons between Björling's two first test recordings of "For You alone" and

"Mattinata" from 1929 (Testament has the best sound) and the later recordings on this CD with the voice in its prime. In the later recordings there is of course more of everything, and that says quite a lot, knowing how wonderful he sounded at the age of 18. On this CD you can also once more appreciate how Björling could create diamonds out of virtually every simple melody—like "Jeanie with the light brown hair," a song which used to bring down the house when he performed it in his own unique way.

The highlights of this CD are the two tenor arias from sacred works by Rossini and Verdi, both recorded on the same day in 1938. "Cujus animam" is sung with all the major Björling virtues: a perfect legato, style, beauty of tone and incredibly easy top notes up to a stunning D flat. But the true gem of the whole set is for me the "Ingemisco." When Jussi Björling was voted the best singer of the 20th century by 28 critics in the *FM Classic Magazine* poll back at the turn of the century, this particular recording was mentioned to exemplify the perfection of Björling's voice.

You might compare Björling's recording again with that of Caruso since they are widely regarded as the two premiere tenors of all times. Caruso recorded it at the age of 41 when his voice was turning heavier and more baritone, and the man from Naples comes up just short in this comparison. His legato is much inferior to Björling's; his high notes less brilliant; and, in addition, he resorts to some less artistic effects in his rendi-

RECORD REVIEWS continued on page 7

# Memorials at Voxna: We look back (and ahead)

by Sue Flaster

For the last eight years, Stefan Olmårs has produced events with terrific organization and splendid music and lectures, and this year's mid-July gathering in Hälsingland upheld his very high standards while reaching for a wider focus.

Although the theme of these Summer get-togethers is remembering Jussi and his forefathers, the scope was broadened this year to include the Lindroos family, past and present, an exciting young tenor and an enthusiastic talk about Beniamino Gigli.

Peter Lindroos was an immensely talented Finnish tenor who died in an automobile accident in 2003. He was represented at Voxna by Petri Lindroos, his well-known bass son, daughter Sofia—violinist and soprano—and tenor-grandson Kristian (Petri's son) recently accepted into the Finnish music academy after an earlier venture into heavy-metal guitar. Kristian is all of 19 and has a promising and expressive voice. I believe he is also the tallest tenor I've ever seen. Physically, he and his basso father seem amazingly alike.

Margareta Hallin again joined us, proving again that the ability to share music is something far beyond the simple physical act of singing (or playing). As she moves up in age, Hallin continues to find convincing and moving expressions of what she feels. Hallin was accompanied by Sofia Lindroos in some charming Swedish songs with texts by Emil Hagström set to music by Thorstein Bergman—material she was also performing in Stockholm in August.

Danish tenor David Danholt was another surprise: he's young, charming



Tenor David Danholt

and attractive, and he can SING. Danholt can also play the accordion, as he accompanied himself on it for his encore of "O sole mio."

After dinner, Petri Lindroos made a graceful presentation on his father's career. The high point was a video of the "Guardate, pazzo son" departure scene from *Manon Lescaut*, in which he was clearly a convincing actor as well as a singer of dramatic authority.

The following morning, Torsten Brander of the Finnish Gigli Society, shared his particular enthusiasm for Gigli, playing some extraordinary audio recordings and a performance video of Gigli, pretty much a master class on what professional singing can be. ■



Lindroos, dramatic bass

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RECORD REVIEWS continued from page 5

tion of this sacred piece, his voice almost choking with "pianto" in "et ab haedis". Jussi Björling's singing of "Ingemisco" is simply a lesson in how to sing! There is hardly any audible breathing, not even between a climactic high B (which rings out with divine beauty after a steady ascending scale executed with the same ease of finishing off a cup of tea) and of the following *pianissimo*. Only his live performance in Hilversum nine months later equals this. In the Rossini aria the comparison with Caruso is also quite striking, Björling singing the high D with a perfect blend of chest and head voices, with superb ease, musicality and beauty of tone, whilst Caruso's head note...I would not dare to call it a *false*...but it sounds strange to me. The whole CD, although it spans a good 32 years between the earliest and the latest recording is highly satisfying. ■