

which indicated “a distinct change of direction for the house.” Oscar Thompson, veteran critic of the *New York Sun*, wrote “Beecham’s arrival ‘put the seal of approval on conductors’ opera, as distinguished from singers’ opera.’ ... something new in the history of the Met, for even the rivalry of Mahler and Toscanini ‘occasioned much less buzz in the corridors of the Metropolitan ... than the rivalry of Caruso and Bonci ... or Geraldine Farrar and Mary Garden.’” (*The Björling Sound*, Hastings, p. 273.)

The fabled *Bohème* recording was a serendipitous event that just seemed to happen in the Spring of 1956. Beecham agreed to the proposal with Victoria de los Angeles as Mimi, on condition of the remainder of the cast being first-class. Everything and one fell into place and the recording was made at the Manhattan Center between March 16 and April 6, 1956.

In the middle of the recording sessions, Jussi developed severe back pain. *Sir Thomas Beecham remarked that to the best of his knowledge the spine wasn’t the organ a tenor used for singing, but his calculated sarcasm withstanding, the session had to be interrupted. Bob Merrill sent [Jussi] ... to his own chiropractor. After the treatment ... Jussi continued the recording.*

There had been no prior onstage performances, nor even any piano rehearsals. RCA Producer, Dick Mohr recalled: Sir Thomas was at his crotchety best. In the third act, de los Angeles didn’t want to cough. It would ruin her vocal line, she claimed. After the first take, when she had not coughed, *Sir Thomas said, “Young lady, now we’re going to do that again, and if you don’t cough, we will later, after the tape is put together, hire a professional cougher, and you may not be able to hear a note you sing!” We did another take—and she coughed.* (*Jussi*, Farkas, p. 282-83; *The Björling Sound*, Hastings, p. 158.)

Beecham was one of the great opera and orchestra conductors, as well as having the energy and fondly remembered wit to excel as both impresario and entrepreneur. Often a paradox, his *Messiah* defied the original score, while his *Bohème* aimed to restore Puccini’s original intentions. ❖

## The Jussi Favorites Survey

I’m sure you’ve noticed that you cannot make an online purchase (or comment) without being pestered into oblivion with surveys. Don’t know about you, but it’s one of my pet peeves (PET PEEVES).

So why not a survey that has a tinge of fun about it? Add to that the recordings of Jussi Björling—now what could be more appetizing than that at the end of 2016.

Here’s how it goes:

There are three categories: (1) arias (2) songs, and (3) complete operas. Since he often had multiple recordings of each, please be specific in identifying each choice.

- You are to choose your 5 most favorite JB arias and list them in order of preference.
- Do the same with songs—list your 5 most favorite, again in order of preference.
- Since there are fewer operas, please just list your 3 most favorite complete operas.

Remember to be specific about which recording. Normally the year of the recording and conductor/accompanist should be sufficient. The survey is open to all known JB recordings. And it is limited to members of JBS-USA.

Your selections should be sent by email (preferably) or snail mail to:

[codyite@gmail.com](mailto:codyite@gmail.com) (that’s me) or

Walter B. Rudolph  
1056 North 840 West  
Orem, Utah 84057

*Deadline for participation is January 31st, 2017. Results will be tallied and shared in a future JBS-USA publication.*



### Jussi Bjoerling

Jussi Bjoerling, the great Swedish tenor now at the top of his prime will again make a coast-to-coast concert tour. Bjoerling rejoined the Metropolitan Opera in NY in the fall. RCA Victor Red Seal Records.