



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

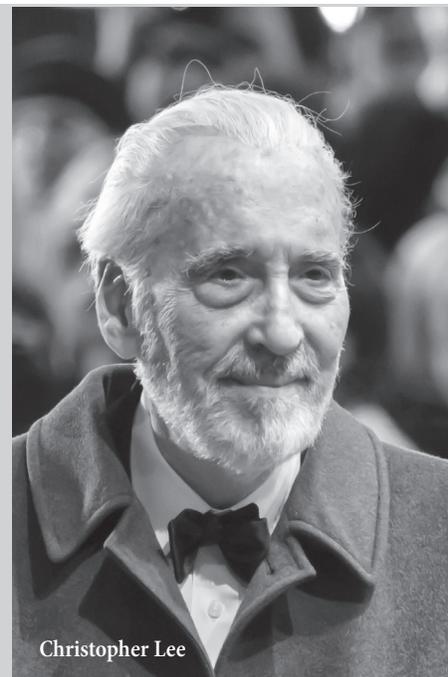
United States for ten years and appeared in more than 1000 performances. After the death of his father, Jussi Björling was able to study singing and made his operatic debut at the Royal Opera in Stockholm when he was 19. After successful guest appearances in Budapest and Vienna in the mid-1930s, he arrived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

have been a strong character. They had five gorgeous daughters who all became opera singers.... They sang all over the world.

I became a complete fanatic for classical music: Beethoven to me is God—but above all opera.... I started going to Covent Garden; I saw everyone you've ever heard of.

It's been the greatest regret of my life: I still believe I was born to be an opera singer'

Then in about 1948 or '49 I was at a party in Stockholm where everybody was singing student songs, knocking back the drinks. And I suddenly felt a tug at my sleeve; I turned around and swooned slightly when I saw it was Jussi Björling: 'You have a real voice!' He told me to come the next morning to the Opera House and sing to him. I told him I hadn't been trained, but he insisted: 'I don't care what you sing. I want to hear the voice—the instrument'. I could barely believe this, but the next morning I stood on the stage, nervous as hell. And he was there, sitting in the stalls next to Joel Berglund: no piano—nothing. 'Sing something!' I did something unbelievable like sing Don Giovanni's Serenade. And there was a lot of muttering. I sang them everything that I knew from opera. At the end of it all, Björling offered to take me into training if I stayed. I couldn't accept because I didn't have the money to live in Stockholm. It's been the greatest regret of my life: I still believe I was born to be an opera singer. But then on the other hand if I'd sung professionally I'd have stopped 15 years ago at least, whereas I'm still acting. I'm too old to perform as a singer, but I can still sing. That's what's so extraordinary: it's because I haven't sung opera for three hours or whatever a day that I can still sing. ❖

Edited from material found in:

<http://www.gramophone.co.uk/feature/my-music-christopher-lee/>;

http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000489/bio?ref_=nm_ov_bio_sm;

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Christopher_Lee;

http://www.amazon.com/King-Complete-Recording-London-Studio/dp/B000005BHM/ref=sr_1_10?s=music&ie=UTF8&qid=1442873238&sr=1-10&keywords=christopher+lee



An Encounter with Javier Camarena

by Enrique Gilardoni

Since 1976 I live in Chile, a country that extends its crazy geography along more than 2,600 miles with a range that goes from the driest desert on the planet in the North to scenic South full of forests lakes and volcanoes.

The main Opera House in Chile opened with Ernani in 1857 and is still active. There are among Chileans a number of opera lovers that enthusiastically follow all lyric activity, not only local but also international.

For this reason the name of Javier Camarena began to sound last year and the interest is increasing as his exploits are happening. Resonant successes were at the Met when in *La cenerentola* he encoed the aria "Si, ritrovarla voglio" this being the third time in history that was given an encore at the Lincoln Center Met, and at the Opera House in Madrid when this time in *La fille du régiment*, he encoed "Ah! mes amis quel jour de fête..." causing the delight of the Spanish audience with the 18 High C's.

A few years ago it was opened in the South of Chile the "Teatro del Lago", a beautiful and modern theatre built in Frutillar, 620 Miles south of the capital (Santiago), at the edge of Lake Llanquihue, with several volcanoes around, giving it an impressive framework. It brings all kind of quality shows. The announcement of a unique recital of Javier Camarena in Chile to be held

July 4th in this theatre caused a real stir.

Several months in advance we bought the tickets and with a couple of friends we made hotel reservations to spend a week in this beautiful area. The recital would be a worthy finishing touch. While we were in the South we learned that Javier had arrived in Santiago and there he would give two masterclasses for young singers.

It was in these days that a group of opera lovers that I usually frequent, contacted Javier and invited him to lunch at the home of one of them. Javier accepted and attended in the company of Karla Sarmiento his executive assistant and Ángel Rodríguez, the pianist who would accompany him in the recital. The natural sympathy of the tenor as well of those who attended with him made this meeting a memorable momento; on one side favoured by the good mood and pleasant character of Javier, and secondly because being all Spanish speakers the exchange of ideas and communication were notably favored.

In the conversation the point arrived in which Javier was asked about his favorite tenors. The response was immediate and categoric: Fritz Wunderlich and Jussi Björling. A phone call informed us to those who were in the South waiting for the recital.

I immediately got in touch with our President, Wally Rudolph and asked him to