

Jussi and the Gounod "Sanctus"

By Donald Pruitt

The wonderful CD "Jussi Bjoerling Rarities" (VAIA 1189) contains much welcome material, including what is indeed a rarity: a musical error committed by our tenor. When I listened for the first time to the "Sanctus" from Gounod's "St. Cecilia Mass" in English (HHP A51, the Ford Sunday Evening Hour broadcast of November 13, 1938), I detected a digression from the score in the second solo tenor passage. Having sung this piece numerous times myself, I wondered if my memory of it had faded with the years, so I retrieved my copy of the score and investigated. Surely enough, I discovered that Jussi had got lost and required several measures to get back on track.

The attached copy of the G. Schirmer English-language score shows the sequence in question. I have arbitrarily numbered measures 4-9 on page 58. Jussi goes astray at m. 7, when he sings another B-flat on the first beat instead of the notated G. He immediately realizes that something is wrong, tries unsuccessfully to improvise to get back on track, and then omits the F-C-A-A-G sequence in mm. 8-9. Someone (Iturbi?) tries to help by humming the last two notes (A-G), but it is too

late. The performance then continues correctly to the end.

I suggest that several factors caused this to happen. First among them is surely Jussi's lack of familiarity with the English version of the text. In a letter to me, Cantor Don Goldberg noted "It's possible that Jussi didn't even know he would be singing this in English because, at times, he seems to be almost sightreading it." Also, if Jussi actually had a copy of this page of the score before him as he sang, he may have noticed only during the performance the disagreement in the text between m. 4 and mm. 7-8: m. 4 reads "THE glory," while mm. 7 and 8 read "THY glory." [My emphasis.] Looking ahead as he sang to see what comes next, as singers do, he noted the discrepancy (which could have been caused by awkward editing of this passage), which confused him momentarily and therefore threw him off.

I of course do not know what version of the score Jussi used for this broadcast. I suspect, however, that it was this Schirmer English-language version (a standard U.S. music library holding), because the distribution of the English text throughout the entire piece, solo and choral (pages 56-62 of the piano/vocal score), is

identical with what both Jussi and the chorus sing. Interesting, too, is his pronunciation of the word "Sabaoth," which is identical with that of the chorus. I think this indicates at least minimal rehearsal, for this is a pronunciation no foreign speaker of English could be expected to use without prompting; he would be much more likely to use a more Latinized form of the vowel values.

Fatigue caused by serious illness and by travel, as well as limited rehearsal time upon arrival, also probably contributed. Harald Henrysson has noted in e-mail to me that Jussi had caught a cold when singing Faust in Västerås on October 20, and "this forced him to cancel four opera performances (two in Stockholm and two in Gothenburg.... His fever got so high that they feared he had pneumonia. . . . He left London on 3 November (ship unknown) and arrived in New York on 10 November." (The chronology in *Jussi*, page 414, is correct; this information came to Harald only after publication of his *J.B. Phonography*, which carries a different chronology on p. 28.) Don Goldberg also writes: "Considering a few days to rest and pack for his trip to the U.S., and his Met debut, he might have been more concerned about his Met *Bohème* in Italian. I'm not sure whether or not there were any Met rehearsals before the Ford Hour concert..." Given the time sequence summarized here, there was precious little time for rehearsal in either city:

- Oct. 20
Jussi sings Faust in Västerås; catches cold
- Oct. 21-Nov. 3
suffers illness; prepares for ocean voyage; travels to London
- Nov. 3-10
sails to New York

- Nov. 11 or 12
travels [train?]
New York-Detroit;
rehearses [?]
- Nov. 13
rehearses [?] and performs.

It certainly seems, therefore, that there was enormous extraneous pressure on Jussi at this time, aside from that surrounding his anticipation of and preparation for his Met debut. Probably having to use an unfamiliar, poorly edited text only added to the pressure. Of course that is all conjecture; but I believe it is not unjustified. When Jussi came to sing the same composition for the Voice of Firestone on April 15, 1946 (HHP 4604c), the Latin text was used, and this passage passed off flawlessly.

Note: I thank Cantor Goldberg for permission to quote his letter for this article, and also for sending me a tape copy of the Voice of Firestone program, HHP 4604.

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Let me add a brief comment on another new CD involving Jussi: The Naxos Historical Opera CD set of *La Traviata*, with Eleanor Steber and Giuseppe Di Stefano (8.110115/16), contains filler material, a portion of which involves two duet performances of Steber and Jussi which were broadcast on the Voice of Firestone program of March 25, 1946: "Will You Remember," from Romberg's *Maytime* and the "Miserere" from *Il Trovatore* (HHP 4602b and d). My player times the latter at 4:36, while the same cut on VAIA 1189 times out at 4:59. In checking to learn the reason for the discrepancy, I found that Naxos has made a clumsy cut in the horn (replacing the male chorus) bridge between the strophes.

The J.B. Museum's "Jussi-Appreciation" Project for Elementary-School Students

By Deborah Clemons

Who says that children can't love opera and the classically trained singing voice? The first step is to let them hear it. We at the Jussi Björling museum in Sweden have tried just that. We recently completed a pilot project with the Östermalm Elementary School in Borlänge that introduced students to Jussi. Our project used a group of 80 students from ages 6 to 9. We designed the project to give students a broader experience than they would normally get during a standard one-hour museum visit. This project, with some modifications, could be used in any school and with any age group.

Projects that work best are partnership projects. In the case of our project in Borlänge, I first made contact with the school principal and later with the teachers of the classes that would be involved. Then I worked out a strategy for the program with the other participants: Harald Henrysson, Museum Director; Katarina Tegen-Höckerlind, Cultural Assistant for Borlänge and former middle-school art teacher; the teachers at the school, and the music teacher at the neighboring high school. We formulated plans for the music and art components, the classroom activities, and the museum visit. I stressed that it was important that students be divided into small groups even though it meant that each activity had to be repeated five times by the presenters to reach the 80 students.

We found that 12-16 students was an optimal size.

The first activity was a visit to the music teacher who talked about and played examples of the different types of voices: soprano, alto, bass, tenor, etc. They discussed the dynamics of the human voice and how sound is made, transmitted, and heard. They listened to Jussi as a child and as an adult.

Next, Katarina and I visited the classroom and told the story of the young Jussi augmented by a short video. We discussed the concept of an "opera". We then directed the students in the painting of sets and backdrops for an opera. Miniature stages had been prepared in advance from small cardboard boxes. The backdrops would later hang from dowels set in notches in the top of the box. The students worked in pairs and listened to Jussi while they worked. We placed photos of Jussi in various character roles on the walls as inspiration.

Teachers directed a later classroom work-session, in which students embellished the outside of the box. They painted the box, used fabric scraps for stage curtains, and decorated the arched stage opening. Students also made figures, using cardboard and fabric scraps, that were later attached to dowels so that they could be manipulated from the top of the box like puppets.

Then came the actual visit to the museum which included a short