



## The President's Pen . . .

Terry Williams

Some might suggest that I spend more time on Facebook and YouTube than one ought. Be that as it may, I enjoy the many wolf pages I follow on Facebook along with lots of pages featuring singers and singing. YouTube is fun because it has figured out what I like and constantly brings me something new to enjoy.

Many of the samples that come my way via videos on Facebook and YouTube (and sometimes only audio on YouTube) are singers who had big careers and still are/were singing well into their 70s and 80s. Examples include Giorgio Zancanaro, Giacomo (Jaume) Aragall, Robert Merrill, Gino Bechi, and Giuseppe Valdengo to name a few. The great Russian bass, Marc Reisen, was still singing into his 90s. These are examples of what I call *Old Guys Rule*. Seriously, listen to Aragall singing “Non ti scordar di me” for a fund raiser in 2012 at age 73. The crowd goes nuts and for good reason. Find me a tenor today in full career who can match, let alone surpass him. Valdengo’s terrific at age 80 singing Tosti’s “T’amo ancora.” The crowd doesn’t just applaud at the end of the song, it applauds the end of the first verse!

So considering all that, this question came to mind—what if Jussi Björling had not died at age 49. Would he still have been singing into his 70s or even 80s? I know, he speculated that he would be able to sing at top form only into his mid-50s. But what if this was just Swedish modesty? What if, like his dear friend Robert Merrill, JB could still have been singing in top form at age 75? Would he have been a member of the *Old Guys Rule* club? Sadly, we will never know. But isn’t it fun to contemplate the possibility. I know if I were a betting fellow, my money would be on Jussi to be able to show just how much *Old Guys Rule*.

We are very excited to report that we have begun the much needed overhaul of our website. The project, under the very able leadership of Susan Flaster, is expected to be complete by the first of the new year. Stay tuned for more details in the Journal next February. Equally exciting is that the Jussi Björling Appreciation Society (UK) has agreed to partner with us. This is an expensive but very necessary undertaking. We would be most grateful for anyone who is able and willing to help with a special contribution earmarked just for the website overhaul. Please contact Allan Buchalter or our treasurer, Janel Lundgren, to arrange details. We will thank you in the Journal.

Maintaining our membership records requires a great deal of time and technical skill not to mention dedication to the Society. You receive the Journal and Newsletters in large part thanks to the work of our membership chairman, Allan Buchalter. I am pleased to inform you that at the annual meeting of the Board of Directors, Mr. Buchalter was elected Vice President - Membership. Congratulations Allan. You earned it and deserve it. Keep up the good work.

You will find interesting articles in this Newsletter, including one where Leslie Barcza recalls his pilgrimage to the Museum in Borlänge, and another by Wally Rudolph about a performance of Rolf Björling, one of Jussi’s sons, in Utah.

On the back cover Sue Flaster previews our “mini” conference in DC next November. I hope you will put us on your calendar now so we will see you then.

Thank you for your loyalty and ongoing support. The Society could not exist without you. ❖

Rolf Björling continued from page 1

I realize that in saying that I run the risk of sounding like just another newspaper hack looking for a headline; I’m aware that Jussi Bjoerling possessed one of the truly great tenor voices of the century. But this was quite simply the most memorable vocal recital it’s been my privilege to attend in some time (unfortunately I missed Tom Krause—another Scandinavian—last month at BYU).

Not that Rolf’s voice is a carbon copy of his father’s, because it isn’t. Production is occasionally stiffer and at times Thursday the middle register took on an almost baritone timbre. Most of the time, though, the likeness was uncanny – equally clear and controlled, with the addition of a ringing top Bjoerling *père* might have envied.

Typical of that was a “Nessun dorma” from Puccini’s *Turandot* that revealed a much more natural voice for Calaf than Jussi ever commanded, resonant and heroic, with its climactic B natural squarely attacked and smoothly ridden. The first of two Leoncavallo encores, “Vesti la giubba” from *I pagliacci* was just as dramatic—and just as well disciplined.

There is, in fact, nothing casual about Rolf Bjoerling’s artistry, in any sense. Once he had warmed up a bit on a grouping of Beethoven songs and could be sure of the outcome, his singing had a freer, more open sound than had been apparent at first. But interpretively things were on a firm footing all night. Especially fine on both counts was his “Es war ein König,” its semi-pompous exposition beautifully set forth in full tones and with ample theatrical flair.

No less impressive were his forays into the twilight world of Richard Strauss (a fanciful “Ständchen”—with a glorious finale – and “Heimliche Aufforderung” and “Zueignung” as thrilling as I’ve ever heard them) and the glimmering ice kingdom of Jean Sibelius (a “Törnet” worthy of Jussi).

Those electrifying top notes did a lot for Gastaldon’s “Musica proibita.” But it was in Tosti’s “Lalba separa dalla luce l’ombra”