

privileged to see and hear some really great performances of the opera with the likes of Plácido Domingo, Jon Vickers, and James McCracken.

I was even able to meet Björling in person once in November of 1959. He sang in two performances of Gounod's *Faust* that year, first in a weeknight performance and second in a Saturday afternoon broadcast performance. I managed to attend the weeknight performance and had a seat up in the Grand Tier of the old house. During the first intermission, I was chatting with a lady sitting next to me and I guess it became obvious to her that I was very much a Jussi Björling fan. During the next intermission, she asked me if I would like to go backstage after the performance and meet him in person. Would I ever?

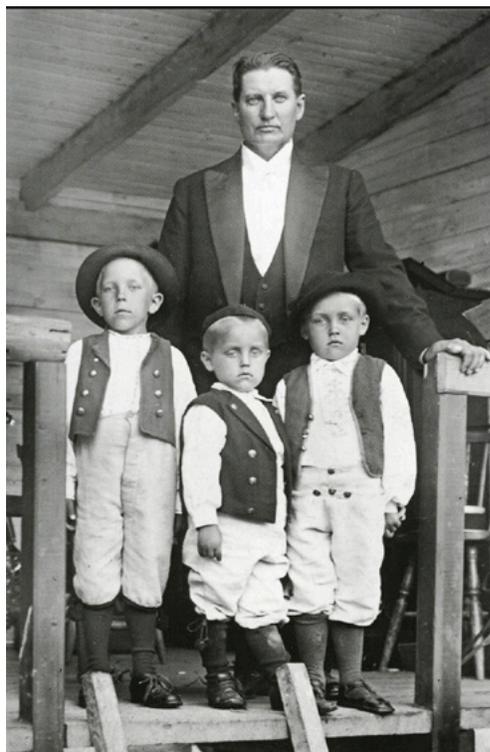
It turned out that the lady was a friend of Anna-Lisa Björling's. After the performance, I went around with her to the stage door entrance, where a small group gathered to wait for Mrs. Björling. When she arrived, she led the whole group through that rabbit warren that was the old Met backstage to the Björling dressing room. When it became my turn to be introduced, I knew that he had already had at least one heart attack, so all I could think of to say to him was "Please take care of yourself, Mr. Björling." Sadly, he had less than a year yet to live.

The performance itself is still the most thrilling performance of *Faust* I've ever heard. Other featured performers were Elisabeth Söderström, Cesare Siepi, Robert Merrill, and Mildred Miller. Pretty hard to beat that line-up. I have a Myto recording of the broadcast performance which I still manage to listen to from time to time.

*Robert B. Ardis graduated from the College of Engineering of the University of Michigan in February of 1946, courtesy of the United States Navy, and from the School of Law, evening division, of New York University in May of 1951. He was a member of the patent staff of Bell Telephone Laboratories from 1947 until retiring in 1988 as Patent Attorney Director. He also retired as Captain, United States Naval Reserve, in 1978.*

## Mr. [David] Björling's Concert

A Review by Eric Westberg, *Hudiksvallsposten*



David Björling with (left to right) sons Olle, Gösta and Jussi, circa 1916.

Though DB's concert belongs to a form of art which does not deserve public mention, I am grateful to give my opinion about it due to the pretentious way in which Mr. Björling's family appears.

Since there is no law forbidding false indication of origin, as far as the title of a performer is concerned, one has to accept the label "opera singer," but my strong conviction is that Mr. Björling has hardly even from a public seat been acquainted with our royal opera stage, surely he can not bring with him this proud title from any foreign opera company. A modest role in a third class touring operetta company could possibly be the defense for such audacity. Method of singing, diction, musical culture, all which might defend appearance in a city (what city Mr. B calls his native one has nothing to do with music), is to him as foreign as his ear was foreign to the concept of purity.

One can only pity the three little boys. To be forced to howl with convulsive tension, which even destroyed any pronunciation of the words, cannot be any pleasure even for a father, whatever confused ideas he has about education, breathing, etc. As beautifully as a well schooled treble voice can sound, for instance from the boys in the Berlin Cathedral Choir, as deplorable it was to hear these constricted yells. Far from making the voice hardy, this is probably the most effective way to entirely destroy any talent. I dare even claim that the propaganda Mr. B makes with his children is extremely destructive. If Mr. B means that this should be an example worth following as far as juvenile singing is concerned, I must most definitely warn against doing that.

Mr. B, when three people sing the same tune, that is called unison singing, not trio. The compilation of the program is unforgivable, but says enough in its naivety. Three things were first-rate: the entrance fee, the well-fitting tail-coat and the promotion that preceded the so-called concert.

If I have with these words put Mr. B out of action in northern Hälsingland, I consider myself to have done a good and blessed work.

*Editor's Note: Eric Westberg was manager of the Stockholm Concert Association 1919-27, one of the founders of the Swedish Performing Rights Society and its manager 1923-44.*

*This review, of a June 1918 performance, was read aloud by Harald Henrysson at dinner at the Quality Hotell Statt on Friday, Aug 31, 2018, for the amusement of members of JBS-USA during their trip to Sweden. It is not known, but assumed, that Mr. Westberg lived to regret his predictions!*