

Remembering Sarah Duvall

(Nov. 15, 1949–Aug. 15, 2020)

by Norm Krasne



After suffering a catastrophic stroke last summer, one of our fellow JBSers, my partner Sarah Duvall, passed away on August 15th. Compared to most in our Society, she was a relative newcomer to opera and to Jussi's heavenly tenor. As her exposure to the art form grew, she came to prefer more contemporary operatic works to the more traditional classics, but she recognized superior singing when she heard it. Portland (OR) Opera was our home base and over a decade we became more involved with the Company and made many friends among its supporters and staff. Sarah was a volunteer for Portland Opera, co-managing its Storage Locker containing household items used by the young Resident Artists when they came into town. At her passing she was Vice President of Communications and Marketing for Opera Volunteers International (OVI).

Her introduction to JBS-USA took place in St. Peter, MN, on the campus of Gustavus Adolphus College, in June, 2011, the Centennial Celebration of Jussi's birth. Those of us who were there will recall that temperatures in the Minneapolis area the week before ranged from 95-100 degrees (F) every day; so naturally, intelligent

planners that we are, everyone filled their suitcases with shorts and polo and t-shirts for the four days. By the time we left, not a sweatshirt or jacket with the Gustavus insignia remained in the bookstore!

Sarah was amazed, as I had been in Charleston in 2006, my first attendance, by the devotion and corporate knowledge of the JBS crowd. She had (not so secretly) thought, "a four-day conference about a singer who died in 1960: how will we ever fill the time!" Of course, her view changed at the opening event, a delightful reception in the nearby home of Anders and Judie Björling. The quality and depth of the sessions, the shared meals, the camaraderie and great music and singing made the time fly. Even the ride back to the Minneapolis Airport in our mini-cooper was special as we sat across from the ever-gregarious Eldon Wolff who provided non-stop entertainment with his profusion of stories.

Sarah and I flew down to San Francisco for opera at least a couple of times a year, always to see at least two operas on consecutive evenings. On many such jaunts we'd meet our fellow JBSers, Mary Baia-monte and Phyllis Frank who drove up from central California and were subscribers. After the opera we normally had a drink and a bite while assessing the performance we had just seen; a most pleasant part of our routine. On many such visits we met for a special lunch at Tadich's Grill in the heart of San Francisco's financial district. Sometimes Eldon Wolff took BART in from his home in Berkeley to join us; those were indeed celebratory luncheons! Once, we went to Los Angeles Opera's production of *Don Giovanni* especially to hear (our diva) Angela Meade's Donna Anna. Afterward, five of us: (the late) Nina Haro, an LA Opera volunteer and long-time JBSer, Mary, Phyllis, Sarah and I enjoyed a (very) late dinner at Kendall's inside the Dorothy

Chandler Opera House. At dessert, the four ladies practically "forced me" to crash the after-opera cast party to say hello to Angela (which I happily did).

We especially loved to travel and in March, 2013 we took a "Vantage" four-country tour of South America, flying into Santiago, Chile three days ahead of the tour. After a lengthy flight delay, a long ride and very little sleep, we were delighted to be picked up at the airport the next morning by Enrique Gilardoni who drove us to his beach home at Marbella, just outside the seaside community of Viño Del Mar. I had met Enrique and Maria Luisa because of a happy accident in Charleston in 2006. I arrived late to the closing dinner because I had walked in the wrong direction to our restaurant. Naturally, upon arrival I took the last seat available...next to the Gilardonis and Carol Pozevsky (who Sarah and I had lunch with in New Jersey some years later). As Maria Luisa had not attended the Minnesota Conference, this visit was Sarah's introduction to her. Though Sarah did not speak Spanish or Italian and Maria Luisa doesn't speak English, the two women bonded and became fast friends over three delightful days in Chile. The four of us have shared many happy occasions since then. After our visit, we returned to Santiago to meet our tour group and explored parts of southern Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil for the remainder of our holiday. On our final day of that tour, we left the tour bus and our fellow travelers in the heart of Rio de Janeiro... to meet yet another of our JBS friends, Dorian Bruzzi, who took us to a fabulous seafood lunch (On that very day, a Roman conclave selected Cardinal Jorge Mario Bergoglio of Buenos Aires, who became Pope Francis, to lead the Catholic Church. Our Argentinean tour guide was ecstatic!).

Salt Lake City, Utah was the site of our next JBS Conference, in June, 2015. Once again, Sarah and I got a head start on the rest of the group by going in a week ahead. As planned, we met the Gilardonis at our hotel and began the festivities with an "Opening Dinner" joined by then-JBS President, Walter Rudolph and his wife Marilyn. The next morning we drove down



Sarah and Maria Luisa Gilardoni in Borlänge 2018

ington, DC a day ahead of a JBS mini-Conference there in November, 2017 to have dinner with our Chilean friends. Sarah and I played hooky from the opening night's scheduled concert to sneak away to the Kennedy Center to see Angela Meade sing the title role in *Alcina* (and meet with her afterward). It was also nice to run into our "old" pals Mary and Phyllis in the Opera House that night. A Saturday morning visit to the nearby Swedish Embassy was a special treat that weekend as was a lovely Sunday champagne brunch for seven of us at the Army and Navy Club courtesy of Carol Pozevsky (Unfortunately, Sarah missed that while visiting with her brother).

The pinnacle of our association with JBS-USA was undoubtedly our Pilgrimage to Jussi's homeland with a contingent of about twenty other Americans in August and September, 2018. Our group included two fellow Portlanders, Peter Hammond and Frank Johnson.

While we had encountered them from time to time at home, usually around Portland opera events, traveling to Sweden with them cemented our kinship. We've happily met with them several times since Sweden and count them among our dear friends. The four of us were fortunate to have arrived in Stockholm early, allowing us to hook up with Nils-Göran Olve who escorted us on a half-day walking tour of his home city. Naturally, the tour included the city's historic Opera House where Jussi made his debut in July, 1930 (singing the Lamplighter in *Manon Lescaut* in case you've forgotten).

After our hike, the five of us had a delightful lunch in Kungsholen just down the street from a place where Jussi liked to eat. The next day our entourage traveled north by rail to Strömsbruk to enjoy the annual Baltic Music Festival there, sponsored by our friend, Stefan Olmárs. By that time, Jussi's delightful daughter, Anne Charlotte, had joined us and she remained with us for the rest of our trip. We continued on to Borlänge where we spent a fantastic few hours at the Jussi Björling Museum. Harald Henrysson, founder and chief curator of the museum until his "retirement" (there's really no such word when it comes to Harald), was the perfect host for our visit. Until that day, Sarah and I had no inkling of how many Björling collectables displayed in the museum were donated by Enrique (who was on this visit with Maria Luisa, of course, and one of their several granddaughters, Isabella). From the museum, we continued to the Björling family gravesite at Stora Tuna, a beautiful and moving experience. We all returned to Stockholm the next day for more celebrating and a gourmet dinner below Nils-Göran's residence. Our visit concluded with a nightcap and farewells in his cozy home overlooking the bay.

Certainly, we were so looking forward to gathering again with our JBS friends in Chicago next April,...but that was not to be. I hope to meet up with many of you there in April, 2022 and at future JBS gatherings ... Sarah will always be with us in spirit on those occasions. ■

to southern Utah for a 5-day road trip to Bryce and Zion National Parks as well as Arches and Canyonlands. Back in SLC, we enjoyed another terrific Conference during which we got to hear the Mormon Tabernacle Choir rehearse and spend time at the city's renowned Family History Library. The Gilardonis came home for a visit with us from Utah that Sunday morning. We arrived back at PDX (Portland's airport) at about noon... and were properly dressed for the 2 pm matinee of *The Rake's Progress* at Portland Opera.

We were delighted to go into Wash-