

Yearning for the Unattainable

(cont. from p. 15)

N.B. The author wishes to thank Bill Clayton for his encouragement and for providing a copy of the 1949 performance from his collection. She also wishes to thank Yoël L. Arbeitman for his help with translation of the text, and some useful suggestions.

SPOTLIGHT ON CARLA RAMSEY



Carla Ramsey, the author of the "Adelaide" comparison appearing in this issue, was born and raised in San Antonio, where she began studying piano at age six and trombone at eleven. "I wish I had taken up cello instead," she says, "but Texas was band country back in the '50s." Why trombone, instead of clarinet or flute like the other girls? "I can't remember

why I found this instrument so fascinating, but it might have had something to do with the fact that I enjoyed hanging out with and competing with the guys," admits the self-described "aging tomboy." "Later, in my 20s and 30s, I studied cello for several years, but by then it was too late to master it."

After frequently soloing on both trombone and piano during high school, Carla attended the University of Chicago, majoring in music theory and history. During those years she studied trombone with members of the Chicago Symphony and began playing professionally in the Chicago area. "I've been pretty much a dyed-in-the-wool instrumentalist most of my life," she confesses. Her first real appreciation of vocal music came in the '60s via the lieder singing of Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. "I didn't listen to any 'heavy duty' opera back then," she admits. "Mozart was as far as it went for me."

After earning an M.A.T. in Music Education at Harvard, Carla moved to the Bay Area, where she started free-lancing and eventually won a chair in the San Francisco Opera Orchestra. "It took a lot of chutzpah to audition for Kurt Herbert Adler—he was a real tyrant," she recalls. "I remember the terror of my first performance in the pit (it was *Parsifal*) with him glaring down at me (or so it seemed) from one of the front balconies during a brief second trombone solo in the Prelude."

"Being part of huge operatic productions of this caliber was a powerful experience," Carla reminisces. "The sheer volume of sound coming from the orchestra and singers was overwhelming. I remember thinking how lucky I was to be getting paid to participate in these productions nightly, while seated

only a few feet away were patrons who had to shell out \$75 or more for the privilege." The performances she remembers most vividly were by Beverly Sills in *La Fille du Regiment* and Joan Sutherland in *Il Trovatore*. "Both Domingo and Pavarotti were also in their heyday in the '70s. I, along with the other pit musicians, definitely preferred Domingo," she recalls.

After her stint with the San Francisco Opera, Carla says she must have "reverted to my instrumentalist roots." After listening mainly to chamber music for almost twenty years she took up where she left off, purchasing some CD's of Sills and Sutherland. Coloratura sopranos became her favorites. "I wasn't very familiar with the other voice types, hardly knowing they existed," she says, "and tenors were definitely not high on my list. I gradually expanded my appreciation of opera from Mozart to bel canto, but only in the last couple of years have been able to 'get into' the dramatic intensity of Verdi and the verismo composers."

So how did this late-blooming opera fan and soprano-lover arrive at her recent infatuation with JB? "About a year ago, while browsing the Prima Voce website, I stumbled upon JB's 'La fleur que tu m'avais jeté,' and was immediately enthralled. The first note seemed to materialize from nowhere, like the shimmering of the aurora borealis or the rising of the evening star (celestial metaphors keep coming to mind)," Carla rhapsodizes. As described in the "Adelaide" article, her first purchases were JB's 1958 Carnegie Hall Concert and the 4-CD EMI set. "It was a true conversion experience. I couldn't get enough of him; he seemed to be singing just to me," Carla says. A search on the Internet turned up the JBS website and Björling List, followed by more CD, book, video and record purchases (she bought a turntable in order to hear JB's unadulterated LP sound). "There is still so much I haven't heard, but I'm adding steadily to my JB collection, as finances allow," Carla reports. Although she loves any and everything by JB, her favorite so far is probably his Swedish repertory. "Those Swedish vowel sounds really send me: that's the 'real' Jussi coming out," Carla enthuses. "The Diamond on the March Snow' makes me cry every time, especially the final line ('Oh happy lot thus to love the best thing that life can give, to shine in its radiance and die at the height of beauty'), which to me epitomizes JB's life and voice."

"As a baby Jussiphile, I am so grateful to have discovered the marvelous world of JB. Reading the *JBS Journal* and getting to know JBS members through the Björling List have contributed immensely to my knowledge and appreciation not only of JB but of opera and vocal music in general," Carla concludes.