

# The Björling Societies Meet at the Glyndebourne Festival, June 2003

By Des Lockett, Stefan Olmårs, and Dan Shea

You may recall our invitation, offered in last April's JBS Newsletter #6, to attend England's Glyndebourne Opera Festival with other Björling Society members. The big attraction last summer was to be a new production of *Tristan und Isolde*, a first-time ever performance of Wagner in Glyndebourne.

Tickets for Glyndebourne are always just about the toughest opera tickets of all to find, and the *Tristan* ticket was in especially great demand: there would be a dream cast of fresh-voiced young singers, with the *Tristan* and *Isolde* chosen to be new to their parts: American-born tenor Robert Gambill and Swedish soprano Nina Stemme would prepare their roles with director Nikolaus Lehnhoff, and be accompanied by baritone Bo Skovhus, bass René Pape, mezzo-soprano Yvonne Wiedstruck, and conductor Jirí Belohlávek.

The Björling Society was able to get a promise of a small block of tickets, thanks to the kind assistance of Robert Gambill. As it turns out, Dan is a long-time admirer of the young tenor, whose career he's followed in Germany as well as in the USA, and in a wide variety of well-regarded recordings. Since the Iraq war had begun a few weeks before our offer of tickets, it's clear that many of our members decided to avoid travel and our opera-group ultimately consisted just of five: Stefan and his daughter Karin, Des,

Dan, and Robert's delightful wife, Sabine Gambill.

An advantage of a small group is that logistics would be easy, and we were able to meet in Glyndebourne for an early picnic followed by serious eating and drinking during the two long intermissions required by *Tristan*. In the spirit of the place, the men wore tuxedos. And following the opera, Robert and Sabine invited our group to meet them at the performers' pub next to the theater. It was great fun, and continued for two more days as some of us attended rehearsals (*Nozze di Figaro*) and a bold new production of *Bohème*. The nearby towns of Lewes and Brighton offered good tourism, as well.

Thus our trip involved some great music of Wagner, Mozart, and Puccini in superb productions that were getting rave reviews, as well as fine social times together with opportunities to learn some inside information about the opera season directly from the artists involved. What could be better! Our thanks again to Robert and Sabine for their generous hospitality.



Sabine and Robert Gambill with Des Lockett at the Pug 'N' Whistle

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