

# A Remarkable Music Database

By William C. Clayton

If you are like me, you probably have a very large collection of recordings in all different forms catalogued, at best perhaps, on 3x5 cards. During my computer years, I have tried to achieve some order, but the result has been little more than glorified lists by composer.

Some time ago, I put a call out to the Björling e-list asking for advice about such matters. I received two replies, one suggesting a nearly three hundred dollar program (an amount which I was loathe to pay), but another kind soul—Lars-Henrik Österholm—wrote reassuringly of a database he'd used successfully for nearly three years, that cost only \$50.

To spare the suspense, I will say that I bit, I bought, and I am hooked. It is *ClassiCat*, version 2 from [www.tdware.com](http://www.tdware.com), owned and designed by one Tim Dickinson, and it is a gem. It has been in existence for some four years, and the testimonials on the web site attest to the esteem in which it is held.

Fortunately, it has just emerged in an improved version, 2.1, and I am now in the process of entering my substantial JB collection, eventually to be followed by the rest of my holdings.

First, there is no risk involved. By signing in to the web site, you can download a trial version for a thirty-day trial period. (I don't always like downloading so I sent for a CD Rom for \$10 plus \$3 postage). If you have any questions, you can e-mail Tim. Then, you can print the Help section and for thirty days play with the thing, learning how, first, to enter CDs,

LPs, etc., just by title and label and then gradually learning how to enter artists, selections (operas, arias, symphonic movements, etc.), and information about recordings and artists.

The trial version has a large number of composers, and each of them has a representative selection of compositions. Help instructs you how to enter CDs, LPs, or tapes and then to just click on items to include them on, say, a CD, and it also tells you how to write in selections which the trial database (DB) might not have. For instance, the trial version might have all acts and music of *La Bohème* but not of *Manon Lescaut*. In that case, you will follow the Help instructions to (1) add *Manon Lescaut* to Puccini; then add Act One to the opera; then add Scene One to Act One; then add "Donna non vidi mai" to the Act. Now that addition is part of the entire DB, and you can then highlight and click to add the aria to your CD of, say, JB arias. I was advised to start simply, for instance with a CD of Beethoven's Third Symphony. And then perhaps a CD, LP, or cassette which has just songs like Schubert's "Serenade," which stand alone and are not part of an opera, operetta, musical, or song cycle.

Step number two, which must be enacted within thirty days, is to register for \$60 (\$50 if you ordered the CD Rom) and get the entire DB. Very simply, you are given a registration number, and you download the entire thing. (If you had gone the CD Rom route, you would use the number to "Import" the rest of the DB by unlocking it from the CD Rom.) Or you can do it all in one step from Tim's site for \$50, which includes registration and the downloading of the program files and the music database, thereby saving \$10. Whichever method you prefer, you now have a DB of 18,149 composi-

tions and over 4500 composers and information about composers. As you add composers and/or selections, your database grows. For instance, just today I had to add every selection for the Hampson CD of musical settings of Whitman poems. On the other hand, the DB has thirty-one Stephen Foster songs so I simply had to click on fourteen of them for the Hampson/Foster CD, requiring that I add only three titles. In addition, once you register, your membership will allow you to download additions to the program as they become available.

But the DB would be only half helpful if all it did was allow you to make lists. As you should rightly expect, it allows the user to access the compositions according to any number of requirements. For instance, as I write I am clicking on Hampson in the left-hand artist window, and I find, on the right that I have so far entered eight CDs. A little blue cross before each tells me that I have entered selections on those so marked. For instance, I click on the cross in front of German Opera Arias, the CD's title, and I get, first, the composers, and then under each of them their aria (s) which appear on the CD. And I can do the same thing for all the other CDs. In addition, I can find out how many times on these CDs he sings, say, a certain Mahler song. The ever-growing extract files now contain over 18,000 compositions, including e.g. complete sets of:

- JS Bach Cantatas
- JS Bach Organ Works
- Beethoven (almost) Complete Works
- Brahms Complete Works
- Handel Complete Works
- Scarlatti (Domenico) Solo Keyboard and Chamber Works

- Schubert Lieder
- Schubert Piano Sonatas

Two other features worth pointing out are the cross-reference views and the ability to add custom fields to your database.

With the views, you can slice and dice your database by hierarchically viewing over two dozen combinations of composer, artist, musical genre, instrument, and record label. One example: for a selected genre, "Opera" perhaps, you can display composers and any compositions that they have for that genre. Furthermore, for each composition you can display any recordings that are cataloged; and for each recording you can display the artists who appear on them. Each view can also be printed as a report.

In addition, if there is information that you want to catalog that doesn't have a predefined place for it, you can add that information as a custom database field. This can be done for composers, artists, compositions, and recordings. Want to catalog the date that you last listened to a recording? No problem! Add a field named "Last listened to" to any recording and enter the date. You can then use this for any recording in your database. Also, there are cross-reference views that will give you a bird's-eye view of the contents of your custom fields across your database.

As of this writing, my entire JB collection is entered into the database, all keyed to Harald Henrysson's Phonography, and I am well into cataloging my complete operas. Can my operetta, show, and lieder items be far behind?

I hope that some of you will try Tim's fine product. I think of how wonderful it might be, say, for a youngster who has just purchased

his or her first serious music recordings and who somehow already has acquired this DB. Imagine our young friend rushing right to the computer to enter each new recording's title, artists, selections. As the collection grows, it goes into the DB in an

orderly, unhurried fashion. Realistically, most of you probably are like me with large collections, scattered, cluttered with many unknown portions, crying out to be catalogued. If you fall into this category, then ClassiCat may be for you.

## Word from the Jussi Björling Sällskapet (Society)

The May 2001 Newsletter of the Scandinavian Society asks what their Society has in common with the currently-popular TV soap opera "Rederiet" and the Royal Opera's Academy. The answer was supplied by Professor Folke Abenius of that school: The Academy is presently housed in the Remmerline mansion on Dag Hammarskjöld's Street, and in its former location on Nybrokajen it served as Jussi's main opera-school. On the other hand, the exterior of the present school is portrayed as a main focus for the soap opera's events. Professor Abenius spoke last May 5 to members of the Sällskapet about the current Academy, which admits only eight students each year to its three-year, very rigorous, program. Then a senior student from the Academy, tenor Carl Rahmqvist, sang some selections. Carl told of going to London and picking up a recording of highlights from *La Boheme* with Victoria de los Angeles and Jussi. He said he had never heard of Jussi before, but when he had returned to Sweden he played the record and vowed to try to become a singer himself.

At a meeting in April, Sällskapet member Bengt Nyquist spoke—with assistance from Roger Alderstrand—about Jussi's time singing popular music as Erik Odde.

Sällskapet President Lars Hemmingsson spoke of a July trip to Voxna organized by Lennart Ekman, to honor Jussi's ancestors buried there in mostly unmarked graves, and to install a stone monument to honor the entire family. There was a splendid concert given by the excellent tenor Björn Haugman. A more complete report will be given in a later issue.

Finally, the Newsletter mentioned an invitation from the USA chapter of JBS to allow "Affiliate membership" in that chapter to Sällskapet members, for a reduced price of SEK 150. (Editor's note: we are pleased that some 12 new members to JBS-USA have resulted, to date, from this offer.)

We especially thank **Janet Björling** for translating this Newsletter for us, during the busy days of our Conference at Gustavus in June. And maybe this is a good place to mention that two of our conference mainstays were in fact **Toby Hekler** and Janet, and that by the end of summer they'd both learned that they had some serious health issues: Janet a serious abdominal cancer and Toby an aggressive case of leukemia. We are relieved and happy to report that both ladies have had successful treatments and are making good progress.