

President's Notes

The *Midsummer* activities of late June are past and we are settling into Summer and all of the festivities it promises.

The Board of the Jussi Björling Society-USA has been busy recruiting, expanding and strengthening. We announce two changes.

1. Janel Lundgren joins the Board this month as Treasurer. You read of her experience with Jussi Björling in her youth in the February 2013 *Journal*.

2. Michael Mayer (former Treasurer) now focuses his myriad talents in behalf of Information Technology issues for the Society as our IT Chair. His primary focus will be the website.

I extend my sincere thanks for the dedicated work offered by each member of the Board.

We do have additional needs for any of you who would like to offer service to the Society and its membership. If any of you have interest, please email me.

Jussi Björling recorded only one excerpt by Richard Wagner (whose 200th birthday was celebrated on May 22, 2013), but it was a stunner—his Swedish version of “In fernam Land” from *Lohengrin*. That recording was heard as a part of the WFMT/Chicago Richard Wagner Seminar on May 18th. Jussi Björling stood his ground with ease on that occasion, once again, doing us all proud!

Happy Listening, and a Happy, Safe Summer,



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lector first quotes John Steane in *The Grand Tradition*: “...one should hear everything, dismiss nothing and compare everything with at least something else. It is a great relief to know that this cannot be done.” But Henstock thinks that Hastings challenges the last sentence since he “not only analyses more than four hundred Björling recordings but also compares them with those of a hundred other tenors...”

“The book becomes a revealing encyclopedia through the comparison ... with about a hundred other tenors.” (Roloff, *Opernwelt*)

“The subtext of references to other artists’ recorded work is a field of research in itself.” (Mike Ashman, *Gramophone*)

Analysis and language

“He has an acute ear for both purely musical and dramatic values, and he expresses all those qualities in eloquent, jargon-free and incisive prose.” (Michael Tanner, *Opera*)

“The author has been able to develop a language that without too much of heavy technical terms permits him to describe song technique as well as interpretation, in captivating analyses. This ought to induce several of us, with Hastings as our guide, to listen more consciously even to Björling’s colleagues from different periods, indeed, to get a more profound benefit of classical song and opera in general.... Hastings ... has taken equal pains to penetrate just as deeply into the interpretations of Nordic music, not least texts of poets of the Swedish language. He has also acquired for himself an increasing insight into the musical environment of the Royal Opera in Stockholm.” (Stefan Johansson, *Jussi Björlingsällskapets Tidning*)

“Insightful scholarship and freshly evocative writing that will send Björling’s fans back to their favourite recordings and will win the tenor many admirers.” (John Allison, *BBC Music Magazine*—where the work got the highest ranking and became Book of the Month)

“One of his text’s strengths is that he

is always specific, never resorting in vague poetics to passages of praise ... can also talk as technically as one could wish.” (Mike Ashman, *Gramophone*)

“Both his experience of the surviving discography and the clarity with which he approaches it are remarkable... The wealth and depth of analysis is inspiring. ... Hastings compares and contrasts Björling with other eminent singers. His superlatives are judiciously employed and mercifully they are not omnipresent.” (Jonathan Woolf, *MusicWeb-International*)

“Hastings writes an English of classic clarity...” (Michael Aspinall, *Musica*)

“Although I’ve been a lover of Jussi Björling for most of my adult life, I feared that the book would be very dry and mind-numbing. I was very surprised to discover how much I enjoyed reading Stephen Hastings’ analyses of not only Jussi’s interpretations of my favorite operas and arias, but also of songs by composers with whom I was unfamiliar.” (*iloveddracula*, “private” reviewer on *Amazon.com*)

“Well, what does Hastings hear? Above all, a unique musicality. Hastings emphasizes Jussi Björling as a musician to be compared with the great instrumentalists of his time....” (Nils-Göran Olve, *Access*)

Objectivity and independence of opinion

“Hastings is far from being a hagiographer and his balanced, detailed, note-by-note examinations find points to disapprove of as well as to praise.” (Michael Henstock, *Record Collector*)

“Obviously a great fan, he is never blind to the tenor’s shortcomings, nor is he too subjective to understand preferring another singer in a particular excerpt.” (Ira Siff, *Opera News*)

“Fair and objective approach, and it makes reading his book so much more interesting than if it had been crammed with unqualified adulation.” (Hughes, *IRR*)

Opera Nederland’s reviewer admits that “Hastings tries to remain objective and indicates which other singers are technically or interpretatively stronger than his hero.” However, the same reviewer is the only one