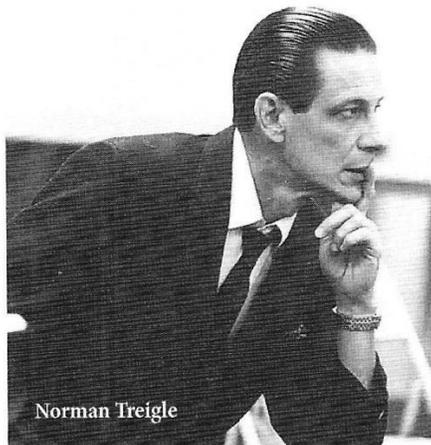


# Norman Treigle remembers his Faust appearance with Jussi on April 1st 1960, Jussi's final operatic performance in the US.

By Tom Hines



Norman Treigle

From the biography, *Strange Child of Chaos: Norman Treigle*, by Brian Morgan, JBS-USA member Greg Fitzmaurice has excerpted for our readers two quotes about the final collaboration between Jussi and the great bass-baritone whose career was tragically cut short by his death at 47 years of age.

Born in New Orleans in 1927, Treigle rose to national fame as one of the leading singers at the New York City Opera. Although approached by the Metropolitan several times, they were all after the term of Rudolph Bing, who only once offered the opportunity for Treigle to cover the Gounod Mephisto (for Nicolai Ghiaurov in 1965). Treigle ultimately refused Met offers to sing *Vespri*, *Prigioniero* (Dallapiccola), *Gianna Schicchi*, and *Don Quichotte*. Before the untimely death of Göran Gentele, there was even discussion of an English language *Boris Godunov*.

As a very young opera singer (23 years of age), he sang the role of Samuel in the cast of *Un ballo in maschera* at the New Orleans Opera in 1950 with Björling as Renato and Suzy Morris as Amelia. His dark-hued voice, even then, was an admirable instrument that would reach its maturity in such leading roles as Boito's Mefistofele and

especially the role of Olin Blitch in Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah*.

Although he recorded very little, his resplendent voice is generously available on YouTube. Of special note are his renditions of popular hymns that are sung with heart-felt intensity. As a Louisiana Cajun (of French Canadian heritage) Treigle's French was excellent; this is displayed in scenes from *Faust* as well as a wonderful YouTube version of "What a Friend We Have in Jesus" sung in English and French!

*April 1st [1960] was Mr. Treigle's final appearance at San Francisco's Cosmopolitan Opera. (The company was to be liquidated on the 26th.) Faust was seen, with Björling, Warenskjold and, in a rare Western appearance by the Soviet Union's foremost baritone, Pavel Lisitsyan (who sang in Russian to the rest of the cast's French!). The San Francisco Chronicle reported that Björling "was in splendid voice, underscoring the general feeling that this is one of his finest seasons to date . . . Treigle was also praised for his strong and dominant interpretation of Mephistopheles as a creature of sardonic evil.*

*In reminiscing years later, Treigle recalled that: "At the old Cosmopolitan Opera . . . we did Faust with no rehearsal. Björling was Faust, and I met him on stage during the Overture. I never worked so hard*

*in my life—he was in the footlights all night, singing like an angel, so there was no danger of colliding with him anywhere else on stage. Tragically, this was the beloved tenor's final stage appearance; he died the following September 9th, in his native Sweden, at the age of forty-nine-years." Treigle sang with many distinguished tenors in Faust, but Björling was the only one who had sung Faust to the Mephistos of both Feodor Chaliapine (at Stockholm in 1935) and Treigle. Indeed, Norman had written Loraine (his wife) during the production:*

*"[Björling] is easy to get along with and doesn't act too much. [He] sure can sing tho, and is in beautiful voice. He flipped over my Mephisto and is going to chew Bing out for not having me . . . He said I was the best he ever worked with, including Pinza and Chaliapine. He hates Siepi's Mephisto. (Brian Morgan, *Strange Child of Chaos: Norman Treigle*, pp. 58-59)*

Treigle only appears on three complete commercial opera recordings: *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* with Sills and Domingo, *Mefistofele* (Boito) with Caballé and Domingo, and *Giulio Cesare* with Sills. For those lucky enough to have them, there are also two superb LPs of arias (sadly not available on CD). ♦

James A. Drake, Andrew Farkas and David N. Tucker at the SLC JBS-USA Conference



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