

2000/nov00/bjorlingCD.htm] and following are some excerpts: "The concert opens with the two demanding Alfvén songs. 'I long for you', is a passionate exhortation with Björling's big voice rising to a tremendous final crescendo. Conversely, he is all poetic expression in the exquisite 'Now take my heart', and just listen to his beautiful, delicate pianissimo ending. His virile heroic voice takes wing in the proud and independent spirit of 'Among the high fir-trees in the forest ...we have built our own little nest...I can still be contented in the company of my love and live and die happily in the mountains.' In 'Toward the sea' the voice soars confidently, defiantly against a storm-tossed sea.

"In the epic ballad 'King Heimer and Aslaug' Björling demonstrates the warmth and richness of the lower registers of his voice. This beautiful song is interesting because of its origins in the heroic Old Norse sagas. It tells of Aslaug, daughter of Brünhilde and Siegfried, the man who killed Fafner. Hidden in a hollow harp, the child Aslaug is smuggled to Norway by the old king Heimer, so as not to fall victim of the political intrigues of the day. The other epic ballad by August Söderman, 'The enchanted lake' is about a youth who is tempted to pluck a beautiful water lily from the surface of an enchanted lake. He is too awed by the ghostly song he hears enticing him to pluck and be transformed and so he "wanders timorously in the mountains deprived of peace in his heart". Again this is a lovely but demanding song with a highly colourful orchestral accompaniment.

"'Evening mood' is a lovely nostalgic pastoral evocation of lakes and forests. 'Sweden', is regarded by many as the unofficial anthem of

Sweden and Björling sings it with immense pride and affection. 'Thou blessed land' is another patriotic song in the same vein. One of the most meltingly beautiful melodies on the disc has to be Carl Sjöberg's 'Music'—"The heart that suffers from life's commotion, music, to you it wants to escape"—and, not surprisingly, Björling responds most affectingly.

The first of the two Sibelius songs is highly atmospheric with brilliant orchestral tone painting—'Sigh rushes, sigh' is a narrative song, somewhat enigmatic, about a love lost beneath the waters of a lake. Björling is passionate and that top note is amazing. The second Sibelius piece, 'The diamond on the March snow' is equally evocative and passionate.

"Beethoven's 'Nature's Praise of God' gives Björling the opportunity to show off the oaken strength of the voice in a more formal and sterner song. The final carol, 'O Holy Night', is Adam's best-known composition aside from his *Giselle* ballet music and the opera *Le Postillon de Longjumeau*. It was made famous by both Caruso and Björling and it makes a fitting final showcase for the singer's prodigious talents. If you buy only one recording this month, I unhesitatingly recommend it should be this one. 'Music' and 'Now take my heart' are still ringing in my ears; songs to die for."

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The recordings mentioned above span the years 1939-59 and attest to the remarkable consistency of JB's voice throughout his career: His voice did darken somewhat in the 1950s, but it's impossible to find a point where he was somehow not at his peak form: his "peak" was constant!

Gösta Winbergh Remembers a Mistake of His Youth

Mike Richter's website is always interesting, we recommend it to your attention: mrichter.com. During November it featured three Swedish tenors in "Che gelida manina": JB (from his 1939 Holland radio broadcast), Nicolai Gedda and Uno Stjernqvist. In October there was an interesting interview of Gösta Winbergh by Jim Farber of the *LA Westside Rave!* Just at that time, the LA Opera was starring Winbergh in *Lohengrin*, and Farber asked him about his youthful fling with pop music, as part of a rock band that played the youth clubs of Stockholm. As Farber recounts the story, Winbergh "offhandedly turned down his only opportunity to hear the greatest Swedish tenor of them all, Jussi Björling. 'I told my parents I'd rather go to the cinema with my friends,' Winbergh says with obvious regret."

As Toby Hekler commented, "It's ironic that Winbergh missed his chance to hear Jussi in exactly the same way that Jussi missed his chance to hear Caruso."

According to the interview, Winbergh would be singing Siegfried for the first time this season in Zurich, and returning to LA Opera in that role. He's 55 at this time and still very much in demand.