

Important Conference Note:

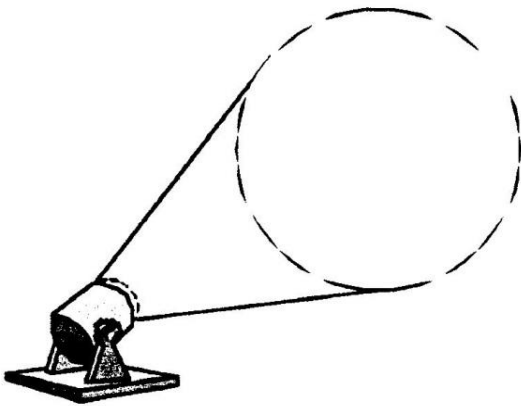
We expect to begin sending out conference registration materials during the first two weeks in March. If you don't receive a packet of materials by the end of March, please contact Mickey Dove immediately.

In the Spotlight: Bill Clayton

It is with great pleasure that we introduce to you Bill Clayton, who recently joined the staff of the Journal as Features Editor. His "Jussi story" follows.

Jussi and Me

By William C. Clayton



"I cannot ever remember when singing was not a part of my life. In my earliest years, I was chiefly influenced by my mother's clear, sweet soprano; by radio concerts with the likes of John Charles Thomas, Nelson Eddy, James Melton, Robert Merrill, Mario Lanza, and Dorothy Kirsten; by the San Antonio opera from 1945 until 1955; by the Met broadcasts; by two years of singing lessons during which I became a serviceable second tenor (lots of heart, minimal instrument); by singing in the chorus when the Met visited San Antonio; and by collecting recordings, especially those of Jussi Björling.

In my youth, we could go to the local record shop and actually listen to recordings, whether we purchased them or not (my first experience with sealed recordings was the Callas *Tosca*; how enraged I was that I could not first "test" it). I spent hours listening to 45 rpm records, with their curiously enlarged center hole, as well as to the earliest long-playing records. Through this venue, I began to develop what can only be called an obsession with the tenor voice as I became especially fond of Jan Peerce, Richard Tucker, Giuseppi di Stefano, Eugene Conley, and Ferruccio Tagliavini.

But the best was yet to come and has, frankly, never been surpassed. My introduction to JB was very similar to that of the redoubtable, elegant, and immensely informed voice historian, George Jellenick. We both learned of Jussi through a music shop, and we both first heard him performing "Che Gelida Manina." One morning in 1953, I was regaling the local shop proprietor with what I thought was my impressive knowledge of tenors when he asked if I knew Björling. I quickly defended my ignorance by extolling the virtues of my three or four favorite tenors, but he was non-plussed. With an air of authority and superiority (not hard to achieve over a feckless teen-ager), he ceremoniously invited me to sit down, and he put an LP on the turntable. With one hearing, I was hooked. I had never heard such smooth legato, such forward-placed tones, such power combined with mezza voce, and especially, such a free, ringing, sustained high C. I suddenly realized what I had missed at the opera. Once, maybe twice, an unknown (to me) tenor, one Jussi Björling, was to sing *Faust* in San

"For completeness of vocal art, however, for me there is still Jussi Björling. Whether live or on recordings, he embodies, as does no other singer, all that vocalism should be—the ineffable collusion of text, tones, notes, and feelings to demonstrate that the singer is singing directly to and for me."