

# George Jellinek on Wunderlich, Björling and Schubert

One of the highlights of the June JBS Conference at Gustavus came with our opportunity to hear a new edition of George Jellinek's radio program "The Vocal Scene" devoted to a comparison of Jussi with the great, lamented German tenor Fritz Wunderlich, who died in 1966, a few days short of his 36th birthday, due to a tragic fall down a staircase. We heard Dr. Jellinek's interesting discussion of these two careers, along with examples of their substantial common repertoire: both singers in the "free as a bird" aria from Millöcker's *Beggar Student*, as well as arias from *Bobème*, *L'elisir d'amore*, *Rigoletto*, *Tosca*, *Eugene Onegin* and other operas. In concluding, Dr. Jellinek mentioned the theme of this particular program: "ars longa, vita brevis" and remarked that "Grillparzer's famous line about the future of even fairer hopes, that would have followed Schubert's untimely passing, comes to mind."

Now for our distinguished radio host this remark was obvious and seemed almost a throw-away line. But after listening to a preview of this program in May, your editor decided to challenge the members of the Jussi Björling chatlist to explain the meaning of these words, offering as reward a CD of the forthcoming Public Radio program on "Jussi Björling in the 21st Century" (a discussion between Anders Björling and Walter Rudolph produced by KBYU). In fact only one person responded with an essentially-complete answer: our linguist friend Dr. Yoël Arbeitman. Yoël explained that Franz Grillparzer was the great Austrian poet and friend of Schubert

who provided this epitaph for Schubert's gravestone:

"Die Tonkunst begrub hier einen reichen Besitz; aber noch viel schönere Hoffnungen" (Music has here entombed a rich possession; but even fairer hopes).

Yoël even consulted with his friend Stephan Albrecht, a student in Hamburg, and found a relevant website: [www.aeiou.at/su-gb1-k.htm](http://www.aeiou.at/su-gb1-k.htm) providing a photograph of the gravestone.

We will soon be able to pass along a copy of the KBYU CD to Yoël (and as we learn about its scheduled broadcasts, we'll be letting you know about those too).

The radio program ends with George Jellinek's kind comment: "With my special greeting to the international Jussi Björling Society." But in recognition of Wunderlich's special bent for Lieder, we had arranged with member Young So (a devoted fan of both tenors) to provide some examples of their Lieder singing: thus we ended our session with two Beethoven songs: "Adelaide" and (for FW) "The Kiss." One point that became clear in our discussion, involved FW's relative youth when he died, even compared to Jussi (who of course also had his extraordinarily early start as a tenor recording artist, at 19), and especially the point that FW's interpretations were rapidly maturing: one especially interesting example is Lensky's aria from *Onegin*, which FW recorded several times but most successfully near the end of his life. Indeed both tenors were rich treasures, but left us too soon and before even fairer hopes could be realized!

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