

Newsletter

of the Jussi Björling Societies of the USA & UK

No. 17, July, 2010

Our honorary advisors: An encounter with Neil Shicoff

by Mati Zeti-Elboim

Toward the Jewish Passover Holidays, the Israeli Opera House presented “*La Juive*” by Halévy. This was an obvious choice, since the second act of the opera is dedicated to the “Seder”—the ritual Passover meal which commemorates the flight of the Jews from Egypt (by reading its story and eating “matzot”, the unfinished bread taken on the exodus).

The PR director of the Israeli Opera, knowing my series of radio programs of “Great Jewish tenors of the past,” approached me the week before with a question:

Would I prepare a program on Neil Shicoff, who was coming to Israel to sing Eleazar?

“But Shicoff is still living with us and I hope he lives to 120,” I answered, “and my show presents past Jewish tenors!!” But—after a short hesitation—I agreed to do it.

I met with Neil and his lovely wife, Dawn Kotoski (a former opera singer) for an hour after his rehearsal (directed by Daniel Oren). Before we settled down, I told him a story:

“You may not remember, but this is not our first meeting. I was in London around 25 years ago, and I had gone

to Covent-Garden to see *The Tales of Hoffmann*.

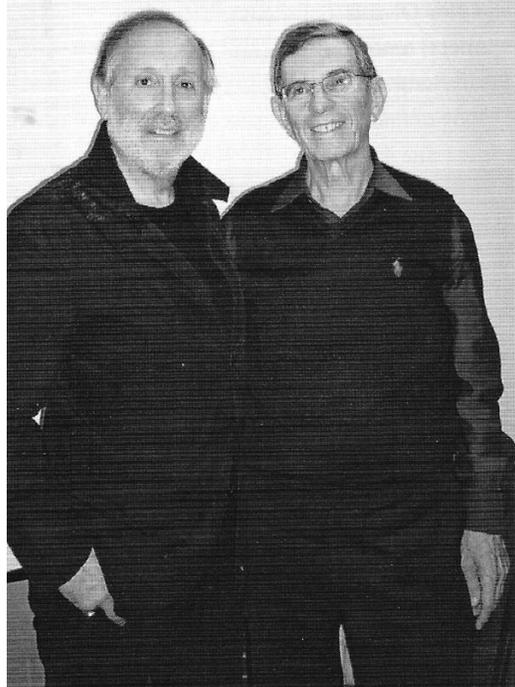
That evening the conductor was Sir Georg Solti and the role of Hoffmann was supposed to be sung by Placido Domingo; but Domingo was replaced by a young American tenor named Neil Shicoff. I was astounded by his great voice and dramatic performance. Everybody in the audience was deeply impressed, and many said he was better than Domingo.

After the final curtain call, I ran to the stage door to meet with the sensational young tenor, and when my turn came, I whispered into his ear: do you have any relationship to the Cantor my late father used to admire so much—**Sydney Shicoff** ???!

I whispered, because at that time not many artists were willing to publicly admit they were Jewish, but Neil answered with no hesitation, “Yes, he is indeed my father!!”

After I reminded him of this first meeting, we started to discuss the possibility of making the radio program. I asked him about past tenors and their influence on him, especially at the

NEIL SHICOFF *continued on page 6*



Neil Shicoff and Mati Zeti-Elboim

INSIDE THE Newsletter

- 2011 US conference
- Upcoming commemorative events
- Astounding live performances: the 4-CD set