

En Minnesbok Part 6

Translated by Gail Campain

Twenty-Five Years With Jussi By Helmer Enwall

For more than twenty-five years I had the pleasure of working with Jussi Björling and introducing him, not only to the musical centres of Europe, but also to the USA, Latin America and South Africa.

It still seems inconceivable to me that this unique voice is now silent. Jussi's distinctive sound is impossible to describe. Words are lacking for the task. Our language seems too poor to describe all the nuances of colour in the spectrum.

Jussi was called 'The Swedish Caruso' in many countries. When my interest in becoming an impresario was first awakened, my ambition was to bring Caruso to Sweden. I didn't achieve that aim, but instead I had the good fortune to be able to launch 'Sweden's Caruso'.

He was only forty-nine years old when he died, but had spent forty of those years as a singer. A remarkable record! He had become loved and celebrated on three continents. This could have been five, for both Japan and Australia were next in line and were waiting for him.

Our long association was marked by a loyal friendship. The person who had Jussi for a friend had something quite special, something genuinely reliable of the kind we Swedes like to think of as typical for us. To be sure, he was a big child who could sometimes cause a bit of trouble and spring a few surprises. But that was somehow all a part of what he was. We all, of course, forgave him so willingly, and we all miss him more than words can say.

He Generously Filled His Horn Of Plenty With Beautiful Tone Johannes Norrby

He was probably seventeen years old when I first met him. To me he seemed to be - if I may use the expression - a male Pallas Athena, she who sprang fully armed from her father's head. Jussi, too, materialized fully armed from his father's head. David Björling is said to have once said about his son: "There will never be another tenor like Caruso - *perhaps Jussi*."

And so it was, to the delight of us all.

In 1938 I wrote in a music column of Jussi: "He is a singing genius... What places him in a class of his own in our country is his unfailing musical mastery; his phrasing, so self-evidently right; his solving of the problem of text versus music. He is without doubt one of the chosen few."

Today I can feel pleased to have written these words, which were no exaggeration.

His singing was flawless, but free from the dullness of the perfect. He was extravagant of voice, but never excessive. He could draw out a musical phrase to the utmost, but he never exceeded the bounds of good taste. He had rhythm in his blood as an innate gift. He did not force his voice, but generously filled his horn of plenty with beautiful tone. To hear him was a joy for body and soul. As the voice of the thrush rejoices in the summer night, so our singer rejoiced - the voice of the Swedish landscape itself. In our hearts we cherish that sound.