Prime Music Activist Bea Bobotek, 93, Has Passed Away

By Christer Ahl, Alec Bobotek, Maija Budow, Caryl Pines Carry, Dan Shea, & David Scally.

Our grande dame Bea Bobotek, one of the Jussi Björling Society’s guiding lights since its founding 23 years ago, died April 10 in Alexandria VA. She had sweeping connections in the Washington classical music scene, as well as inside key institutions like radio station WGMS, the Smithsonian and local museums and embassies. These connections became increasingly useful over the years, as Washington became our favorite gathering place.

Our very first JBS conference was held in DC at the Washington Plaza Hotel at Thomas Circle and was co-sponsored by the Embassy of Sweden. The action began with the Embassy’s annual “Jennie Lind Concert” at the Corcoran Gallery Hall and involved programs with key personalities like Anders Björling, Andrew Farkas, Cantor Don Goldberg, Harald Henrysson and Walter Rudolph.

The first JBS board was there too, meeting our brand-new membership, and Bea already was very much involved, suggesting interesting initiatives. One that became a major success was Bertil Bengtsson’s program at the Hirschhorn Gallery, arranged “under the auspices of the Smithsonian Institution and co-sponsored by the Embassy of Sweden and JBS-USA.” Ahem, JBS had made the big time! At the enthusiastic reception following Bertil’s talk, we were delighted with the notable presence of Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg. And our spring 2001 JBS Journal article about this event acknowledged “We are grateful to Bea Bobotek for her enterprise in suggesting this idea and pulling together many strings!”

In addition to helping us navigate the resources available in DC, Bea loved the travel opportunities available for our members: an early one of these was our “Lightly-Structured” trip to the Stockholm area June 13-29, 2000. Those dates allowed time for visits to the Royal Opera House for opera and ballet, a day visiting the site of Jussi’s 1937 film Fram för framgång with members of the Swedish Society, concerts with Montserrat Caballé, Leif Segerstam, and others; we published a long list. Bea plotted with her good friend Maija Budow, and others of us, to add an extra week before June 13 in order to attend Wagner’s Ring at Helsinki’s beautiful new opera house – that turned out to be another perfect idea!


But we were never just a travel group, we had agendas to cover, business to conduct, as a group with a real Mission. For example, the worldwide events marking the 50th anniversary of Jussi’s death (Sept.9,1960) brought a small group of us to Scandinavia House on Park Ave. in NY, Sept.9,10: Christer Ahl, Bea, Maija, Beau and Linda Kaplan; Marilyn and Wally Rudolph, Connie Cloward, Bill Clayton, Monica Valley, Dan Shea.

Scandinavia House’s dining room played Jussi’s music on Sept.9, thanks to Bea’s iPod. Of our entire group she had the only technology advanced enough to mesh with theirs. Our Newsletter of November 2010 describes the memorial music we played and discussed from the just-released 4-CD WHRA set Jussi Björling Live!, from Jussi’s 1937 national US radio debut to his last Swedish radio broadcast in 1960. Other parts of that day’s talks were...
We all belonged. This friend happened to mention to me that a group of music lovers were flying to Helsinki, Finland to attend Wagner’s \textit{Ring}. What timing! I had just lost my husband after a long illness and I was trying to look to the future. The friend introduced me to Bea and the rest has been a wonderful adventure! We travelled with the Jussi Björling Society not only to Helsinki, but to conferences all over the USA, and to Sweden of course! What a life that was to meet all these music enthusiasts — and we had so much fun! It was also a pleasure to host a JBS dinner at my own home in Washington, D.C. and to become a member.

Bea and I and others would also travel to New York every three to four months for long week-ends, to catch up with every opera they produced at the Metropolitan Opera. Bea supported every musical group locally in DC including the National Opera, National Symphony and Vocal Arts DC. Together, we were on the go all the time for almost 20 years. Bea was a most inclusive and generous friend, and became the best one I ever had. I miss her terribly and will never forget her.

\textbf{Remembering Bea Bobotek} \\
by Caryl Pines Curry

If it were not for Bea’s ebullient music evangelism, I would not now be a member of the Björling Society. I would not have experienced the last ten years or so of Vocal Arts, DC. Nor would I have had the pleasure of driving with her to operas, concerts and musical events at embassies and other locations. She had a subscription to the Met Opera and went to NY frequently with friends. She went to Seattle and elsewhere for Wagner’s \textit{Ring Cycle}, and to the Smithsonian for chamber music. She would go anywhere to feed her need for a variety of musical formats. In short, she went to EVERYTHING!

Conversations in the car were edifying with respect to Bea’s remarkable operatic knowledge and memory. She could recall who sang whom when and where from recordings, broadcasts and the numerous operas around the world that she had attended since the late 1930s. She was able to dissect performances, compare them to others in the past, and thoroughly enjoy great ones. She was acerbic in her critiques of mediocrities.

I miss her now as I go alone to virtual events. I miss calling her to tell her what opera is on Saturday NPR radio. And I will certainly miss her when concert halls and opera houses return to live performances. She was a unique and thoughtful friend, with a prowess for spreading her enthusiasm for the art form we all love.

\textbf{by Maija Budow}

I met Bea quite by accident through another friend at the indoor tennis club to which we all belonged. This friend happened to mention to me that a group of music lovers were flying to Helsinki, Finland to attend Wagner’s \textit{Ring}. What timing! I had just lost my husband after a long illness and I was trying to look to the future. The friend introduced me to Bea and the rest has been a wonderful adventure! We travelled with the Jussi Björling Society not only to Helsinki, but to conferences all over the USA, and to Sweden of course! What a life that was to meet all these music enthusiasts — and we had so much fun! It was also a pleasure to host a JBS dinner at my own home in Washington, D.C. and to become a member.

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