

# The Smithsonian Presents Bertil Bengtsson on Jussi: A Swedish Tenor's American Odyssey

By Dan Shea, based on reports from Bea Bobotek, Enrique Gilardoni, Beau Kaplan and Don Pruitt

**A**s Bertil Bengtsson prepared for his two presentations at the JBS Conference at Gustavus, he received a welcome invitation from the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC: Thanks to information provided them by JBS member Bea Bobotek, they knew of his availability to speak on Jussi and his career: it would be an attractive program for their continuing lecture series. Bertil worked out some agreements

between the Smithsonian and the Embassy of Sweden and accepted. By the time June 26 arrived, word had gone out in the monthly Smithsonian Associates magazine and a nearly sold-out audience of over 200 would appear for the "evening seminar and light buffet reception" at the modern Ring Auditorium of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. The whole event was presented "in cooperation with the Embassy of Sweden and the Jussi Bjoerling Society-

USA," in view of some fine cost-sharing and planning expertise shared by the Embassy's Cultural Counselor Nancy Westman, Smithsonian officials and JBS, working with Bea's leadership.

Thus Bertil and his friend Elaine Karlsson added Washington to their itinerary, and joined friends Bea, Beau Kaplan and Enrique and Maria-Luisa Gilardoni there, as well as Embassy officials Nina Ersman and Margareta Paul. The event itself was a big success: Bertil gave his fine lecture, a variant of what he was to present at Gustavus, amply illustrated with recordings, slides and videotapes, including a Firestone Hour "Flower song" from Carmen, and a "La donna è mobile" from the Ed Sullivan Show. The slides showed Jussi with Anna-Lisa in costume for *Roméo et Juliette*, a backstage shot at the Met of Roméo with Anders and Lars standing with "the kissing lady" Bidú Sayão, and candid shots of Jussi with Anna-Lisa relaxing in

Bermuda and Hawaii. The distinguished audience was in fact very enthusiastic, and an elegant reception followed. Thanks to Don Pruitt's snapshots reproduced here, you can get some sense of the occasion. We were especially pleased with his photo of Bertil conferring with Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, assume the discussion was of Jussi and opera—rather than some fine point of US or Swedish jurisprudence. (Actually,

Justice Ginsburg is a well known supporter of the arts in Washington, and has been interviewed on a Met Opera broadcast intermission, so her interest in Jussi was not so surprising.)

*For more on Justice Ginsburg, see page 17.*



Clockwise from upper left, Jussiphiles at the Hirshhorn Museum; Alla Pruitt, Elaine Karlsson, Enrique y Maria-Luisa Gilardoni, Bertil; Bertil and Justice Ginsburg; Enrique och Bertil.