

Report on the JBS-USA Conference, October 2002

ON THE THEME *Jussi Björling in New York City, 1919–1959*

We came to Manhattan from Brazil, Chile, Cuba, Israel, Italy, Sweden, the U.K.— and the U.S., from Massachusetts to California, from Minnesota to Texas. Not to mention NY, NJ, CT, PA etc., altogether over 150 strong. We gathered at the New Yorker Hotel, on 8th Avenue at 34th Street, for 12 major programs and a half-dozen smaller events starting on Thursday, October 24, and ending at noon on Sunday, October 27. Here's a brief summary of what happened:

Thursday, Oct. 24 – Grand Ballroom. This big hall had two rows of tables at the back, for exhibitors like the feisty guys from the Vocal Record Collectors' Society, hawking their fascinating catalog of CDs. Also on sale were Bluebell CDs from the Björling Museum in Sweden, books from Amadeus Press, autographed photos and original programs from Harmonic

Autographs, as well as videotapes from Kultur, bumperstickers from JBS,....

At 9:30 Dan Shea welcomed the audience and introduced Kendall Svengalis, the chairman of the day's sessions. Ken began by introducing himself, as a longtime friend of Harald Henrysson. He'd met the Björling family in Sweden some twenty years ago, is a Founding Member of JBS, and with wife Ellen belongs to a Swedish singing group.

Ken then introduced our first speaker of the day, Harald himself, who spoke on his topic "The Björling boys sing their way across America, 1919-1921," Harald handed out copies of his map showing the route from New York to California taken by David Björling and three of his boys, and described his research on their lives during this time. (We have extra copies of that map, for those of you who are interested and might want to help Harald track

down newspaper articles about the family and its concerts. For a copy of the map, contact Harald or Dan.)

For our next session, Andrew Farkas interviewed Anders and Lars Björling about living and travelling with a famous father in great demand around the world. This delightful discussion introduced many of us to Lars, who was attending a JBS Conference for the first time, while Anders by now is a much-appreciated mainstay of all our meetings to date.

After our lunch break, Ken introduced Daniel Guss, Senior Director of Product Development for the RCA Victor Group of BMG, who spoke on "Jussi Björling as an RCA recording artist." After some autobiographical notes that explained his family's deep connections to classical music and especially Jussi Björling, Dan surprised his audience with some very exciting news: RCA's "Re-Discover" series would release the



entire 1955 Carnegie Hall recital of September 24, 1955, on CD during 2003! Most of this concert has never been released on CD, and there are nine songs and arias that have never been heard by anyone outside of the Björling family since 1955. Best of all was the *sound* of two items sampled for us by Mr. Guss: "Svarta Rosor" and "Come un bel dì" from *Andrea Chenier*: As Lars Björling confirmed afterwards, the rich warm tones clearly represented the "real" sound of Jussi's voice much better than did the original LP excerpted from that concert. We can eagerly look forward to RCA's release of this "new" material, probably in autumn 2003.

As it happened, the entire day had gone by with much interesting talk about Jussi, but only two examples of his singing (during Dan Guss's presentation). Our audience was, in retrospect, desperate to hear more of that voice, and luckily our expert analyst and writer **Albert Innaurato** was ready to speak about how Jussi, with his vocal gifts and prodigious technique, epitomized the idea of "The free voice as an expressive instrument." He chose a collection of excerpts from live performances that illustrated how Jussi had the

interpretive freedom to sing "in the moment," as the music and occasion required, "without screaming or crooning." When Albert's time ran out, the audience agreed by acclamation that he be allowed more time to complete his program!

By then it was late afternoon of our first day, and time to get ready for the evening's performance of *Andrea Chénier* at the Metropolitan Opera. Some 60 of our members joined the audience that evening, to hear two venerable singers in excellent form: **Plácido Domingo** and **Aprile Millo**, with the tenor especially producing powerful bright tones during the first three acts, in three demanding arias. As we learned in an announcement at the start of the last act, he was suffering from allergies and had to leave without completing the opera. While his replacement was barely adequate, we were happy to have heard much truly impressive singing from the sixty-one year old master-singer.

Friday, Oct. 25. This day's program was ably chaired by JBS Advisor **Walter Rudolph**, and our speakers during the morning sessions were **Barrett Crawford**, who described the work of the **Leonard Warren**

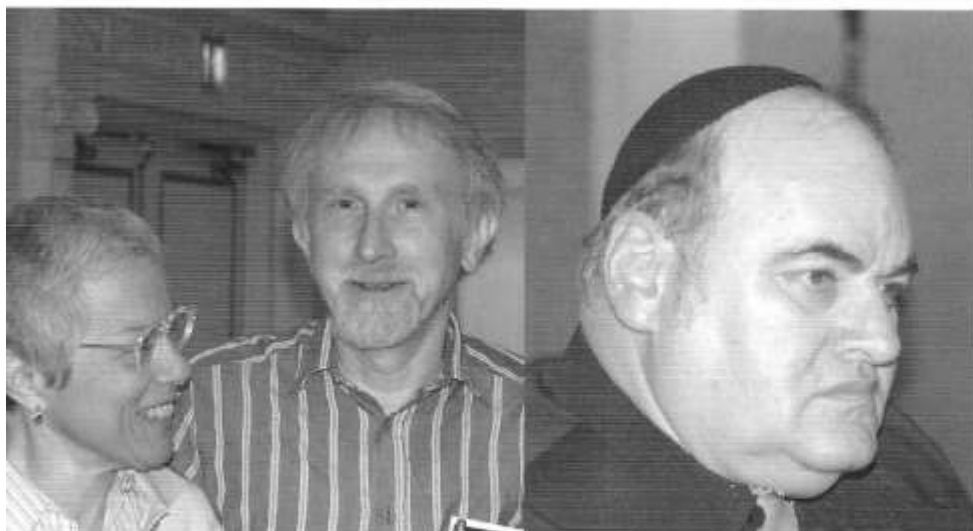
Foundation, and **Robert Zarbock**, who spoke on "Remembering **Zinka Milanov**."

Barry spoke of his "fifteen-year labor of love" to enable the production of a superb 2-CD set of Warren's best recordings, as well as of the well-regarded biography by **Mary Jane Phillips-Matz**. Robert's presentation featured the actual voice of Zinka describing the attributes of her own singing, ever so modestly, followed by the voice itself, in all its breathtaking *bel canto* glory.

The afternoon's sessions continued the theme of "Jussi and Zinka: What the RCA recordings tell us" in a detailed analysis by **Stephen Hastings**, the brilliant young editor of *Musica* magazine in Milano.

We hope we will be able to bring you at least partial excerpts from these talks, in future issues of our publications and in the videotape of our conference: More information on videotapes are announced elsewhere in this issue; and the transcript of **Regina Resnik's** commentary is here as well. Clearly these topics are of enduring interest to all lovers of great singing.

These remarks especially apply to the presentation given by **Seth Winner**,



From left to right, scenes at the New Yorker Hotel: **Barry Crawford**; **Fary Björlin** with **Barbro Ehnbohm**; **Dan Shea** and **Mickey Dove**; **Sue Flaster** and **Harald Henrysson**; **Cantor Don Goldberg** caught in a moment of introspection.

THE JUSSI BJÖRLING SOCIETY - USA, INC. AN INVITATION FOR FRIDAY, OCTOBER 25

Dear friend of the Jussi Björling Society-USA:

We are pleased to invite you to a reception to mark the first New York conference of our Society. Jussi Björling naturally based his American career in this city, at Carnegie Hall and the Metropolitan Opera, and he interacted with members of the Scandinavian community here through special benefit concerts as well as social occasions.

We hope you will join us as we celebrate Jussi's illustrious career, both at our conference at the New Yorker Hotel during October 24-27 and also at our reception in Volvo Hall at Scandinavia House, from 7 PM to 8:30 PM. 58 park Avenue at 38th Street.

We thank Volvo Group and The American Scandinavian Foundation for co-sponsoring this event.

our last speaker on Friday's program. Seth asked, "Will the real Jussi please stand up?" in his "Discussion of remastering techniques and their consequences for the Björling legacy." As a master audio technician, Seth spoke with great authority on various ways a given recording could be represented, clearly a subject of great interest to all members of our Society. In fact, most of us know and are grateful for his classic transcriptions of Jussi material on Pearl CDs. The discussion following this session was especially intense.

Friday evening's schedule offered a reception at the elegant new Scandinavia House on Park Avenue at 38th Street. Thanks to arrangements worked out by JBS Advisor Barbro Ehnbohm and Lynn Carter of the American Scandinavian Foundation, the reception was co-sponsored by ASF and the Volvo Group, and involved some special guests from New York's Scandinavian-American community. A welcome to JBS from Mayor Michael Bloomberg was presented by New York official Brian Andersson, and ASF President Edward Gallagher congratulated JBS for a successful Conference. Spacious

Volvo Hall was filled to capacity, with about 150 guests present.

Saturday, Oct. 26. Our Chairman for the morning session was Dr. Richard Copeman, President of the UK's Jussi Björling Appreciation Society. And on the agenda was some very good news indeed: Harald Henrysson was able to report success in his attempt to recover, in time for the conference, **eight known radio broadcasts made by Jussi between 1945 and 1951 from the Library of Congress.** Just days before our Conference began, the recordings were in fact sent to Harald via Andrew Farkas, together—and unexpectedly—with the audio portion of a 1951 TV broadcast of "We, the People" that featured Dorothy Caruso and Jussi Björling. Samples of Jussi's singing in these broadcasts were offered during the morning: for the first time, we were able to hear Jussi in these songs and arias in good sound. For instance, the 1951 performance of Glover's "Rose of Tralee" was thrilling to hear in clear sound, finally.

More information on these transcriptions is given in Sue Flaster's article following this one.

After a lunch break, famed opera

broadcast commentator George Jellinek escorted a magnificent panel of guests for a discussion of Jussi—the man and his singing: present were Licia Albanese, Lucine Amara, Regina Resnik, Robert Merrill and wife Marion, and Anders and Lars Björling. Our enthusiastic audience lit up the whole hall with their flashbulbs, and the guest stars found themselves besieged with requests for autographs and photos. Best of all was the discussion itself, which was highly entertaining as well as informative and heartfelt.

A rare recording of Jussi with Licia in the "O soave fanciulla" duet, from a 1949 *Bohème* performance in San Francisco, brought the program to an end.

The evening program began with a reception for 120 in the hotel's Crystal Ballroom, followed by dinner and a musical program. Our eloquent and elegant Mistress of Ceremonies, Regina Resnik, mentioned that the program would be as she'd suggested: "short and Swedish, with tenors only"! In fact we were blessed with two fine tenors, Jussi's son Lars Björling and Juilliard student Jean-Paul Björlin, son of another well known musical family in Sweden. They presented a dozen favorite Scandinavian songs in the kind of bright Nordic tones we especially appreciate. Then, with the presentation of JBS's specially-commissioned silver medals to our guests of honor, another great evening came to its end.

Sunday, Oct. 27. Our Sunday brunch brought back many of our group for one last program, and began by honoring two special individuals: Toby Hekler and Janet Björling. Toby has collaborated well with husband Karl, member Bill

Clayton and others to provide helpful advice and assistance with such projects as translations of German-language articles, and our first JBS CD-release (which has now raised well over \$1000 for JBS). Janet also provides JBS with never-failing support and advice, and with husband Anders, warm and gracious hospitality—especially during last year's well-remembered conference in St Peter, MN.

Our program ended with Don Goldberg's program celebrating the career of great American tenor Richard Tucker. Especially interesting were some rare and thrilling recordings from Tucker's early career and the cantorial literature.

For some of us, the fun continued with an afternoon visit to the Caruso Museum in Brooklyn followed by dinner, with host Aldo Mancusi. Next morning a contingent of 20 joined Met Opera Director of Archives Bob Tuggle for a special tour. A few of us attended the following night's performance of *Il Pirata* with Marcello Giordani and Olga Makarina (substituting ably for an indisposed Renée Fleming), and were led by Anders Björling to inspect two Met exhibits featuring Jussi: one for Faust that showed Jussi with Victoria de los Angeles in 1953, and Emil Näsval's bronze bust of Jussi that is permanently exhibited in the artists' gallery.

So much to do in New York! Some, like Enrique Gilardoni, managed to get to hear Anna Moffo's interesting talk on her great career, on Oct. 23 at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. We hoped that she'd be able to join our conference banquet, but that turned out not to be possible—this time: We need to return to New York City!

A Remarkable Cache of Björling Recordings Retrieved from the Library of Congress

By Sue Flaster

The Library of Congress [LC] collects every book published in the United States. They also collect, when possible, copies of radio and television programs which have been somehow preserved, either on disc or tape. Could their archives contain anything interesting for the Björling recorded legacy?

Early in 2000, Cantor Don Goldberg made two trips to the LC to research Jussi Björling radio

broadcasts from the 1930s to 1950s that might be archived there. His report of those excursions was published in Issue 11 of this Journal (Fall 2000). Don had found that indeed the LC is holding a number of radio broadcast tapes and acetate disks containing work by Jussi. In some cases, this material has not been heard since it was first aired nearly 60 years ago; in other cases, broadcast material which has been

Jussi as Pagliaccio with speaking with Enrico Caruso's widow, Dorothy Caruso, in "We, the People."

