

Also in this issue we present two favorite columns, Hal Sokolsky with some notes on Jussi's "Recorded Legacy" and Carla Ramsey with "Jussi in the News." We hope you'll enjoy our continuing efforts to improve this *Journal*!

—Dan Shea



Bertil Bengtsson at Gustavus, June 29



## The Gustavus Conference

June 28 – July 1, 2001

By Bill Clayton, Mickey Dove and Dan Shea

**W**e came, we met, we listened—to some great singing, and some first-class commentary on the singing, at our JBS Conference at Gustavus Adolphus College. And we talked—many opinions were aired. For the "consumers' report" we refer you to Bill's survey of the members who attended, in the next article. Here we give an overview of the conference events as a whole, from start to finish.

Most people arrived on Wednesday, June 27, coming from 16 states and the U.K. (Des Lockett, Liz and Ray Harsant, Don Thomson), Chile (Maria-Luisa and Enrique Gilardoni), Sweden (Elaine Karlsson, Bertil Bengtsson), Israel (Mati Zeiti), Italy (Stephen Hastings)

and Brazil (Dorian Bruzzi). The basic group staying on campus numbered just over 50, with area visitors augmenting the audience for the main sessions. By evening our group had taken over the common room at our campus hotel, the Carlson International Center, and informal listening/ discussion sessions were in full swing.

Thursday morning brought the group to nearby Jussi Björling Recital Hall, a beautiful hall seating 450 attached to the music department's facilities. The main events of the day were Bertil Bengtsson's 90-minute discussion of "Great Royal Swedish Tenors," which featured several rare recordings of Jussi's predecessors Arvid Ödmann, David Stockman and Martin Öhmann in roles such as Turiddu, Roméo and Des Grieux, and presentations by Bill Clayton, Sue Flaster, Karl Hekler and Enrique Gilardoni on "other" singers they love, in this case Richard Crooks, Elly Ameling, Lauritz Melchior and Miguel Fleta, respectively. Then came a social highpoint, an evening gathering at the home of Anders and Janet Björling for drinks and light buffet—also present were family members and area friends. As pictures will attest (see following article), it was a lovely party—with delightful people everywhere, in the garden, on the porch, in the house.

Friday's sessions began with Stephen Hastings' discussion of "Jussi Björling as Verdi Tenor," a comprehensive analysis of Jussi's recordings of live and studio performances. Stephen stressed the

Italian perspective on these roles and offered recorded comparisons with an honor roll that included Caruso, Bergonzi, Lauri-Volpi and Pertile. By the end of his searching discussion, it was clear that Stephen had provided JBS with its perfect homage to Verdi, in this anniversary year. As with all our sessions, enthusiastic discussion followed (talk was never in short supply). After a lunch-break, we heard **George Jellinek's** Vocal Scene radio program comparing two great lyric voices who left us too soon: Jussi and Fritz Wunderlich. Since that program compared only opera arias, member **Young So** supplied some examples of the two singers in Lieder by Beethoven. Next we were treated to **Anders'** discussion of his own personal favorite music, much of which involved special family associations. Thus we learned what Jussi thought of Louis Armstrong's voice, and what comment he made to son **Lasse** as they listened at home to a Swedish Radio broadcast of Jussi's classic 1938 recording of "Nu är jag pank och fågelfri" from Millöcker's *Der Bettelstudent*.

(We have to repeat now that most of the conference was videotaped, so you'll be able to fill in the details of what we're just sketching here, if you wish to obtain those tapes. Further, we'll attempt to get written versions of some of these talks, to publish here for you.)

After dinner at Gustavus' very pleasant student cafeteria, we returned to Björling Hall for Bertil's three-hour production called "Jussi Björling: The Legendary Tenor Presented in Sound, Words and Pictures." If this sounds like a marathon, we have to admit that the claim of three hours is an exaggeration, since thirty minutes of that time was taken for a coffee break, complete with birthday cake to cele-

brate the day: fortuitously, Bertil's 39th birthday! And the rest of the time flew, thanks to the quality of Bertil's discussion and the audio and visual material compiled by Bertil and his associate, **Hans Thunström**.

Saturday morning began with more discussion by JBS members of "other singers we love." **Greg Fitzmaurice's** choice was Igor Gorin, and Greg made a good case for "the Björling of baritones." **Walter Rudolph** had prepared a special 45-minute tribute to **Giorgio Tozzi**, who was present with his delightful wife Monty. Walter's moving presentation certainly provided the emotional high point of our conference, as it covered the great career of this marvelous gentleman. Andrew Farkas added his own personal commentary, and then Giorgio gave a graceful response full of wisdom about his life as a performer, and his and Jussi's friendship.

The day progressed with a discussion by **Robert Tuggle** of the challenges of writing and publishing operatic biography. Bob was joined in this by **Andrew Farkas**, and their unusually frank and witty commentary gave a vivid picture of the current state of this field, clearly of special interest to our members. Don't expect to hear such a forthright exchange on "Opera News on the Air" any time soon! The afternoon concluded with panel discussions led by **Walter Rudolph** on "Jussi Björling, the Man and the Artist," and by **Karl Hekler** on "Jussi Björling in Live Performance." Participating in these panels were Andrew, Anders, Giorgio, Stephen, Bertil and **Ed Walter**.

Saturday night's conference banquet brought together over 100 celebrants at Gustavus' elegant Alumni Hall. College officials **Stephen Hogberg** and **Axel Steuer** spoke elo-

quently of the educational missions our groups share, and Gustie alumnus and writer/"radical humorist" **Bill Holm** connected Minnesota, Iceland, Jussi and the state of today's American and Icelandic youth in some wise and hilarious ways. Along the way it became clear that this grandson of Icelandic immigrants knows his music and his Jussi Björling lore, and he declared his intention to join our Society. We look forward to his essay fitting Jussi into his own special worldview, for publication in this Journal.

And we did some Society business: In recognition of **Anders Björling's** essential guidance to our Society as a leading member of our Advisory Board, and especially for his constant involvement with planning for this conference, the JBS Board of Directors presented Anders with its "Jussian of the Year" award. The Board also presented special service awards to **Ellen Lienhard** and **Bill Clayton**, for their useful work in helping JBS to continue functioning. On the other hand, Anders did a turn-about and presented **Mickey Dove** and **Dan Shea** with plaques recognizing their efforts in founding and advancing this Society. In defense of this part of the program, it must be said that all parties kept their speeches fairly short!

The program continued with an auction of many impressive Jussi-cological items: An autographed program from a 1934 Malmö concert, complete with validating items provided by Harald Henrysson, went to **Dick Soderquist**. A laminated poster of the cover of *Jussi*, the biography, went to **Anders Björling**. Bob Tuggle had contributed a copy of his well known book *The Golden Age of Opera*, and **Mike Mutchler** bid successfully for that and then donated it to the music library at Gustavus.

Mike did the same thing with one of the copies of issue 110 of the Italian magazine *Musica*, which contains the original Italian version (and an excellent gallery of photographs) of Stephen Hastings' fine article "Jussi Björling: The Supreme Singing of a Shy Man" which appeared in Issue 12 of this Journal. Many other items were snapped up: Jussi's concert and opera programs, official backstage photos from the Met's opening night of *Don Carlo*, and other essential items. Our superb auctioneer was **Walter Rudolph**, an expert from many Public Radio auctions past, and he helped keep the proceedings entertaining. At the end of the exercise, JBS had gained about \$3000, a source of great relief to us—representing the Board of Directors—in our efforts to stay solvent while operating as effectively and conspicuously as we can, attempting to fulfill the high objectives of our mission statement. As a fitting cap to our long evening, tenor member **Kevin Carlson** sang "Land, du Välsignade" with accompaniment by Gustavus Professor of piano **John McKay**.

Sunday morning brought one more talk, by Cantor **Don Goldberg**, who spoke on "Jussi and his baritones" in the cozy confines of the Carlson Center. Then we began arranging to re-enter the real world, with many of us postponing departure a bit by riding our conference bus to the American Swedish Institute in Minneapolis, where Kevin Carlson gave a full-scale concert of Swedish songs.

For some of us, the madness would continue with a JBS-sponsored excursion to Santa Fe for some live opera. A report on that can be found elsewhere in this issue. For everyone, the question is: When and where can we do this again? We may have an answer for that question, very soon!

## Some "Consumer-reactions" to the Gustavus Conference

By Bill Clayton

**A**fter returning home from the Gustavus conference, I put out two email requests to all who attended for their reactions to our collective experience. I was quite gratified with the number of responses as well as the variety, strength, and good humor of the opinions offered. I have culled from them the following categories, and I have done my best to see that every respondent is represented at least once. Those who appear more often do so because they wrote at considerable length about a variety of reactions.

### Sharing Opinions

*Allan Wilkinson:* I found the camaraderie to be remarkable—lots of very interesting and crazy people with a variety of ideas put together in a relatively small place for a few days.

*Carla Ramsey:* How many Jussiphiles does it take to screw in a light bulb? One, because if there are more than one they will do nothing but talk nonstop and the job will never get

done! For me, the conference was the experience of a lifetime—one I am still reflecting upon and savoring—a magical blend of stimulating conversations with people from all parts of the globe combined with world-class presentations. There are no words to describe what it's like to be sitting teary-eyed among an auditorium full of others who have the same response to the "Supreme Singing of a Shy Man," as Stephen Hastings described our beloved tenor.

*Jerry Kaufman:* I came to the JBS conference as someone standing close to, but still outside the Jussi Björling tent. I left the conference with the warm and contented feeling that I've moved back inside that tent. Thanks to all who helped rekindle the flame for me and made the event so special.



Above: Stephen Hastings and Walter Rudolph.



Left: Allene Cash, Bertil Val and Eldon Wolf, Young So and Leigh Metcalf at the Bjorlings' garden party.