

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

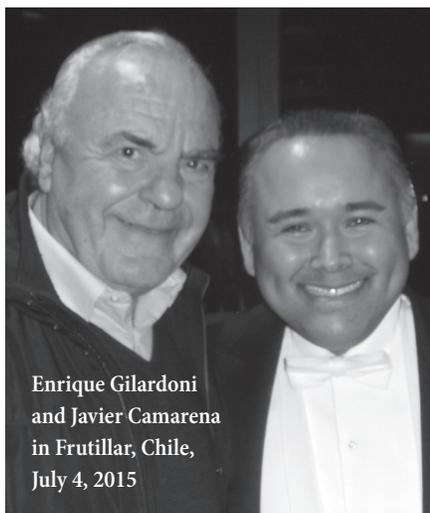
July 4th in this theatre caused a real stir.

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



Enrique Gilardoni
and Javier Camarena
in Frutillar, Chile,
July 4, 2015

authorize me—if I could contact Javier—to invite him to become one of Honorary Advisors of our Society. The positive response of Wally was swift (*with JBS-USA Board acclamation*) and we attended the recital with the hope of being able to contact Javier at the end of it.

The first part of the recital was dedicated to opera arias and pure “bel canto.” It began with “Ah! lève-toi soleil” from Gounod’s *Romeo et Juliette* and continued with “E servato questo acciaio. L’amo tanto” from Bellini’s *I Capuletti e i Montecchi*. Then “Si, ritrovarla io giuro” from Rossini’s *La Cenerentola*, and to close, “Ah! mes amis quel jour de fête” from Donizetti’s *La Fille du Regiment*.

The second part was devoted to Zarzuela fragments (Jota “Te quiero morena” from Serrano’s *El Trust de los Tenorios*

and “No puede ser” from Sorosabal’s *La Tabrerna del Puerto*) and Mexican songs by Roberto Cantoral, Consuelo Velásquez and Luis Alcaráz that were interpreted with the grace and authority of the one who knows what he is singing.

The encores included a song that Jussi recorded in Swedish in 1936: Osán Pérez Freyre’s “Ay, ay, ay” whose author was born in Chile. The recital culminated with “La donna è mobile” from Verdi’s *Rigoletto* causing an endless ovation from the excited audience.

Following the recital a cocktail was served in which I had the opportunity to talk with Javier. I congratulated him and thanked him for the magical moment that he made us to live, but at the same time, I told him that he had created in me a doubt. Javier looked at me as not understanding what I meant with creating a doubt. I then explained: Until now I was convinced that the most beautiful tenor voice that I ever heard live was Fritz Wunderlich’s, and now I’m in a doubt.

“Don’t tell me that you saw Fritz Wunderlich!!” he replied.

“Yes. That is one of the few advantages of being old. I saw him in 1961 at the Teatro Colón in Buenos Aires in three operas: *Der Rosenkavalier*, *Die Entführung aus dem Serail* and *Die schweigsame Frau*.

I then explained to him that I had devoted many years of my life to the art of Jussi Björling, that I was correspondant for

South America of the JBS-USA and I was an honorary member of the Jussi Björling Sällskapet of Stockholm; and the President of the JBS-USA had requested me to invite him to join the list of Honorary Advisors of our Society.

Javier was very pleased and grateful for the offer and asked me to coordinate the details with his Executive Assistant Karla Sarmiento who was present at the event. It was a pleasure to contact Karla, a friendly and charming lady with whom I subsequently exchanged several e-mails through which she officially confirmed with me the acceptance of Javier to the offering that I had made him.

To complete this process, our President sent to Javier two letters, one in English and the other in Spanish officializing the appointment and the name of Javier Camarena appeared printed in the letterhead among the other honorary advisors.

We will follow with attention the trajectory of this great singer whose heavy agenda will keep him for many years singing in the most important opera houses of the world among the greats of the opera. We wish him the best of success, first because he is an exceptional singer and second, because through the limited contact I had with him, I could see that his personal qualities are not inferior to his artistic ones. ❖

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