

Singer-Sized?

No doubt many of you saw and followed the recent brouhaha about a particular singer's shape—a subject that has surfaced several times in recent years. From *The New York Times* (May 24, 2014) article entitled *What Matters: Singer's Shape, or her Sound?* there was an interesting conversation between Anthony Tommasini, Corinna da Fonseca-Wollheim, and Michael Cooper, about a recent review of Glyndebourne's new *Der Rosenkavalier*. Mr. Tommasini included the following as part of his comments:

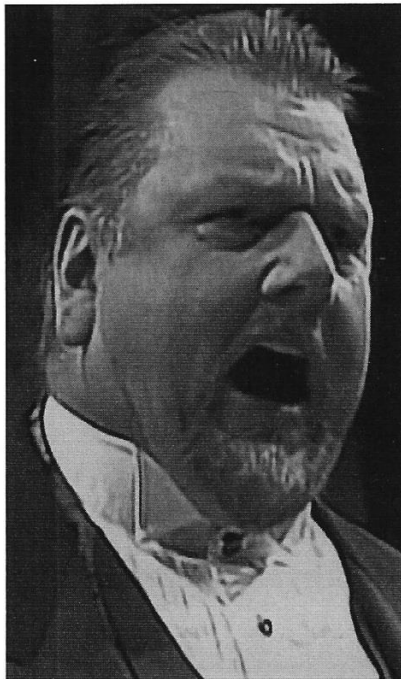
I recently watched again a video of a live television performance from the 1950's featuring Renata Tebaldi and Jussi Björling in the last part of Act I of Puccini's La bohème. Tebaldi looks like an attractive, middle-aged, well-fed Italian lady. Björling, a little stocky, looks like a Stockholm banker. But wow, when they start to sing, they are the essence of youthful desire, longing and passion. Love at first sight has never seemed so possible. And it's not just that the singing is amazing. The dramatic element of the scene is completely convincing. What are Rodolfo and Mimi supposed to look like, anyway? They don't have to be conventionally attractive. They just have to convey attraction to each other.

It reminded me, too, of a frequent comment by the late Giorgio Tozzi.

He would ask, "what's the difference between opera and any other art form? The singing!"

—Walter B. Rudolph

Ben Heppner, Society Honorary Advisor, Retires from Singing



Ben Heppner, the leading Wagnerian tenor of his generation, announced April 24, 2014 that he is retiring from singing. "After much consideration, I've decided the time has come for a new era in my life," Mr. Heppner, 58, said in a statement. "I'm setting aside my career as an opera and concert singer."

Mr. Heppner, a Canadian, rose to fame singing some of the most difficult roles in the repertory, and was especially prized for his Wagner. When he and Jane Eaglen sang in Wagner's *Tristan and Isolde* at the Metropolitan Opera in 1999, Bernard Holland wrote in *The New York Times*: "Opera has found its new Tristan and Isolde, and I wonder if we have ever had better ones."

Mr. Heppner recently became a host of CBC Radio's *Saturday Afternoon at the Opera* and *Backstage With Ben Heppner*, and he said that he looked forward to seeing what else the future might have in store.

I wish to thank the countless people who inspired me, supported me and encouraged me to embark on a fantastic journey over the past 35 years, he said in his farewell statement. A million thanks to those who hired me. Most importantly, I want to thank everyone who ever bought a ticket.

Alexander Neef, general director of the Canadian Opera Company, which recently featured Heppner as Tristan and Peter Grimes, offered these words; "[With Heppner's retirement], we lose one of the most generous performers: someone who has just given all of himself in a performance and that is really something that has grabbed our audience, like very few singers can." (Michael Cooper, *New York Times*, and *CBC News*, April 24, 2014)

The JBS-USA is honored to have Mr. Heppner as one of its Honorary Advisors.



Beniamino Gigli
and Jussi Björling

A High School Rivalry

JBS-USA member, Charlie Layrison recently shared this memory of a high school rivalry. He attended Warren Easton High School in New Orleans from 1942-46 where: *There were two factions—the Björling side and the Gigli side. We on the Jussi side always drove the Gigli guys crazy by telling them that we were leaving them to go home to have a 'Björling adoration hour.'*