

called “one against twelve”. Each of those present would have to demonstrate something that qualified him or her for membership. Jussi was fired up by the idea. Many fell by the way-side, among others, Axel [Wenner-Gren] who, at least for the time being, was judged to be far too normal; but both Jussi and I were considered highly qualified. It was decided that all members would pledge themselves to doing certain crazy things when we met each other in public—for example, we would speak inarticulately, or sound out our words like modern pre-school children. Jussi’s membership test was superb—it turned out that he was also a brilliant mimic and “crazy artist” who would have created a *fuore* on the variety stage. He impersonated and mercilessly parodied a whole series of opera singers, librettists and conductors. Finally I mentioned Tetrzzini, the world-famous soprano whom I had seen in my childhood, she of the gigantic girth and enormous string of pearls, who, as she sang her show-stopping arias, would fling her pearls about.

Jussi leapt up: “I can do that too!” whereupon he produced a fantastic send-up with all Tetrzzini’s gestures, mannerisms and juggling of pearls. His humour glittered and shone like fireworks, and he finished his performance on a captivating, melting *pianissimo* with the words: “Just look, I can fling my pearls too.”

And so a quick jump over to the Bahamas. We were in Mexico and were just about to leave for Nassau when we got a telephone call from Anna-Lisa. Jussi had become hoarse; he thought he had lost his voice. “May we come to you tomorrow?”

“We’re just leaving for Nassau,” I replied, “but you’ll be very welcome there.”

They arrived half an hour after me.

I had not even had time to take off my hat or powder my nose. Jussi was utterly dejected. He had lost his voice, he said. He could barely whisper “Shangri La”. He had had to forfeit splendid engagements and honours. They stayed for a week. Jussi wandered along the beach like Diogenes and practised with pebbles in his mouth, full of concern for his voice.

Then suddenly one morning—a storm was raging, waves were crashing onto the shore—a tone like a silver trumpet! Its silver conquered the storm and burst like a beam of light against the sky. Jussi’s voice had returned. He was on top of the world again—all was bright and joyous once more.

In all our memories of Jussi there is interwoven a golden thread which glistened through and bound together his whole life - Anna-Lisa! Anna-Lisa, ever-faithful, ever-present, always supportive when life’s vicissitudes struck. She was Jussi’s inspiration, his guardian angel, his reason for being.

Jussi’s death has brought Anna-Lisa and us even closer together. If all Jussi’s admirers the world over knew what she meant to him, his name would never be mentioned without hers.

I started by speaking of a diamond. These recollections of mine are but small glimpses of its richness. I would have liked to have said so much more, especially something to recall his big, warm, open-to-all heart, but what I finally most wish to express are my sincere, my heart-felt thanks for having been able to consider him as a member of our family, as a friend to rely upon, as the artist who became a golden gift to his country and to the world—a prince of artists whose very memory, in all its brightness, makes the stones along the paths of our everyday life shimmer like jewels.

Ed. Note: Marguerite Wenner-Gren was an American soprano who married

Axel Wenner-Gren, Electolux tycoon. She was a good friend of the Björlings, who visited the Wenner-Grens in the Bahamas. She became a close friend of Anna-Lisa after JB’s death.

A Sovereign Artistry

Holger Löwenadler

Jussi Björling! I remember all the times I heard the young tenor in the 1930s: he was the impecunious, enamoured Rodolfo in *La bohème*; the cynical Duke of Mantua in *Rigoletto*; Cavaradossi, the fighter for liberty in *Tosca*; Manon Lescaut’s noble des Grieux; the lyrical Roméo or Faust; the despairing Canio. The voice was always the same—warm, healthy, beautiful.

Dramatically speaking, there was not all that much difference between the various characters. It was the young Jussi, unaffected, a little awkward, not strikingly gifted as an actor. But he made his way out into the world and returned. I went to hear him again—the same golden voice, a little darker and more expansive with the years, the same sovereign artistry in which everything sounded so easy; but dramatically, the performance was each time more free, more nuanced, more smilingly assured—though never cocksure. It was an impressive, interesting development which demonstrated what success, properly used, can deliver from a latent talent. His last performances at the Stockholm Opera—I’m thinking here chiefly of Rodolfo and des Grieux—were unforgettable. In these the beautiful voice of the early years was joined by the depth and warmth of mature experience.

Jussi in private: I can't say that I knew him very well. We would meet in the street or in Dr Bertil Kågen's rooms as we waited to have our vocal chords checked. He was always friendly—a nice, decent chap. The admiring words I always felt a pleasure in being able to say to him in appreciation of the most recent performance were received with modest gratitude: "Really, do you think so—well, it wasn't so bad. I felt in good form." No self-dissection, no boasting. In his simple, good-hearted manner he had authority, and one felt that one had met a real personality. There would sometimes be something searching in his look, an appeal in a tone of voice which hinted that he was not the uncomplicated man which first impressions indicated. It is not the tangible things alone that create a great artist.

And this evening, the 9th October 1960, I have heard that warm, brilliant voice again on the radio. But sadly, cruelly, above the singer's name in the newspaper were printed the words "Memorial programme."

Jussi Björling and the Royal Theatre, Copenhagen

H. A. Brønsted

There were all too few occasions on which we at the Royal Theatre enjoyed the good fortune of being able to persuade Jussi Björling to sing on our stage. In return, though, these guest appearances became memorable events in our theatre's little history. During the Royal Swedish Opera's guest performances in Copenhagen in 1933 he sang the roles of Vladimir in *Prince Igor* and Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni*. In 1942 he brightened the dark period of occupation as the Duke in *Rigoletto* and Rodolfo in *La bohème*. And he was with us in our joy at the liberation when, in

September 1945, he sang Gustav III in *Un ballo in maschera*. Many remember these performances, and all his stage colleagues recall a wonderful and inspiring collaboration, as well as a pleasant spirit of comradeship.

Jussi Björling was greatly loved by the Danish public and a significant reason for this was undoubtedly his unrivalled ability to give—although with his voice alone—full life to the characters he portrayed on stage. In this respect he was supreme and we are fortunate that this ability has been preserved on countless gramophone records.

Jussi Björling will stand, for all time, as an example of the best in Swedish art and as a distinguished representative of Sweden's rich operatic culture.

The Singer and the Actor

Edvin Adolphson

It would not be overstating the case to say that Jussi Björling was extremely popular with artists of the spoken theatre too. He was always very eager to learn all about the problems of the theatre and of the actor's art, and when he met actors he never failed to ask us about our experiences in the theatre. He wanted to know as much as possible about the stage and its techniques.

When his busy schedule allowed, he willingly gave his services for the benefit of actors, including a number of recitals at The Djurgården Festival. The Swedish Theatre Union awarded him its Gold Medal as a small token of appreciation.

As a person he was what I would call 'a nice friend'. He was affable, with

Here the very discerning Enzo Bruzzi meets a certain soprano at the Met Opera's bookshop. No, Enzo hasn't written his book yet, but Renée Fleming's is doing fairly well if not quite a best-seller. Enzo is the grandson of Dorian Bruzzi, and son of Rafael and Kathy.

