

Guest Performances on California's Sunshine Coast

By Kurt Herbert Adler

Jussi Björling's long-standing connections with the San Francisco Opera have left us with wonderful and unforgettable memories. He sang many of his most famous roles here—in *Il Trovatore*, *Manon Lescaut*, *La Bohème*, *Tosca*, *Rigoletto* and *Roméo et Juliette*. At one of these performances his wife appeared as Juliette, and on one occasion she sang with him the duet "Sweethearts" for the annual Fol de Rol, an event which the Opera Guild organizes to support the work of the opera company and which is attended by thousands of people. Mr Björling always hoped that he would have the opportunity to sing Radames at the San Francisco Opera. Unfortunately, it could never be arranged, and now it is, for all time, too late.

Right from the beginning, Mr. Björling was regarded here as an "Italian tenor", a breed which in this city, with its many Italian inhabitants, is especially highly valued.

During the later period of his visits to San Francisco there had been a considerable falling-off in attendances at solo recitals, but he was among the few who still drew large audiences to the War Memorial Opera House.

Personally I recall with special pleasure the times when I conducted his performances of *Faust*.

Although we always considered him as one of our own, negotiations with him became fairly difficult during the last years. The most significant reason for this, which has proved to

be prophetic and which he constantly emphasized, was his feeling that he would not be singing for very much longer!

I remember one evening when he and his wife had gone to Los Angeles for a performance. Anna-Lisa arrived at the hotel completely hysterical. She had lost her handbag containing all their travel tickets and her magnificent jewels. The handbag was quickly found again, but I remember her words so well: "Just think how much singing those diamonds and emeralds represent..."

Both within and outside the world of opera, Mr Björling had a great number of personal friends who would willingly have done anything for him, if it had proved necessary. On a cold, clear night in 1958, when I had the

opportunity to spend some hours in Stockholm, I saw a couple of acts of *Tannhauser* at the Royal Opera and then passed the rest of the evening with the Björlings. It was a very pleasant visit with a man of true humanity—one of history's greatest tenors.

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Kurt Herbert Adler (1905-1988) was born in Vienna, studied there and conducted in various European centers. In 1943 he came to the USA and joined the San Francisco Opera as conductor and director, becoming artistic director (1953) and general director (1963). [He should not be confused with Kurt Adler (1907-1977), the Czech-born conductor who went to New York in 1938 and conducted at the Met 1951-73.]

[According to our translator, Gail Campaign, this chapter of En Minnesbok was written in English and then translated into Swedish, so that what we have here is a translation of a translation. It seems that the original English version of this chapter is no longer available. —Ed.]

Errata in the previous issue

Issue 12 of this *Journal* contained a number of slips and typos, which we regret:

The cover list of issue Highlights listed our Tom Hines as Ton. On p. 2 we refer to our Honorary Advisor Giorgio Tozzi as Georgio. Worse, on p. 21 we refer to the aria "Die quella pira." Worst of all, on p. 30 we quote Sir Andrew Davis on Artur Rubinstein but somehow we manage to misspell the pianist's name three times in one paragraph. And we thank member Dorian Bruzzi for pointing out that Bill Clayton's review of Mary Jane Phillips-Matz's biography of Leonard Warren refers to a famous 1945 performance of *Rigoletto* as the first time that Jussi appeared with the great baritone; but in fact their first joint appearance at the Met was in *Faust* on Christmas day, 1940.