



Göran Forsling

In the summer of 2015 a new opera about Swedish tenor Jussi Björling was premiered. It is based on journalist Yrsa Stenius's book *Tills vingen brister* (2002), available in English translation as *The Heart of Jussi Björling*. The libretto is by Greta Sundberg. The music is composed by Mats Larsson Gothe, who recently had a great success at Norrlandsoperan in Umeå with *Blanche och Marie* about Nobel Prize Winner Marie Curie and her assistant and friend, Blanche Wittman.

Jussi Björling died of heart failure at the age of 49 and after almost 45 years as a singer, having made his debut (age 4) together with his father and his two brothers. They toured extensively in Sweden and the

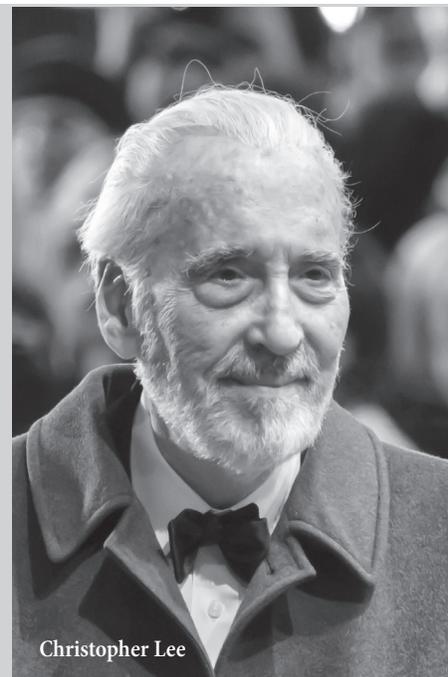
United States for ten years and appeared in more than 1000 performances. After the death of his father, Jussi Björling was able to study singing and made his operatic debut at the Royal Opera in Stockholm when he was 19. After successful guest appearances in Budapest and Vienna in the mid-1930s, he arrived at the Metropolitan Opera in New York, where he was one of the brightest shining stars for more than 20 years.

The opera is entitled *Silverfågeln (Silver Bird)* and it was produced at The Concert Barn in the little village of Vattnäs, close to Mora in the province of Dalarna (Dalecarlia) in central Sweden. Jussi Björling was born in Borlänge in Dalarna and had close relations with Mora in his youth. The premiere was on 10 July and *Silverfågeln* was performed six times in total—all sold out. (*It was broadcasted in its entirety by Swedish Radio on August 8th.*)

There are at the time of writing negotiations concerning performances in the USA next year, the Swedish Embassy has been involved and when everything is settled the libretto will be translated into English.

The opera is controversial insofar as it focuses on Jussi Björling's alcoholism—so much so that it gives a very lopsided picture of him as an artist and the portrait of his wife Anna-Lisa is far from flattering.

For further information see review on <http://seenandheard-international.com/2015/08/broken-winged-silver-bird-but-it-flies-on-the-wings-of-music/> ♦



Christopher Lee

## Sir Christopher Lee— *'I still believe I was born to be an opera singer'*

*Edited by Walter B. Rudolph*

The actor Christopher Lee, who died at the age of 93 on June 7th, 2015, may have appeared in more films than anyone of his generation. Best known for portraying villains with his 6'5" frame, he was seen in James Bond, Star Wars and Lord of the Ring films, among many, many others. Here he reflects on an opera career that might have been...

\*\*\*

His stepfather said, 'Playing the piano is for sissies; learn to box!' So, with regrets, Christopher Lee never learned to play. He joined the RAF during WWII and was sent to Italy for two years.

His first opera was *The Barber of Seville*, seen in Naples shortly after it fell, starring Tito Gobbi and Giulio Neri. After returning home, his mother heard him singing in the bath and told him he had a voice! Then she told him *'it's not surprising that you can sing.... You've inherited all of this from your great grandfather, Girolamo Carandini.'* He was a singer at the Modena Opera House. He left Italy for Tasmania. *There he married my great-grandmother, who called herself Madame Carandini.* Before Melba, she was *the finest soprano in the country.... Madame Carandini must*