

“Jussiday” at Skansen: our three tenors, and more

by Stefan Olmårs

Some time ago, Sten Petri, who manages cultural events at Skansen, joined the Scandinavian Sällskapet. That inspired me to put together a commemorative concert at the Skansen open-air stage, where Jussi gave 52 concerts.

On August 28th, at around 11 o'clock, I walked through the gates of Skansen and saw a big poster: “Jussi today at 2 PM,” listing me as the MC. I had been deeply worried about the weather since the forecast was for heavy rain, but the sun was shining and it was over 70 F!

Bertil plays some favorites

Bertil Bengtsson started by talking about Jussi and especially about his singing at Skansen. He was brilliant, as always. And he introduced and played selections from the only recordings of Jussi at Skansen (from May 25th, 1952). He opened with Jussi introducing himself and “Mi batte il cor... O paradiso,” then “Trollsjön” and “Nu är jag pank och fågelfri” from the same occasion. The audience was really enjoying it: I noticed most people lay back a bit and closed their eyes!

Before Bertil we had a legendary Swedish accordionist, Sone Banger, playing opera and operetta selections for half an hour. After Bertil we had our own three tenors. Sten Petri's father Sven Petri has composed some fine songs and tenor Raymond Björling has recorded them at Skansen on a very good CD. Raymond sang a couple of those songs and two songs that grandfather Jussi also sang.

The 2010 recipient of the Jussi Björlingsällskapet Prize, tenor Nils Olsson, also did three songs. Among them “O sole mio,” which suits him, because he is best

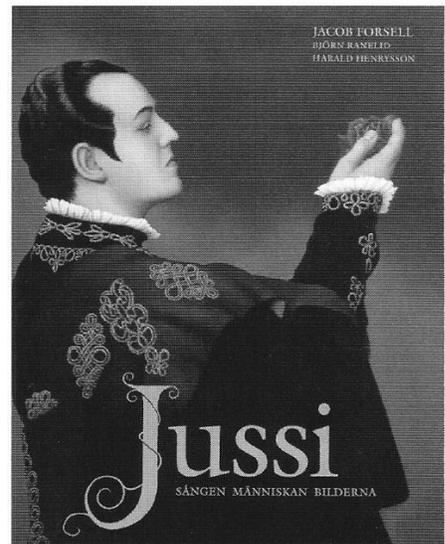
described as a Pavarotti-type of singer—both for voice and body size. The 2008 Prize winner, tenor Mats Carlsson, also sang his three numbers, ending with “Till havs.” I know of no one, nowadays, who does that better.

In my own “Jussifests,” I usually start with the artists and we listen to Jussi afterwards. It is not very easy for the artists to have to sing after Jussi! This time I did reverse it, hoping for some new listeners: families who were there for the other attractions (zoo and so on) at Skansen and just dropped by. I was afraid that they would leave after the artists' concert and would then miss Jussi. On this day Jussi was the important person. I wanted everybody to hear him and realize how good he was. And Jussi gave his last concert from that very stage at Skansen on the 20th of August 1960, 50 years ago.

The Jussiday at Skansen was a great success. Our Skansen-man, Sten Petri, estimated that we were 500 - 1000 in the audience this year and we hope to have another Jussiday on the 13th of August 2011. And, if it works well, maybe we can make it a tradition again with “Jussi at Skansen.”



Well-known Swedish author Björn Ranelid presented three hour-long radio programs on “Jussi Björling in our hearts.” Pictured from the first program are Harald Henrysson, Ranelid and photographer Jacob Forsell, editor of a forthcoming book about JB. The other programs featured Raymond Björling and Kickie Ekman, and Anne-Charlotte and Lars Björling.



Jacob Forsell's upcoming book

Richard Copeman, JBAS President