

A Report from the Jussi Björling Museum

By Harald Henrysson
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Editor's Note: We collect here several reports sent by Harald to the Björling chat group—those reports stand on their own as a record of the varied activities going on in Sweden at the Borlänge JB-Museum and by the Jussi Björling Sällskapet (Scandinavian JB-Society). You may want to consider joining this bjorling@yahoo.com chatgroup, if so email Mickey Dove at mdove9@cox.net.

Subject: A lecture in Örebro about the Björling Quartet.

On 29 April I gave a lecture at the Trinity Church in Örebro about Jussi Björling's connection with that city. I was happy to have the chance to speak in the same church as the boys made their public debut on 12 December 1915. I had never seen the church before, and it was a great surprise to find the large hall, where the boys sang then (and seven times more), to be a beautiful room where 800-900 people could be seated, in excellent shape and hardly rebuilt at all since their appearance there. It seemed that most of the local people who visited the church had never been there either, because it belongs to a Methodist congregation with only 69 members, as I recall. They could not afford to heat the large

hall for my lecture, so I spoke in a smaller one, but we visited the large hall afterwards.

After my lecture, an old man stood up to relate his most unusual memory of Jussi. He had been one of the passengers on the same plane as the couples Björling and Melchior when they flew back to the US after WWII in October 1945. This trip was described by Anna-Lisa on p. 159 in *Jussi*. She also described it in much more detail in a Swedish newspaper article of 1945, where she enumerated all the Swedish passengers, including our new ambassador in Washington, and added "there was one more Swedish passenger, but I can't recall who he was—I hope he forgives me." Evidently that was this man.

I told him that Anna-Lisa had related that a motor stopped, and that the Björlings jokingly blamed the heavy Melchior for that, but he did not remember that. He did remember, however, something which she did not mention. The two great tenors had stood up during the journey and asked for permission to sing to the passengers. So they sang two duets over the Atlantic; this man could not remember which ones, but he remembered that Jussi gave, appropriately, "Till havs" as an encore! Thus, this was the second known joint Björling/Melchior

performance—the first one the lunch for Met boss Edward Johnson in 1941.

I have written an account of David Björling's and the Björling Quartet's extensive activities in Örebro and the surrounding province of Närke, which will soon be published both in an Örebro journal and in the journal of the Scandinavian JBS.

Editor's Note: Concerning this article that Harald has just mentioned, we assure you that when we get it translated, we'll schedule it for publication in this Journal.

Subject: Birgit Nilsson on Swedish radio's "Sommar" program

Every summer for many decades, the Swedish Broadcasting Corporation has on one of its radio channels a daily program called "Sommar" (Summer) where noted and interesting people talk and play their favorite recordings for 1.5 hours. This may be the most popular radio program in Sweden. It is considered a great distinction to be selected for one of these programs.

This year, Yrsa Stenius, author of the latest book about Jussi, was heard on one of the programs and played several of his recordings. Two other "summer hosts" whom I have heard also played him, and a few days ago Birgit Nilsson appeared with a program, entertaining and interesting as could be expected. Among the artists whose recordings she played were Zarah Leander, the Swedish singer who was the most popular singer in Germany during the Nazi era and Birgit's early idol, and, besides herself, three classical singers. These were Cecilia Bartoli, Thomas Quasthoff (whom she gave

special praise) and Jussi (with "Salut demeure").

Birgit took up the sad story about Solti's *Ballo* recording, and although she had not yet arrived in Rome when Jussi left, she declared she was quite sure that he was not drinking then (as the producer Culshaw had stated; she did not mention Culshaw's name). She repeated the words that the frustrated Jussi would have said to Solti "You go home and study your part, I know mine" (which she has once told me personally she has from a reliable source), and also that Jussi later tried in vain to reach an agreement so that the recording could continue. She described Jussi as "a really fine colleague, warm and hearty, natural and unaffected."

Birgit sharply condemned "provocative, ignorant stage directors and stage designers" who are abundant today. Among the stories she told there was one about President Johnson's wife sitting in Rudolf Bing's box at the Met. Bing discovered that her chair was defective and when she stood up for a moment, he tried to replace it without telling her. But she sat down swiftly with the result that she fell to the floor, with much embarrassment.

Hans Thunström has written for our next Sällskapet journal an account of the role Jussi's recordings played in all this year's "Sommar" programs. According to his count, no fewer than SEVEN of these programs mentioned Jussi and played his recordings.

NOTE: in snailmail from Stefan Olmås dated 2003-07-08, he says

"I just got email from Harald. National Swedish Radio has in summertime a program "Sommar" every day from some wellknown Swede

who has about 90 minutes to talk rather freely and play the music they like. Yrsa Stenius was on one of these recently. Also another summer talker played Jussi records and mentioned the museum too. On Friday 11 July there is a program containing an old radio interview with Jussi.

And on the 9th of August there is a broadcast on SR with Jussi's recordings from 1954 of Cav/Pag."

Subject: Some recent recognition of our Museum.

Good news for me is an unexpected and very positive article—the journalist had not contacted me—about the museum, in one of Denmark's largest newspapers, Information, in its series "Remarkable Museums."

"Every incarnated Jussi Björling fan - and there are thousands of that category even now, 43 years after the singer's death—should at least once in his life go to Borlänge, the largest city in Dalarna, to visit the small museum that is devoted to the memory of the famous Swedish tenor."

Subject: Ingrid Palm—enthusiastic supporter of the JB Sällskapet and Editor of its journal *Tidning*.

Yesterday (October 19, 2002), Yrsa Stenius discussed her book on Jussi at the museum to two crowded adjacent auditoriums. There is considerable interest in this book and we'll be reporting and commenting about it on future occasions.

This is mainly to report how shocked I was, when I saw Ingrid Palm there; I might not have recog-

nized her if I had not known she would be attending. The once so robust person was thin, frail, pale and looked at least ten years older. Her daughter had brought her to the meeting, a 3 hour trip. Ingrid had told me only a few weeks ago via telephone that her cancer had returned and spread to an area where it was not possible to treat it, so I understood she could not have much time left.

I was astonished that she still wanted so eagerly to make the long journey to the museum. I was able to talk a little talk with her, get her a good seat and hand over the new Bluebell CD as a gift. She said she actually felt a little better, and I understand she was glad to be there.

When I returned from the museum the next day, our mutual good friend Bo Persson called. Ingrid's daughter had just called to let him know that Ingrid died this morning. Evidently the cause was a heart attack, perhaps precipitated by the difficult journey.

I do miss Ingrid, who was a great person and good friend!

Harald

Ingrid Palm

