

it's a song about the sea as far as I know. You listen to it and tell me you can't tell what it's about. It may not be John Masefield, but so what . . .

At times I was surprised by my own emotions as I walked around looking at pictures and hearing the voice. We see him as a child with his family, discover his family tree, see his teacher, but mostly we're immersed in the career. We see a wealth of photos from productions on either side of the Atlantic, often with familiar faces from the middle decades of the century. There's also a library and a video room. I was surprised to see video of his state funeral, overcome with emotion for a moment when I realized I'd been too young to see my own father's funeral, so I watched that segment twice. There's a small map if one wants to walk or drive to his grave-site but I chose not to. There's art—several paintings and sculptures of a famous face who was a huge star in his time and is clearly not forgotten—as well as a plethora of cartoons & caricatures.

And there's an organization there, a friendly and welcoming group of people. I got a glimpse of how many recordings he's made, how many more there are to hear.

I encourage you to investigate if this intrigues or inspires you to want to know more. There's a society in the USA, another in Sweden, and the museum itself.

I am very glad I chose to visit. ❖

*Posted on June 14, 2014 by barczablog
Editor: Thanks for the acknowledging the Societies, Leslie. One may read his blog at http://barczablog.com/2014/06/14/pilgrimage_jussi_museet/#comment-83653*

Jussi Björling in Copenhagen

Jussi Björling (t); Bertil Bokstedt (pn); • JSP RECORDS JSP682 Mono (67:50) Live Falkoner Centret, Copenhagen 10/15/1959 • Arias and songs by MOZART, BRAHMS, LISZT, WOLF, SCHUBERT, BIZET, PETERSEN-BERGER, ALFVÉN, GRIEG, GIORDANO, TOSTI, R. STRAUSS & The Voice of Firestone: Broadcast 3/10/1952

Collectors of historical vocal recordings are always wanting more of their particular favorite singer. They do not often get rewarded for their enthusiasm. However, this CD must surely mark a giant find in the vocal annals for which we must be truly thankful. The silver voiced Jussi Björling was one of the 20th century's great tenors and much has been written about him. There has even been a splendid phonography, improved over the years by new releases, but even this recital escaped the doyen of Björling experts, Harald Henrysson.* This new musical discovery had tangled origins—according to John Haley of Harmony Restorations. It was his restoration of a 1969 Judy Garland concert that led another collector to acquire tapes from the man who had managed the Falkoner Centret concert hall in Copenhagen. Among those tapes was a live performance of what turned out to be Jussi's last concert appearance in Denmark. This concert is not long, as the tenor may have wanted to take things slowly after his recent hospitalization during recording sessions for *Madama Butterfly*. He was already suffering from the heart disease which eventually killed him in September 1960 at the early age of 49.

Miraculously this had no effect on the voice itself. The recital began with Tamino's first aria from *Die Zauberflöte*, sung here in Swedish. This is a slowish version, allowing Jussi to revel in the character, as well as sing with a perfect legato. One feels the aria naturally without, as Björling expert Stephen Hastings says, "any trace of self-indulgence". Björling and his accompanist Bertil Bokstedt had obviously worked hard as the German lieder sound rather more inspired than on a studio recital from some seven years earlier in New York, which sometimes verges on a run through. "Zueignung" for example has Jussi in as free a voice as ever with an excellent top A on 'heilig'. In the Brahms at 'Tranne rinnt' there is a gorgeous downward portamento seeming to find just the right emotional voice. And then the lovely diminuendo at 'Wang herab' to conclude the song. In the Wolf song "Verborgenheit" (Solitude) the sadness comes through at 'Seine Wonne seine Pein! There is a nice contrast in 'Ade' in "Die böse Farbe". In the flower song from *Carmen*, which Jussi sang many times, there is, disappointingly, no soft B-flat at the end but there is emotional contrast throughout the story of the aria, with real passion at 'un seul desir'. The next group are Scandinavian songs and one always feels that here is the essential Jussi, singing with just that bit more freedom. Alfvén's "Skogen sover" is really lovely—one of his best versions—with a glorious 'Juninatt' (June night) to conclude.

The bonus is the complete 1952 Firestone recital—it was also issued by Immortal Performances earlier in 2016, but with fewer announcements. The "Lalba separa dalla luce l'ombra" is majestic and as well sung as ever, leading to an exciting conclusion but the "Nessun dorma," his only one for Firestone—somehow lacks tension. However, Jussi can't help himself and still ends it with a healthy and splendid B. After hearing the two recitals from 1952 and 1959, those seven intervening years brought a darker and stronger voice but the unique timbre is there throughout as is the continued steadiness. The preservation of so much for so long was really miraculous.

This highly recommended CD is in excellent mono with the piano just a shade in front of the singer. The 24-page booklet is everything one should expect in an historical release, including a history of Jussi in Denmark by Henrysson and an in depth analysis of the concert by Stephen Hastings. Aside from being every collector's dream, this is also a wonderful opportunity for new listeners to hear one of the great singers of the last 120 years.

—David Cutler, Fanfare Magazine

* Editor's note: This recital was not known to exist, and therefore is not an omission on the part of Harald Henrysson.