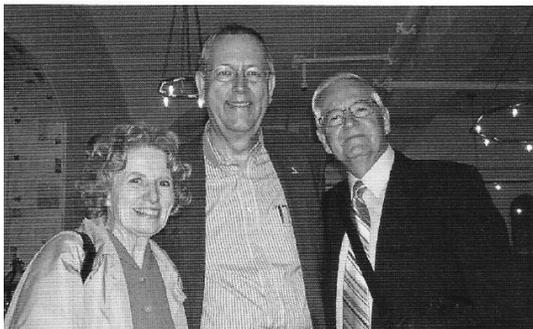


We gather together: September 9-10 Meetings in New York City

by Dan Shea



From left, JBS members Marilyn and Walter Rudolph and Bill Clayton.

For members of the Jussi Björling Society, the anniversary date of September 9 this year was more than usually fraught with memories of that 1960 day, whether that had been experienced personally or was simply a historical fact associated with a favorite singer's life story. To mark the occasion, there had been anniversary radio programs the previous weekend from Vermont and California, see for instance the interesting list of selections played during Peter Fox Smith's 4-hour tribute on the afternoon of September 4, at <http://www.vpr.net/episode/49386/>. Mr. Smith conducts an anniversary program like this every year on the Saturday preceding September 9.

Duff Murphy's "The Opera Show" on KUSC featured Jussi's music, much of it from the EMI 5-CD set "The Swedish Caruso," from 9:00 AM till noon, according to Laguna Beach resident Phyllis Josell. Of course both of these stations are sound-streamed via the Internet [and we hope that recordings were made of both, for sharing and possibly also preservation at the Museum]: Any additional informa-

tion on these and other anniversary programs will be greatly appreciated (please contact Editor Sue or me with that news).

As we know from our previous JBS newsletter, the Vocal Record Collectors' Society had scheduled its September 10 program to celebrate WHRA's release of Björling radio broadcasts, a 4-CD set produced in collaboration with the three JB Societies. In anticipation of that, a small group of us met on the 9th for dinner at Scandinavia House: Christer Ahl, Bea Bobotek, Maija Budow, and Beau and Linda Kaplan were there from Washington DC; Marilyn and Walter Rudolph were there from Orem UT; this writer from Middleton WI; and NY was represented by Marilyn's sister Connie Cloward, Bill Clayton and Monica Valley.

We had arranged with the dining service there to allow us to play Jussi's recordings via Bea's iPod, with the understanding that if other diners complained we would turn Jussi off; luckily no one complained, not even a table full of teenagers.

Afterwards most of our group headed back to the Westside YMCA, where several of us were staying, for a late-night listening session together on this sad anniversary. We began with some excerpts from the new WHRA set "Jussi Björling LIVE!" and focused on the 4th CD which begins with one of Jussi's 1937 radio programs from Carnegie Hall and ends with his last radio broadcast from Gothenburg, August 1960. We all found Jussi's singing of Lensky's aria from *Eugene Onegin* especially moving, and Christer recounted a story of his family's passionate love of Jussi's singing—that occasionally even would result in his having to referee arguments over the kitchen table:

"My father was a fanatic supporter of Jussi; my mother was probably equally convinced, but she had 'divided loyalties' due to her fondness for Nicolai Gedda; ... she generally admired him for his 'musicianship,' for his control, and for special [linguistic] abilities; so she insisted that while Jussi was generally #1, precisely in *Onegin* Gedda was able to offer something that neither Jussi nor anyone else could match."

Given that we'd be hearing much more of the WHRA set the following night, we moved to other singers and heard a marvelous program on Hans Hotter offered by Wally Rudolph. This was based on a radio program on Hotter that Wally had produced and broadcast earlier, and we enjoyed the excellent interviews on the bass-baritone that Wally interspersed among examples of his singing.

The next morning we met again for another listening session led by Bea Bobotek on the singing of Tibbett, Warren, Panzera, Holzmair, and many others. After an afternoon pursuing Matisse at MoMA among other things, our group met for dinner at Aquavit and then convened at the Vocal Record Collectors' meeting. There the main event on WHRA's new CDs of Björling radio broadcasts had attracted a large audience, "well over 100" and "the largest turnout since George Jellinek's farewell program" according to VRCS President Joe Pearce. Presenters Seth Winner and Dan Shea took turns illustrating the vivid sound that Seth had been able to draw from source material gathered by JBS over the previous ten years. Perhaps most astonishing were the 1937 General Motors Concert and the 1960 Gothenburg broadcast, which you'll have to hear on your own—all the words in the world are pale substitutes for the experience itself! If you don't have these CDs yet, by all means run to the enclosed order form, to get your own copy—you'll be glad you did.