

London Celebrates CDs, *Bohème*

by Dr. Richard Copeman

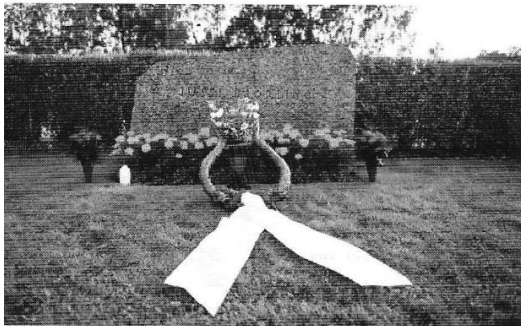
The UK JB Appreciation Society commemorated the 50th anniversary of Björling's last Covent Garden performances of *La bohème* in March of 1960 with an afternoon event at Swedenborg Hall on Saturday, September 11th. Sadly John Steane, who was scheduled to speak, was ill and could not appear. In his place I presented the "Producer's Showcase" *La bohème* scene with Tebaldi as well as one of the "Voice of Firestone" videos. I was able to use the audio system of the venerable Recorded Vocal Art Society, and members of that society were also present (I am treasurer of RVAS as well as head of JBAS [UK] so could wear two hats!). It was nice to meet several founding members of JBAS again, about 25 years after we originally met up. I played many tracks from the new CD set which was enthusiastically received, and I sold dozens at the event and by post to those not able to attend.

Especially well received was the 1949 Carnegie Hall "Sweden in Music" recital for sheer beauty of sound: the contrast with the quality of previous transfers of radio broadcasts was amazing. I played the *Roméo* duet with Sayao from San Francisco (now in much better sound than the Met broadcast) and we enjoyed the previously unpublished 1954 Stockholm hospital recital from this magnificent set of CDs.

The event was generously sponsored by the Swedish Embassy, and Carl Otto Werkelid, Counselor for Cultural Affairs, attended. I had made contact with the Swedish community through the Embassy and the Swedish Church in London. The church organist is a keen Jussi fan and is in touch with Raymond Björling (son of Rolf). Raymond has expressed interest in visiting London for the centenary and we are trying to arrange an evening at the Swedish Church on February 4/5th 2011. I

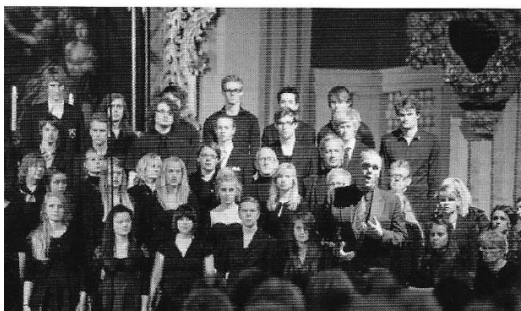
hope we can confirm this and advertise it in the same February issue of the *Gramophone* magazine which will carry a review of the CDs and a feature on the centenary. David Mellor, a well-known broadcaster on Classic Fm will review the CDs in *The Mail* on Sunday, and *The Record Collector* (www.therecordcollector.org) will review the CDs and event. Sadly, our secretary/news editor Eric Wimbles was not able to come due to ill health, and we paid tribute to his sterling work over many years. Luckily another long-standing member, Robert Manderson, has agreed to take over those responsibilities.

The afternoon came to a perfect conclusion with a 45-minute recital by young Indian tenor Anando Mukerjee, accompanied by Russian pianist Pavel Timofejevsky. They performed songs by Schubert, R. Strauss, Tosti and Rachmaninov, including the gentle "How fair this spot" and the exuberant "Spring waters," and concluded with full-voiced and impassioned performances of arias from *Carmen* and *Bohème*, which were rapturously received. It is important to look forward as well as backwards, and nurture young talent.



Jussi's gravesite with musical wreath

Raymond Björling with the massed local choirs



Stora Tuna Church memorial concert

by Harald Henrysson

On the evening of September 9th, Stephen Hastings and I and two friends went to Stora Tuna Church for a well-attended memorial concert. The Conservatory Chorus from Falun and Borganäskören from Borlänge had joined forces. The soloist was soprano Carolina Bengtsdotter-Ljung, a singer from Dalarna who once received the Jussi Björling Award and who has been active for several years in Germany. As a surprise—not included on the printed program—Raymond Björling appeared with "Tonerna" (on the 10th, he also gave a memorial concert at another Dalarna church). The concert was a fine and worthy tribute to Jussi's memory. The program included music sung by him or used at his funeral, or associated with Dalarna. At the end, led by torch-bearers, the chorus and the audience left the church and went to Jussi's grave, where the chorus sang "Sverige" and the county governor delivered a short speech. From the Björling family, besides Raymond, Lars and Ann-Charlotte and her husband Örjan Grimås attended.