

Introducing Web Notes, and Madeleine Drake: she'll be our new guide to Jussi-references on the Internet. Back in Issue 13, our "Jussi in the News" column carried a "classified ad" requesting a volunteer to keep track of interesting items about Jussi on the internet, and then share them with our readers. Earlier this summer Madeleine wrote to us, offering to do just that. She's come up with the following first installment, and we hope you'll enjoy what she's found. Madeleine is a musician herself, read more about her at the end of this column. —Ed.

Web Notes: A Guide to Jussi on the Net

By Madeleine Drake

Welcome to the first issue of Web Notes—a digest version of the many reviews, conversations and informational tidbits about Jussi Björling's life and work that abound all around the Internet. For those of you who already surf the Net, some of this may be familiar. With luck, I may have found a nugget or two that you might have missed. If you haven't yet had a chance to get into the Web, I hope this gives you a glimpse of how Jussi is thriving on the Net, in chat rooms and discussion groups all over the world.



We begin with an important, upcoming vote. No, not the 2004 election. Instead, it's voting time for classical music lovers everywhere.

As many of you already know, Jussi's recording of "Au fond du temple saint" with Robert Merrill was inducted into the very first Classical Recording Industry Hall of Fame. The list includes a number of

great recordings, such as the Pears/Britten performance of Schubert's "Winterreise" and Pablo Casal's recording of the Bach cello suites.

These awards are called "Classys" and are intended to be analogues of Emmys. CRIHoF has two laudible goals: To honor the finest recordings ever made; and to encourage record companies to keep them available.

You can help by nominating your own favorites. Each year there is a deadline of September 30, to submit as many as five nominations. Ingemisco, anyone?

Check it out at: <http://www.recordcollectorsguild.org/phpbb/viewtopic.php?t=3118>

If you don't have access to the Net, you can submit your nominations via mail directly to Founder Randall Goldman via this address:

Classical Recording Industry
Hall of Fame
P.O. Box 1
Kenilworth, Illinois 60043, U.S.A.
or via email: <http://HallofFame.com>



The next item is actually from a few years back, but it still is a great example of how the Net brings the world to you. These are notes from a 1997 talk given by Andrew Farkas for the Music Library Association, Northern California Chapter, shortly after completing his contributions to the book *Jussi*, written in collaboration with Anna-Lisa Björling. For those of us not able to get to California for this talk, thanks to the Web we can enjoy it just the same. Biography, said Farkas, has taken over the publishing field. Readers are eager to find out what the subject of a biography was really like, what the person contributed to the field and how he or she advanced through their career. The biographer must sort through the data, separate fact from fiction and rumor, and "leave no tombstone unturned." Facts must be checked and re-checked. (Playbills and programs, for example, which would appear to be reliable sources of information may in fact contain inaccuracies. A singer scheduled to perform on a particular evening may actually have canceled due to illness or other circumstances.) Even birthdates may be in question. Caruso's father reported his son's date of birth to the local authorities as several days later than it actually was. He was slow in reporting, and wanted to avoid the inevitable fine!

Research—even for a librarian—can be frustrating. Farkas described a query he sent to a library in Paris asking if they had information on Björling. Yes, they did. Farkas went all the way to Paris, only to discover that the "information" they held was a file whose sole contents consisted of a letter from another researcher

requesting materials about Jussi Björling!

Farkas interviewed family, friends, and colleagues of his subjects. Often their stories differed, or conflicted. Farkas, as the biographer, had to resolve or explain these conflicts, or opt to omit the controversy altogether. Less than savory aspects of his subjects' lives (Björling drank heavily; Caruso enjoyed many extra-marital affairs) had to be handled delicately but honestly. And, again, misinterpretation of facts can lead to gossip. A prominent opera expert stated on a Metropolitan Opera broadcast intermission feature a few years ago that Björling once appeared at an opera performance so drunk he could barely stand up. Upon checking the facts, Farkas found that Björling in this instance was suffering from the flu and a high fever, but was not inebriated. The task is to present material in a "scholarly but readable fashion" (the two, says Farkas, are not mutually exclusive), and to document and cite everything. Through-out his talk, Farkas' deeply-rooted sense of integrity concerning the accuracy of his accounts was evident.

Asked how he was able to hold down a demanding full-time job as a library director while producing two scholarly and readable biographies, Farkas answered that he spent all his evenings and weekends writing and doing research. Each book took five years. There will be no more biographies, Farkas stated emphatically. Now it's time to relax and enjoy life." (Source: MLA, <http://www.lib.ucdavis.edu/hss/music/mla/fal97nl.html>)



It isn't just Operaphiles who appreciate Jussi. The following is a student's account of the music clinic given last year in Hawaii by Adolph 'Bud' Herseth, the principal trumpet of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra since 1948:

A key point of his (Herseth) clinics and lessons was that "All music should tell a story." Don't just play the notes, communicate to the listener. He demonstrated this multiple times, playing orchestral parts flawlessly, but blandly, then playing again but with a clear mental image of what he wished to communicate.

In every clinic, someone would ask him who his influences were. He pretty much said that he played the trumpet as he wanted it to sound but that musically, his favorite people to listen to were operatic tenor Jussi Björling and jazz singer Frank Sinatra. Bud stated that the voice is the greatest musical instrument and both of these artists truly communicated through their music....

First, a note on Jussi Björling. Adolph Herseth calls this operatic tenor (1911-1960) his all time favorite musician to listen to. After hearing that, of course I had to go out and buy a Jussi Björling recording (I picked up The Ultimate Collection, RCA 74321 63468 2). I have been listening to Jussi in my car for the past few days and what first struck me was how much his singing, the intensity of his voice, the vibrato, reminds me of **Maynard Ferguson!** I mentioned that to Bud and he agreed, saying that as a boy, Maynard listened to great opera singers and violinists and that was his concept of sound when learning the trumpet. As Bud said, "That's

what it's all about!" Well, from now on, any students of mine that aspire to be principal or lead players are going to be listening to Jussi Björling! I brought my Jussi Björling CD to dinner last night and Bud was kind enough to autograph it 'My Favorite! Bud Herseth.' (Source: posting from Mark M. on <http://abel.hive.no/trumpet/>)



Just last month, the Connect Business Magazine in Southern Minnesota did an article on **Anders** and **Janet Björling**, entitled "Swedish Kontur—The Scandinavian Glass Menagerie." The web page can be found here: <http://www.connectbiz.com/stories/kontur.html>

For those of you who might not have access to the Web, here are a few choice snippets from the article, which features a color photo of Janet and Anders in their shop:

"My father was one of the great tenors," said Anders Björling, co-owner with wife Janet of Swedish Kontur, an upscale St. Peter gift shop on S. Minnesota Ave. "I don't want to sound like I'm bragging, but he was the Pavarotti of his time. A 1999 British poll of music critics rated my father as the No. 1 singer of the twentieth century. Frank Sinatra was No. 62. One of my favorites, Ella Fitzgerald, was No. 48."

Anders grew up with his siblings in Stockholm, always in the shadow of his great father. On balance, he said, life as the son of a famous dad went well, but not when other children teased him. "Anders, why don't you sing a little?" they would say. Rather than a great voice, Anders inherited a talent for numbers. ... and here's a story from Janet:

On one of their first dates, Janet asked him, "What does your father do for a living?"

Anders answered, "He sings."

"What does he sing?"

"Oh, opera, things like that."

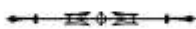
He didn't make much of it. That night Janet was talking with her roommate, a music major, and began to wonder. She said, "You know the Swedish boy I've been dating? He says his father is an opera singer." The roommate looked up from a book. "Oh, who?"

"Jussi Björling."

"Jussi Björling! You've got to be kidding!"

In 1957 when she and Anders were engaged, Jussi invited them to a performance because he wanted firsthand to meet this "American girl" his son would marry. In [Manhasset, L.I.], he opened with a rousing aria. "People just shouted and carried on," she said. "I thought he must be something! I had never anywhere seen an audience react that way. The more he sang the louder they clapped and screamed. At the end of his performance he said to the audience, 'Because you have been so nice to me, I would like to sing 'Because' for you.'"

At that precise moment Anders' mother turned, Janet said, and she said in a thick, singsong Swedish accent, "How corny can you get!" Janet said the experience overwhelmed her; she had neither seen nor heard anything like it.



One of the most important aspects of the Net are the many discussion groups—where everybody gets to have an opinion. Inside various classical groups, composers and per-

formers are argued about and fought over in the greatest detail—sometimes with reason and accuracy—and sometimes not. Wandering recently through two prominent opera groups—rec.music.opera and the OPERA-L list—I found a number of interesting comments about our own favorite tenor.

1. Whose poll is it, anyway?

"Back in Canada there used to be a radio program called 'Gilmore's Albums,' run by the legendary CBC broadcaster Clyde Gilmore from 1956 to 1997. Every now and then Mr. Gilmore would have a comparison: Pav vs. Domingo. The winner would always be his own favorite tenor: Björling."

Andrew Ludasi (Source: 4/15/2003 posting on OPERA-L and subsequent email interview with Mr. Ludasi. See also http://archives.cbc.ca/info/281g_en26.shtml for information on the Gilmore archive at CBC.)

2. Remembering Jerome Hines (Sept. 8, 1921—Feb. 4, 2003).

"... six or seven years ago, he (Hines) took my breath away again, not by singing but by speaking—from the heart—at a fundraiser for the New Rochelle Opera Company in Westchester County. In thanking people for supporting opera, he wanted to remind them of the power of music, especially vocal music. He spoke of an experience with one of his adult sons who was afflicted with a medical condition (forgive me, I can't recall exactly what). As a result of his condition, Mr. Hines said, his son had never cried in his entire life. There had, of course, been many occasions when father and son had listened to music, but it was just a

week or so before this event that they were listening to a recording of Björling singing *La Bohème*. During "Che gelida manina," Hines happened to turn—and for the first time in his life saw tears on his son's face."

Art M. (Source: 2/5/2003 posting on OPERA-L)

For an interesting 1993 interview with Mr. Hines, go to www.josephshore.com/hines/ where Hines gives some authoritative opinions about singing technique. (Some of his comments might help explain Jussi's own vocal longevity—see the discussion of weak larynx muscles there.) Here's just a short excerpt from the start of that interview:

Joseph Shore asks: Jerry, I believe that great singers show how the vocal organs work at their peak efficiency. Therefore, I believe that studying great singers is very important to voice students. They need to learn by observing the peak efficiency of the great singer's art. When you were a young singer, did you learn by listening to other great singers?

JH: To a certain extent. My first record I bought was Jussi Bjoerling and I was thrilled to death. Then I began to listen to Pinza. The singer who influenced me a lot for a while was Titta Ruffo. I remember one day, I asked Maestro Curci, "Which was sounds better?" and I sang the way I thought Titta Ruffo would sing, and then the way I thought Pinza would sing. And Maestro Curci said, "look young man, your voice is so beautiful, if you do something wrong it still sounds right. It's very hard to teach you."

3. Jussi the man

The following opinion was offered

by “Dave” on the rec.music.opera group:

“Bjoerling, a great singer, was not often a great colleague. His recordings show little interaction with his colleagues.”

Here are some reactions: from Karl M.,

“I have to respectfully disagree with Dave. The early-40s *Ballo* with Milanov, the late-40s *Roméo* and *Bobème* with Sayão, the mid-50s *Manon Lescaut*, and the late-50s *Cavalleria* with Simionato (all Met performances) are just a few examples that show Bjoerling could be a passionate singer and a highly interactive colleague. I could name several other examples, most of them, I admit, are in-performance, as opposed to studio recordings. But I certainly think the studio *Bobème* with de los Angeles and the *Cavalleria* with Tebaldi are convincing as well.

“Mildred Miller told me that when singing Siebel to Bjoerling’s Faust, he took special care to calm her when (he) saw (she) was nervous. She has never forgotten his kindness.”

And, from Ed Rosen:

“Robert Merrill has always spoken of Bjoerling in the highest regard, as both colleague, person, and friend [with] many stories about Bjoerling’s wonderful sense of humor, true companionship on stage, and bubbling personality.

“If Bjoerling had problems, drinking or otherwise, he did not let it affect his performances or his interaction with his fellow singers.

“And unlike many great singers, he often and lavishly praised others. Other tenors, that is. We have an interview from the Alan Wagner show “Living Opera” from 1959, and when asked about being the greatest tenor, Bjoerling modestly

talks about other tenors at the Met around that time. He says America should be proud to have two such great tenors as Jan Peerce and Richard Tucker. He says newcomer Carlo Bergonzi is wonderful. He says di Stefano could be ‘king of us all’ if he would use his brain a bit more.

People who knew him say he was a humble man.”

(Source: 4/19/2003 postings on rec.music.opera)



For those of you who might not have heard the news, Guild GmbH of Switzerland has released a new 3-CD set of fragments from SFO performances the 1930’s and 40’s, entitled “San Francisco Opera Gems.” Included in this collection is a 1940 performance of Jussi and Rethberg in *Un Ballo*, Act II. The following review was posted on their site just recently:

“*Un Ballo In Maschera*. This is the poorest sonically but the most vital vocally of this set of discs. Only 24 minutes of the act are included and this fragment derives from rather poorly recorded private sources. Whilst many pitch variations have been corrected there are still problems in this respect as well as surface noise that is particularly intrusive at the start of track 28 (‘M’ami, m’ami!’). ‘Holes’ have been filled with 5 seconds of Hervi Nelli and 20 seconds of Zinka Milanov [from her Met broadcast two months later]. In 1940 no complete recording of *Ballo* had been made and even the ‘Met’ hadn’t managed a performance since 1916! However, the work was suddenly revived in San Francisco, Chicago and New York and has been a staple of the

repertoire ever since. This performance spans two generations. Rethberg (born 1894) had been a ‘Met’ spinto for 20 years whilst Björling had only just begun his international career, soon to be abbreviated as he returned to his native Sweden for the remainder of the ‘War’ years. Both singers display the skill of long-breathed phrases, and vitality of characterization, whilst in their phrasing respecting Verdi’s melody and dramatic thrust. They couldn’t, however, finish the duet together! [Jussi holds on to his high note longer than Rethberg, in track 28.] Bonelli is a full-voiced resonant Verdi baritone who sings with meaning and graceful phrasing. Björling’s personal problems deprived us of a studio recording of his Riccardo, a part ideally suited to his lovely tenor voice. We can but regret having to be satisfied with limited opportunities such as this and despite the considerable limitations involved.”

(Source: guildmusic.com , May/03 review on GHCD2238/39/40)



Another great singer, and fellow performer of Jussi’s passed away recently. The following is an obituary [from Moscow! The Net tends to ignore geography] for the mezzo Fedora Barbieri, whom we remember for many classic recordings from the 1950s [I heard her wonderful Amneris from the stage], as well as for her appearance in the 1985 video *Jussi Björling’s Saga*.

(Moscow) Fedora Barbieri, 82, whose big, rich, dramatic mezzo-soprano complemented vocal titans like Maria Callas, Jussi Björling and Cesare Siepi, died Tuesday in Florence.

She made her Metropolitan Opera debut in 1950, as Eboli in a new production of Verdi's "Don Carlos" on the opening night of Sir Rudolf Bing's regime. Of that performance, Olin Downes of The New York Times wrote that Barbieri was "a superb mezzo from Italy, with a kindling dramatic temperament."

(Source: International Herald Tribune, Monday, March 10, 2003 - <http://www.iht.com>)

Editor's Note: A further comment on Signora Barbieri came from Phyllis Josell, who reminded the Björling-chatgroup what Signora Barbieri said of Jussi during the "Jussi Björling's Saga" TV documentary:

He had "a heavenly voice, which ranged from the forceful to the dramatic—from power to softness. He did what he wanted with his voice." Of Barbieri's singing, let's recall C. L. Osborne's evaluation of her Amneris in the 1955 RCA recording, with Jussi: "Also in peak condition is Barbieri, whose rangy mezzo—deep, roomy and gutsy—gives us a compelling Amneris. She had no reputation for subtlety, but may surprise you with her musico-dramatic alertness." [from the Met. Opera's Guide to Recorded Opera, 1993]

Finally, a few facts you may or may not have known:

Leonard Warren and Jussi, besides singing and recording together, were born in the same year—1911 and died in the same year—1960. Jussi ushered in the Bing era at the Met in 1950 in Verdi's Don Carlo. Ten years later, Warren collapsed on stage at the Met and died almost instantly, singing another Don Carlo, in Verdi's *La Forza del Destino* [and

directly after having sung the recitative "Morir! Tremenda cosa" and aria "Urna fatale"].

(Source: Warren info courtesy of <http://bassocantante.com/opera/warren.html>)

And here's our "Web Opera-quote" for this issue:

"I felt I was painting with a Popsicle."

Robert Merrill, on singing *La Boheme* in English

(Source NY Times, Dec 30, 1975 - posted on bartleby.com)

Well, that's about it for this issue. There's so much information and discussion about Jussi on the Web that I can only highlight a small part of it. And I'm always interested in finding more. Please keep this column in mind, and when you find items that you think will interest other JBS members, feel free to pass them along to me. Thanks in advance for your help!
—Madeleine D.
mmdrake@bctonline.com

Here's a short introduction to soprano Madeleine Drake, and how she first heard Jussi's singing: My voice came from my father, who had the most beautiful untrained voice I've ever heard. My mother was a talented organist and choral director. Both of them were committed to my voice and my training from the word go—which was an incredible advantage in itself. I began singing at the age of 5, in church and local events,

sometimes with my father and my sister, but frequently alone. Behind the scenes, my parents worked to teach me what they knew—about singing and breathing, and about music in general. They were pretty much grounded in sacred music, but when they saw that I was drawn to opera, they gave me every kind of encouragement. My poor father had little use for opera, but when I was about 9, he began taking me every summer to see the Met performances on tour, and never complained once.

My first formal training came at the age of 12, with a local voice teacher. When he saw my talent was beyond him, he directed my parents to the Cleveland Institute of Music. I was accepted and studied via the CIM Preparatory wing for the next 4 years. During this period, I had some of my best experiences vocally. I did some musicals, recitals, and competitions. In addition, I toured Europe with an award winning choir as its soloist, and got to experience an entirely new world of art and history, not to mention a host of performances that I still remember vividly today.

It was via CIM that I first "met" Jussi. I say "met," even though he had been gone for some time by then. My second teacher at the Institute was an incredible coach and deeply devoted to singing. One day, she played Jussi's recording of "Adelaide" for me, so that I could get a sense of proper phrasing.

Well, I didn't like Beethoven (I still don't), and it was some time before I got phrasing down to her satisfaction—or mine. But I got Jussi right away. I was stunned. I was already busy building up my own record collection, but nothing I had heard could compare to the pure vocal perfection that poured out of that throat. I fell

in love then and there and I've been in love ever since.

After graduation, my CIM teacher directed me to Cincinnati Conservatory. At that time, it was one of the top vocal schools in the country; last time I checked it still was. I auditioned along with several hundred others, and was accepted on scholarship to the opera/voice performance program. It was a terrific time; money was pouring into the school via P&G. We had names like Andrew White, Italo Tajo, Robert Evans to study with, and guest work from just about everybody—Bernstein, Schippers, Shaw, Fonteyn, Milnes, etc. I got to do roles and performances I might not have otherwise—Verdi, Puccini, even a fair run of Schubert and Brahms; it was without a doubt, the experience of a singer's lifetime. Also, it was at CCM that my teacher taught me the vocal principles of Lamperti, for which I am eternally grateful. I've used them both in my own performing, and in my teaching, and they have never failed me once.

I got my Bachelor's degree in Opera/Voice Performance and decided to look elsewhere for my graduate work. I moved to Boston, and began performing in various venues throughout New England, while working on my Masters.

But then gradually things changed. I didn't like what was happening to the music world I'd trained in for over 20 years. I watched as some of my friends went directly to NYC and destroyed their voices in record time. Opera was already emphasizing how you looked and acted rather than basic vocal artistry, and I just wasn't suited to that at all. I quit my studies, left my singing career behind, moved across the country

and started an entirely new career and a whole new life.

For the past several years, I've worked as a software engineer, i.e., I design and program software. I get to work from home, with my CD player beside me, and Jussi in my ears. I teach when I find a student who's interesting and who's interested in more than being the next Brittany. I don't attend live performances as much as I used to. While I never got to hear Jussi live, I did get to hear Sutherland and Horne in *Norma*, Robert Merrill as Germont, Martina Arroyo as Lady Macbeth, Mignon Dunn as Delilah, and countless others.

In addition, I've found that the computer world is full of trained musicians who, like me, are not comfortable with professional music as it works these days. We get together in informal settings and perform what we works for us. I've done *Winterreise* with guitar, *Leonora* and *Aida* with recorders,

Dowland with harpsichord, you name it. Right now, I'm working with a harpist friend of mine on a series of French songs and ballads. It's amazing what vocal Debussy sounds like, backed up by a harp instead of a piano. Anyway, it works for me—the idea is to have fun and enjoy lots of music, in lots of ways.
—M.D.

Madeleine Drake



Björling in Verdi's *Requiem*, 1940 Toscanini Broadcast

Here's an interesting review from *The Sunday Times* of London during summer 2003, of a re-release of a performance by Toscanini's NBC Symphony of the Verdi *Requiem*:

"The sound of full orchestra and chorus on this 1940 broadcast of Verdi's *Requiem* is thin, and the work's apocalyptic ending misfires because of a wrong entry by the soprano, a blunder that must have horrified Toscanini. But the strength of this wonderful account of the *Requiem* is not so much its power—great though that evidently was—but its tenderness, warmth, and flexibility (a quality not always associated with the maestro), and the exceptional, and well-recorded, soloists: Zinka Milanov (outstanding, that one slip apart), the splendid Bruna Castagna, Jussi Björling in glorious voice, and Nicola Moscona. (Thanks to David Cairns for bringing this to our attention.)