

# JBS-USA Salt Lake City Conference: we attend a rousing concert

by Sue Flaster



One of the joys of all of the JBS conferences and other meetings has been the chance to attend musical events with friends with whom one shares some very particular and very deeply felt convictions. In New York and Washington, we shared trips to the opera; at the other conferences, there were concerts with performers and music of special interest to our members. That tradition was upheld in splendid manner at the recent gathering in Salt Lake City. President Walter Rudolph arranged for our June 13 special evening to be slotted into the Temple Square Performances series, a tradition based on “expressing and nurturing the highest and noblest aspirations of humanity through the arts.”

We drifted into the Temple Square Assembly Hall, a classic church-like building with wooden pews on both the ground level and in the balcony. The building is quite tall and deep and therefore can have a bit more echo than in more traditional concert buildings. All of that space was richly filled by the voice of Rebecca Pedersen, soprano. Miss Pedersen was a Met National Council Auditions winner, as well as winner of the George London Competition, among her

distinctions. She has performed with the Met Orchestra and NY City Symphony and other ensembles. In Salt Lake City she gave us a ringing Strauss “Cäcilie” as well as “Come in quest’ora bruna,” from *Simon Boccanegra* and “Pleurez, pleurez, mes yeux,” from *Le Cid*. Her tight vibrato and superb intonation were matched with considerable volume, appropriate for the size of the hall.

Banner Smith, our second singer, is a young Utah tenor who has already performed a wide range of roles including Don Ottavio in *Don Giovanni* and Gherardo in *Gianni Schicchi*. Smith chose three items we associate with Jussi Björling and gave us his satisfying interpretations in a voice characterized by lovely timbre and a ringing top. His selections were Tosti’s “Ideale,” “Adelaide” and “Una furtiva lagrima.” He demonstrated a lovely legato, especially in the “Una furtiva,” and a very fine command of dynamics in “Ideale.”

A piano solo by Jarek Oaks (who had earlier accompanied the presentation of *Engelbrekt* to the Conference) provided a change of pace in the program. The piece Jared played was called “Disegno no.3 (Carosello),” and was written by Anders

Eliasson.\* Jared is a terrific musician who has been active as a conductor in Salt Lake City, at the Kennedy Center and at Chicago’s Auditorium Theater. He is currently working on an anthology of early Swedish operatic arias.

This reviewer had no previous experience with the Eliasson piece, and can only comment that the pianist seemed deeply immersed in it. The acoustic qualities of the Hall gave the piano a rather longer duration, and I enjoyed that sound.

The dramatic high point of the concert occurred during the “Weiche, Wotan, Weiche!” JBS President Wally Rudolph made his debut as Wotan from the pulpit steps, providing quite a striking contrast to mezzo Carla Rae Cook. Much more widely known as a Wagnerian than Mr. Rudolph, Ms. Cook has performed most of the appropriate *Ring* and other Wagner roles with the Met, San Francisco Opera, Washington National Opera and Lyric Opera of Chicago to name some. She opened her segment of the program with the “Pie Jesu: from the Duruflé *Requiem*, accompanied by Cordell Clinger on cello, and Robert Stephenson on the pipe organ. Ms Cook picked up a tambourine to provide rhythm support during “Five Hebrew Love Songs,” with music by Eric Whitacre and words by Hila Plitmann. She was accompanied by a string quartet in this cheerful and spirited music. A sheet of translations for all the music performed was especially helpful in this part of the program, as the music was totally new, at least to me.

To me, Ms. Cook seemed to embody the best of what one thinks of as a Wagnerian singer in many ways, having a powerful and flexible voice, and notable height. All of the singers and instrumentalists made themselves available after the concert for photos and closer encounters at the Assembly Hall, and also joined us back at JBS Central (the Plaza Hotel basement) for wine and pie. Dessert came at the end of the concert and our conference, and fulfilled its function. ❖

\*Editor’s note: Composer, Anders Eliasson was born in Borlänge, Sweden