

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 baritone" 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

After 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.



Micky Dove serves up birthday cake (above) Giorgio Tozzi and Bertil Bengtsson (below).

Michael Mutchler: To me the conference was a first in a lifetime experience to meet and talk with others who were unashamedly in love with Jussi and his artistry. Many of my associates in my former working life did not know who Jussi was or tolerated my discourse when I got carried away. It was a pleasure to listen to people and share with those who are even more carried away.

Beau Kaplan: If we individuals had remained in solitude admiring Jussi like hermits in the desert (which is how I used to feel), even he sooner or later would be forgotten. But coming together as we did in Minnesota stokes the flame of remembrance and Jussi thereby lives on for us and those that follow.

Lynn Cook: On a purely personal note, I was fully expecting to lurk in the background while listening to

esoteric, scholarly discussions & not daring to say a word—how exciting to find out (immediately) how wrong I was.

Bea Bobotek: I did really enjoy the informality of the “after hours” events, and the fact that we got to know some persons well enough to raise eyebrows or emit silent “oh not agains” to some behaviors of some of the participants. Perhaps that’s the real mark of success of group activity.

Bill Clayton: My point is very much like Bea’s. It has to do with a wonderful phenomenon of sharing disparate opinions, strongly presented, but without rancor. I offer three examples, all involving myself. (1) I was in a group at the Björlings’ reception, “talking shop,” and, out of the blue, declared Leopold Simoneau to be the best tenor in the general French repertoire, to which someone remarked that he is greatly overrated. (2) Later I offered that I virtually revere Alfredo Kraus and Walter R. agreed that “Kraus is god.” However, someone else opined, “Kraus is also greatly over-rated.” (3) My favorite example occurred the next morning at breakfast. Someone said how much he enjoyed Harbison’s *The Great Gatsby* at the Met. I objected that “any opera whose chief *encomium* is its good jazz music cannot have much of a score. Besides, the opera makes it seem like the story is about Gatsby when any reader knows it is Nick’s story.” The other party and I agreed to disagree. The point of all this is that in these encounters, and some others I was privy to, conflicting opinions were given freely without (apparently) hurt feelings or the feeling of being “flamed” as sometimes on the Internet. Perhaps it is making such exchanges *in person* rather

than in writing which makes the give and take such fun and so enlightening. If for no other reason, this might be justification enough for such conferences.

Leigh Metcalf: I thoroughly enjoyed the conference. My memory of everything is still so clear, as if it had all happened just last week. It was an experience I will never forget. And to be able to meet so many people with the same interests!

Speakers

Ray Harsant: “Other Singers We Love” included Richard Crooks—one of my other favorite tenors although not quite in Jussi’s class. I thought Stephen Hastings’ talk was absolutely outstanding—so erudite, intelligent and well presented with illuminating examples that convinced me that Jussi was the best Verdi tenor of the 20th century. The talk on Giorgio Tozzi was fascinating, and it was extremely moving to be part of the standing ovation and hear Giorgio’s beautifully phrased reply. His speaking voice has that rich warm velvet quality that we remember from his recordings. Anders’ presentation was naturally full of rare insights and his presence at the conference added a very special dimension. It was a delight to meet Robert Tuggle and Andrew Farkas—both such intelligent, literate and humorous gentlemen. Bertil’s presentations were both excellent—I think he has a better English vocabulary than I do! We particularly enjoyed his “JB—the Legendary Tenor.” The pictures and recordings were very well chosen and reproduced. Bertil should offer this talk to major opera organizations throughout the world. I loved Karl He kler’s description of hearing JB for the first time in *Trovatore*. His

phrase that JB's top notes were like lasers was so true! I envy few men, but with Karl's having heard Jussi 33 times, he is definitely one of them !

Terry Williams: If I were asked to select one feature of the conference that I most treasure, it would have to be Bertil's program Friday evening. Following right on the heels of that choice would be Walter Rudolph's tribute to Giorgio. Bravo to both Bertil and Walter.

Ward Murray: The highlights for me were the second Bertil Bengtsson presentation showing pictures and videos of Jussi with selected songs, and the very moving tribute to Giorgio Tozzi, by Walter Rudolph.

Walter Rudolph, ace auctioneer in full swing (below) Sue Flaster and Toby Hekler show Bertil some photographs (bottom).



Bill C.: I was thrilled to find that so many people knew Richard Crooks. This fact simply confirms again what a remarkable group our Society is. I obviously had been moving in the wrong circles!

John Skaar: To my surprise I was the only one who brought something sung by the distaff side, i.e. Ewa Podles—contralto/mezzo from Poland. I think our colleagues were impressed, I was asked to make copies for four of them—which I will. What a nice interlude to break up the fairly-tightly structured—but wonderful—programs on Jussi. As always we celebrated "our Jussi" ad infinitum.

Sue Flaster: The presentations were varied and inspiring, and the speakers were terrific. Giorgio Tozzi was a revelation: what an incredibly beautiful man.

Eldon Wolf: Bertil Bengtsson's presentation at the conference giving a history of great Swedish tenors was very impressive. His research to find and play recordings from the past allowed us to hear voices we have never heard before. Photographs with accompanying recordings gave life to the presentation. Bill Clayton's choice of "other favorite singers" turned out to be Richard Crooks. Valerie and I were each exposed to the singing of Richard Crooks because we had mothers who loved his voice and collected his recordings. The selections of played by Bill triggered nostalgia for us, for we remembered the music and lyrics we heard many times during our childhood. We enjoyed Giorgio Tozzi on the discussion panel with the other participants. Good humor and some

laughs kept up a lively pace. On Saturday morning at Björling Hall, Giorgio and his wife Monte were seated in the audience when Walter Rudolph proceeded to honor Giorgio for his achievements. Then Giorgio rose from his seat to speak spontaneously to the audience. His charm, wit, and dignity gave us an electrifying experience. The ovation for him was delightful! And I must throw my hat very high with cheers for Cantor Don Goldberg for his Sunday morning talk, at the end of the conference, when we'd left Björling Hall and moved to the lounge in the dormitory building where Don presented his topic, "Jussi and His Baritones." The room was small and intimate with fewer in attendance than the larger hall. If you weren't there you missed a sensational part of the conference. Don's enthusiastic and knowledgeable descriptions of the baritones who performed with Jussi were full of delightful tidbits both musical and personal. We also heard of the great admiration and respect between Jussi and his baritones. The recordings we heard were of some of the most memorable performances in grand opera. Many thanks to Don Goldberg for his energy in creating a stimulating presentation to close the JBS conference 2001. It was wonderful!

The Venue

Allan: Remarkable also was the quality of the food service at GAC, quite unlike what I remember from my college days elsewhere.

Sue: The dorms, food, public areas, and PEOPLE at the college were just incredible. I can't think of anything which wasn't really lovely.

Ward: Although there may have been fewer participants at this con-

ference than in Washington, there seemed to be more interaction among the participants. As a result, established friendships were reinforced and new friendships flourished. I think that this was due to the relative isolation of the location with no outside distractions

Bill: As an academian of some 40-plus years' experience, I love interesting campuses, and for me Gustavus Adolphus College was a delight. The dorms and community room were delightful and convenient. The "cocktail hours" offered much chance for visiting. The dining hall food was excellent. The staff members, both professional and student aides, were constantly friendly and helpful.

Eldon and Valerie: The setting at the Gustavus campus was very friendly and appropriate for our second conference. The campus was a lovely place to reunite with JBS friends we made at the first conference in Washington, DC a couple of years ago.

Appreciation of Anders and Janet

Eldon: The dinner celebration at the home of Anders and Janet was very special. The gracious sharing of their home allowed us to see the family pictures on the wall, to share the pictorial history of Jussi and his lovely family. It was a warm feeling to be welcomed in that home. It was very special, and we'll always remember that.

Carla: It was truly a privilege to meet and hear Anders and Janet at the Conference. I appreciated not only Anders' sharing of his considerable knowledge about his father's career and opera in general, but his and Janet's grace, humility, and generosity.

Ray and Liz: The cocktails and buffet at Anders' and Janet's lovely home and garden were a major highlight—what an absolutely nice and natural couple they are!

Bill: First, I especially enjoyed the venison! But most remarkable were the grace and warmth shown to us by Janet and Anders. Something quite magical happened relative to the party and that lovely home. During the week the weather had been quite hot and humid, with threats of rain, and I can imagine that Janet and Anders were apprehensive. Then suddenly, just after we had convened on their beautiful back lawn, the rain clouds dispersed; the humidity dropped; and the sky turned from a milky chalk to a brilliant blue. Jussi must have been looking out for us. And Anders was a constant source of friendship and sharing during all phases of the concert. We owe him an infinite debt for his part in arranging this conference. How fitting that Anders was honored at our final banquet as "Jussian of the Year."

Sue: We were all moved by the warmth and kindness of Anders' and Janet's hospitality. The evening was really a high point of the conference for me: there was so much more to be learned and appreciated in such an evening of fellowship sometimes than in the more scholarly moments of a conference—especially this kind of conference, where a community of emotion is what brings us together.

Greg: It was obvious, almost from the very beginning of the conference, what high regard Gustavus Adolphus has for Anders Björling. I think that the magnificent help we received from the people in the Björling concert hall was directly due to Anders and his relationship with

them. And at the banquet, when the President of the college extended his welcome to us, I was amazed at the warmth and generosity he showed to our group. This and his extension of an offer to return was, no doubt, directly related to his regard for Anders as well. It was great also that Anders was willing to auction off a tie that Jussi wore and to present a second one to Dan Shea. He also presented an autographed photograph of Jussi to Mickey Dove, for her many contributions to JBS's operations. It is very thoughtful of Anders to share some of his father's memorabilia with those of us who admire his father so greatly. Anders' talk at the conference in regards to the music that he liked showed what delight he had in the recordings his father left behind him. I was glad to hear that Anders and I share a love for the same performances and wishes for what Jussi might have also performed and recorded. He was honest and straightforward in his presentation—even to including some of his favorite non-Jussi pieces. Let me also say that the dinner buffet and gathering at Anders and Janet Björling's house was truly wonderful. It was very thoughtful of them to do it, and it was an occasion filled with great warmth and camaraderie. I must also compliment Anders on his wonderful landscaping and how beautiful his yard, plants, shrubs, and trees were. I also do my own yard work and I know what it takes to achieve what Anders has done there. It was truly beautiful and added so much to the evening. My thanks go out to Anders and to Janet for their wonderful hospitality.

(As usual, the preceding has been slightly reworked by your Editor. —D.S.)