

Another brief story about this great lady: Mike and I went to Rolf Björling's first recital in New York City. We had tickets this time. Anna-Lisa was there, accompanied by Bill Arne. We spoke to her and she was most appreciative of our positive comments about the singer. We had no idea Rolf wasn't her son, and she didn't try to enlighten us. It was certainly very gracious of her to come to New York for his recital.

Incidentally, the rest of the *Trovatore* cast that night in Philadelphia was not chopped liver: Antoinetta Stella, Irene Dalis, Ettore Bastianini, Nicola Moscona, with Max Rudolf conducting. I especially recall that Stella and Dalis were both first-rate, but strangely had no special memory of Bastianini as di Luna; I'd heard Warren in that part many times. This was Dalis's second performance with the Met; at the train station to New York afterwards, I saw her and said excitedly, "Miss Dalis, I've seen every performance you've given at the Met." She laughed heartily at my lame joke.

### Incomparable Jussi Björling in a Floodtide of Tenor Song

If there is anything to match Jussi Bjoerling in today's world of song I don't know it. His voice is magnificent, his skill in using it lies in the most radiant realm of bel canto, his repertory ranges the world of tenor song, and his command of styles is so secure as to seem effortless. That this is a vintage Bjoerling season we knew last fall when he sang incomparably for the Lyric Opera. That he is unrivaled in recital is a joyous fact rediscovered Sunday afternoon in Orchestra Hall.

## Ups and Downs for the Björlings in March 1958

Anna-Lisa and Jussi Björling flew to New York in late February 1958, with a major tour of some 20 concerts scheduled for Jussi during March and April. Jussi kicked off his tour with a sold-out concert at Carnegie Hall that became one of his most famous, since it was recorded and eventually released by RCA [Cantor Don Goldberg had a role in finding the original tapes, see Ch. 27 of *Jussi* for this and more on reviews and other events of this tour]. At this time, Jussi was in great form vocally, with no health complaints.

After further concerts in Canada and Cleveland, the Björlings arrived in Chicago where Jussi appeared at Orchestra Hall on March 16, again to rapturous reviews: Claudia Cassidy wrote of the "Incomparable Jussi Björling in a floodtide of tenor song."

The Björlings then headed south to Florida where they were lionized by Fort Lauderdale society, with newspaper hoopla of their doings in five articles in the local press: photos of Jussi with Anna-Lisa and smiling with Mrs. Ed Johnson and local socialites; before the March 21 concert there were articles on Anna-Lisa as her "Tenor's Severest Critic" telling of her own musical background and their enjoyment of fishing together, and sharing information about their children. Another article with headline "Music Lovers Orbit 'Round Visiting Star" tells of a luncheon at the local yacht club with the star's tour manager Chris [sic] Schang, and plans for Jussi to go deep sea fishing the day after his concert. There is a review of the March 21 concert, expressing

enthusiasm for the first half of the concert with arias from *Xerxes*, *Rigoletto*, *Carmen* as well as the usual Lieder. But then "there was a marked difference in the latter half of the concert. Timbre was still top-notch, but intonation and control seemed to suffer ... Fortissimo passages were definitely sharp, pianissimo passages, especially in the higher range, sometimes flat. Control seemed to waver at times" although he was excellent in some Swedish songs and an aria from *Chénier*. There was a gala post-concert reception and next day Jussi went off on his fishing trip.

A fifth news clip dated March 24 is headed "Opera Singer In Hospital" and tells of our tenor's recuperation in General Hospital of an undisclosed illness. You can read *Jussi*, pp. 306-7, to learn of some serious stomach bleeding, two weeks in the hospital, cancellation of 14 concert dates, and continued health trouble leading to his first instance of heart failure that September.

*Thanks to Walter Daly for providing a sequence of news articles from Fort Lauderdale that suggest strongly that Jussi was pressing his health, even after he must have known—during his concert—that his body was starting to fail him. And thanks also to Lynn Putnam for sending several news clippings from Chicago, in particular the extravagant review mentioned above.*