

A Report from the Jussi Björling Museum

By Harald Henrysson
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On October 7, Swedish Radio's weekly Sunday opera program was devoted to an interview with Lars Hemmingsson, the current Chairman of the Scandinavian Jussi Björling Society. Lars described the three existing chapters of JBS, in the UK, USA and Sweden, and described the origin of his own interest in Jussi (which had a connection with Jussi's son Rolf, one of whose teachers was Lars' father). He also told of his memories as a youthful super at the Royal Opera, one of them at an *Aida* performance with Jussi where he stood close to him and could hear his remarks before the curtain went up. Lars also discussed some of his other favorite singers at the Royal Opera.

On October 13, the JB Museum presented John Erik Eleby in a lecture on "Jussi from a Bass Perspective." Eleby let Jussi's career be mirrored in his connections with basses and baritones. He let us listen to recordings of a number of excellent low male voices, starting with Chaliapin and Kipnis, and whenever possible at performances with Jussi. The combination of these singers' testimonies about Jussi and John Erik's own analysis made up an interesting picture.

The previous week, John Erik had given a very successful concert at the Haga School in Borlänge, together with a local male chorus. He was introduced as "possibly the finest bass baritone this country has seen

since Joel Berglund." Among the music on his program were "Auch ich war ein Jüngling" from Lortzing's *Der Waffenschmied*, Escamillo's aria and "Kung Heimer and Aslög."

John Erik is a versatile musician, active also as a music teacher, pianist and choral conductor. He is one of the founders of the Scandinavian JBS and has a thorough knowledge of Jussi's singing, as he even demonstrated once on a TV quiz program!

Our next program at the Museum will be on November 17, when the record collector Harold Löwing will talk about "Jussi – the Diamond among the 78s" and present favorite recordings. Harold's large collection has been made available for the Naxos Historical Series "Jussi Björling Collection," of which vol. 2, containing early recordings of lighter music in Swedish conducted by Nils Grevillius, is expected to be released soon in Sweden.

Dagens Nyheter, one of the leading Swedish newspapers, featured a very positive report on October 6 of the JB Museum. This article, by Hans Wolf, was printed with a charming drawing of the Björling boys – based on the well-known photograph where they are holding hands, but with rural people in costumes of the time added in the background and the Swedish and USA flags waving over it all to symbolize their tours. At the museum, we are continuing the work of mapping out these tours of the Björling Quartet,

with great assistance by a few volunteer researchers, and the number of performances we have found is amazing to us. The only number formerly published, which comes from Gösta's book about his brother and was also reproduced in Jussi, turns out to be very misleading. The earlier estimate is of 98 concerts in southern Sweden and about 30 in Dalarna, after their return from the US in 1921, has been revised to at least 260 in Sweden, along with some 40 before the US tour and about another 40 in the US. Much work remains to be done here, since the boys sometimes gave three concerts in different churches on the same day! Any assistance with research on the US tour 1919-1921 would be greatly appreciated.

And at last I am able to report that a new book about Jussi can be expected in Swedish next autumn. The author, Yrsa Stenius, is a well known writer and journalist who has done much research at the Björling Museum, and conducted intensive interviews with Jussi's friends and family. She titles her book "Tills vingen brister" (Until the Wing Breaks) and describes it as "a personal study in Jussi Björling's life and art."

Bright ideas from member
Bob Gelfand, Pittsburgh

- Tell a friend about J.B.S., today!
- Call your local classical radio program and request an aria or duet with Jussi and ask them to mention www.jussibjorlingsociety.com