

Jussi's "Manon," Licia Albanese turns 100

The Jussi Björling Society – USA sings Happy Birthday to Licia Albanese



One of the world's favorite sopranos, Licia Albanese, was partner to Jussi Björling's commercial recording of Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* (1954). Each of Jussi's Met broadcasts was legendary. But few if any performances wear *legendary* like the 1956 broadcast of the same opera with the same Manon and Des Grieux, conducted by Dimitri Mitropoulos. Father Owen Lee refers to it as "the most thrilling of all Met broadcasts."

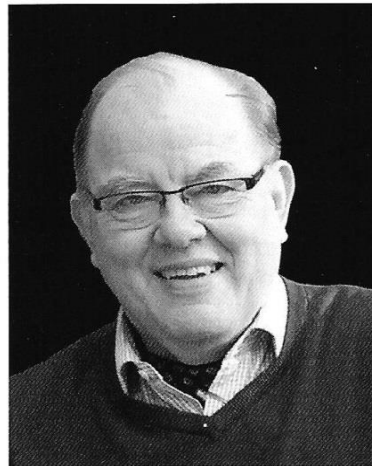
Society members who were able to attend the 2002 NYC Conference were privileged to hear and meet Licia Albanese and hear her warm praise of her favorite tenor, Jussi Björling. We also heard the pair sing the Act 1 duet from the San Francisco *La bohème* from 1949.

NPR quoted Stephen De Maio, a friend of Albanese's and a director of the Licia Albanese-Puccini Foundation, which supports young opera singers. "It will be a very quiet birthday this year." She will be celebrating "with dinner engagements all week long, together with her son and daughter-in-law, as well as friends." Her 100th birthday was July 22, 2013.

See also: <http://www.jussibjorlingsociety.org/licia-albanese.html>

Jacob Forsell Remembers Jussi

By Jacob Forsell



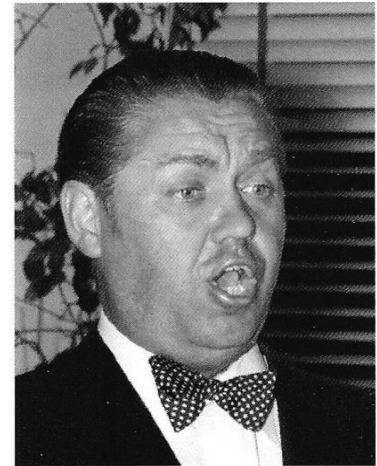
Jacob Forsell

In my childhood home in the Stockholm suburb Lidingö Jussi Björling was quite often a dear guest. Sometimes with his family, sometimes without. My father, who was the eldest son of the Stockholm Royal Opera-director John Forsell, knew Jussi from the 1920s. He was also Jussi's family doctor over the years, so it was not surprising that they spent a lot of time together.

It is rather strange though that neither I nor my siblings thought it was something remarkable when uncle Jussi came to visit and "sang a little." He was like any guest at any time. We did not understand at all that he was a superstar, it simply did not show. Sometimes he was in the company of my uncle Björn Forsell, who was a great baritone singer and a close friend of Jussi's. And when these happy boys began to sing together in the late evening the whole house was shaking.

Usually Jussi was invited as dinner guest with whole or part of the family. But it also happened that he showed up when he was run-down and depressed. Then my family home became a sanctuary where he could be at peace and rest. My parents had a high tolerance and understanding of people with anxiety and worry.

A special memory from the mid 50s flutters by. Jussi and his wife Anna-Lisa (and also daughter Ann-Charlotte I think) were invited home for dinner. At this time my interest in photography had taken off and was the only thing I had in my head. That Jussi was visiting did not interest me. I rather sat in my little



Jussi

darkroom, which was set up in a tiny closet next to our music room. When the dinner was over the party moved to the music room and after a while Jussi began singing accompanied by my mother, who was a pianist. There I sat in my little darkroom and heard the world's greatest tenor singing straight through the wall, but actually I was most troubled by the high noise level. Dutifully I went into the music room with my little amateur camera and took three, only three, shots. I must admit that I did not understand what a big moment I had witnessed. But I have it clearly in my mind and the three images of Jussi will remain in my archives, one of them can be seen above.

Dear readers, with this little reflection I welcome you to the new Jussi Björling Society Magazine. Together with designer Curt Lundberg I have taken on the task of being its managing editor and look forward to this challenge with both pleasure and excitement. My one-year-old male labrador also wishes you welcome. His name? One guess! ■



Editor: Mr. Forsell is the managing editor of the new Jussi Björling (Scandinavian) Society Magazine, published by the Jussi Björling Sällskapet. These memories were in the Spring 2013 edition. Translation by Harald Henrysson.