Two Swedish artists of note with connections to Jussi Björling passed away earlier this year, soprano Margareta Hallin and mezzo-soprano Kerstin Meyer.

M
ezzo-soprano Kerstin Meyer, who died at the age of 92 on April 14, 2020, appeared in several operas with Jussi. Recordings survive featuring him with Meyer as Maddalena in Rigoletto in 1957 and as Azucena in Il trovatore in 1960 at the Royal Opera House in Stockholm, the latter being the same role in which she had made her debut there in 1952. She was a longtime member of the Royal Swedish Opera and the Hamburg State Opera and made many guest appearances at the major opera houses of London, Milan, New York, Vienna, and elsewhere. She often performed in concert with Elisabeth Söderström, with whom she had shared a teacher, along with another pupil named Anna-Lisa Berg, later Björling.

Our friend and colleague, Bengt Krantz, Chairman of the Swedish Jussi Björling Society, has been kind enough to share this memorial tribute with us:

“Only 66 days after the passing of Margareta Hallin, I have the painful duty to announce that still another Honorary Member of the Swedish Jussi Björling Society has died. The opera and concert singer Kerstin Meyer, also a Court Singer and professor, left our mortal life on the 14th of April at the age of 92.

“A cheerful, curious, sympathetic and lovable representative of the singers’ guild has left us. With that, one of the last important Swedish singers that sang together with Jussi Björling is now a part of eternity.

“Kerstin Meyer was abundantly active at The Royal Opera House of Stockholm, where she participated in 74 productions following her debut in 1952. Her roles included a vast selection of classic mezzo-soprano parts in a variety of different languages, predominantly from the German, French and Italian repertoire. She also appeared in contemporary repertoire, premieres, and Swedish works. In addition, she was active in opera houses outside the Swedish border. She approached all categories of music with vitality, enthusiasm and devotion.

“Meyer was also one of the relatively few opera singers that was seen frequently in public, often in the company of Kjerstin Dellert and Elisabeth Söderström.

“Her educational activities included, besides substantial work as a voice coach, a period as headmaster at the High School of Opera in Stockholm. In that way she kept contact all her life with music, through the art of opera and concert singing.

“The voice of Kerstin Meyer is preserved in numerous recordings, produced in the homeland and internationally. She also participated in the film adaptation of Värmlänningarna in 1957, with Per Myrberg and Busk Margit Jonsson in the leading roles. It is hard to find something as purely Swedish as this film.

“Rigoletto and Trovatore are two works where Meyer met Jussi Björing on stage. She also tried her hand at English operetta at Oscarsteatern in Stockholm in 1980 when she appeared as Buttercup in HMS Pinafore by Gilbert & Sullivan. Her majestic farewell occurred at Malmö Opera in A Little Night Music by Stephen Sondheim, when she was 85. The same year she was a lovely host in “Sommar” on Swedish Radio.

“Personal memories of Kerstin Meyer include when, full of excitement, she came back from the USA with her husband, culture journalist Björn Bexelius. They had seen Ernani at the Metropolitan, and they had observed that Folkoperan was performing the opera at their then-present address at Roslagsgatan in Stockholm. She persuaded her husband to see what
Margareta Hallin had an interesting and varied career, beginning with her debut in 1955 as Rosina in *The Barber of Seville* with the Royal Swedish Opera in Stockholm.

She went on to sing more than 1,500 performances at the Royal Opera House over the next twenty-nine years and now has a bust there in her honor. This focus on Sweden was by her own choice; Nicolai Gedda, for one, thought that with her “beautiful coloratura soprano voice” she could have had an international career.

Although she never appeared in opera with Jussi, she took part with him and other Royal Opera soloists in the Gröna Lund concert of June 9, 1960. Recordings of duets with Jussi were planned in 1960, but prevented by his death.

Hallin received *Jussi Björlingstipendiet* (The Jussi Björling Award) in 1970. She also acted in films and released several pop hit records. After retiring from singing in 1984, Hallin began composing music, including a chamber opera based on the Strindberg play *Miss Julie*.

Margareta Hallin died at the age of 88 on February 9, 2020.

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