

## *The JB Museum Closed*

# Stockholm Headline: The Jussi Björling Museum will be closed down: “It’s sad that there is so little pride in father there.”

*Dagens Nyheter December 7, 2020*

After 26 years the Jussi Björling museum in Borlänge will be closed down for good. Diminishing visit figures and a strained economy are the given reasons, but the handling by the local authority is questioned. “This is what always happens to culture, when the bureaucrats have free hands”, says the opera singer Marcus Jupiter.

The feelings are strong after the news that the museum will be closed. “Shameful and sad”, says the court singer Malin Byström about the information on Facebook. Her words are mild compared to those from many of her colleagues. In the social media, there has been a hailstorm of invectives after the news became known.

The Jussi Björling Museum has been run by the town of Borlänge since October 1994. Then the doors of the former doctor’s villa were opened a few minutes’ walk from Borlänge’s railway station. A stage costume that was used by Enrico Caruso and donated to Jussi Björling by Caruso’s widow is on show in a display case. CD records, 78 rpm records, scrapbooks, video films, footages and concert post bills are shown on two floors. But only a few weeks more. On January 1, the museum will be closed.

What will happen to the collection in the future has not been decided. “Today we don’t know what premises we’ll get,” says the curator, Jan-Olof Damberg. “We’ll probably be in a room in the library, and the base is likely to be a photo exhibition by Jacob Forsell that was shown at the Stockholm Concert Hall in 2011.”

It is the combination of museum and accessible archive for research that has made the place unique. The collection has attracted scholars from all over the world

SVEN ÅSBERG/DN/SCANPIX



and at the same time anybody interested has been able to browse in a complete catalogue of Jussi's recordings, reviews, concert and opera programs. All what is included in a real museum with expert personnel, sales and scholar support will disappear. All this the town of Borlänge confirms in its answer to an official letter sent in late April, where the chairmen of the three Jussi Björling societies in Sweden, the UK and the USA including engaged music scholars and opera singers asked about the issue of premises and the future for the museum. An e-mail from the executive official of culture and leisure time, Patric Hammar, confirmed its reception. He promised to come back about it during the fall for "further discussion" and to answer questions. It wasn't until November 23, that the answer was delivered, the day before the decision was made.

**Can you understand that many people became disappointed when the promised dialogue about the future of the museum never happened?** The aspect of time could always be discussed. But all the people involved have been aware for a long time that it has been tough. The town has arrived at a point where it has become untenable to continue to run the museum in this way. The move has been considered for several years.

The issue came already up in 2013, curator Jan-Olof Damberg confirms.

He emphasizes that there has been talk about *moving* the museum — not winding it up. A great deal of the collection constitutes of depositions made by the Björling family. Depositions that will now be returned.

**The children of Jussi Björling, Lars and Ann-Charlotte,** are very disappointed at the closing of the museum. They also question how the local authorities have acted on the issue. The news about the closing reached the family on the grapevine.

"It was Harald (Henrysson, former curator of the Jussi Björling museum) who told us over the telephone. The family's view

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Jan-Olof Damberg in the Museum gift shop

is very critical, to say the least," says Lars Björling.

Also Ann-Charlotte is disappointed with the town authorities. She got the news from the chairman of the Swedish Jussi Björling society, Bengt Krantz. "I think it is miserable. The fact that the family wasn't informed is really, really poor. It's so sad that this happened, because Daddy wanted to be buried in Borlänge. It's unfortunate that there is so little pride for Daddy."

The executive official of culture and leisure time, Patric Hammar, has a different opinion. He stresses how precious Jussi Björling is to the town. "It will always be important to display the memory of him in the town. On behalf of the town we are always going to honor and pay tribute to Jussi."

**Can you understand the family's reactions concerning how you have handled this on behalf of the town?**

"It's unfortunate if it is as you say,

that the information about the shutdown reached them on other ways. The relation to the family is most important. But even if we had had a better dialogue the problems with a diminishing number of visitors and an indefensible economy would have remained."

There might, however, be a change for the better. Marcus Jupiter hopes the Björling family collection will come to Stockholm. He's dreaming of a museum on the premises of the former Opera School. "The building is empty and big enough to be used for a full opera museum."

Lars Björling suggests that the family is thinking likewise. "Not saying too much, there may be an opening in Stockholm. It might also be something that observes Christine Nilsson and Jenny Lind. I don't think I can say more yet", he concludes. ■

*Text: Carl-Henric Malmgren*

*Translation: Calle Friedner*

## The JB Museum Closed

### A Sampling of Quotes from JBS-USA Members

What a shame. Visiting the Jussi Björling Museum is one of my cherished memories — What a wonderful place. How sad. A terrible mistake. What a shame.

*David Lewis*

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I hope that the museum contents can be salvaged and displayed elsewhere, as you discuss. Very sad.

*John Haley*

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For many of us in America the idea of traveling to Sweden to see this museum is very important. Although he has been gone for many years his music is still the top of my personal operatic list. His legacy is meant to endure in Sweden, not to be put aside....

*Phyllis Frank*

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There are few memories of historical singers left to us now and Jussi was of course one of the great singers of the 20th century, so it is vital that this museum be kept going.

*David Cutler*

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His artistry and interpretation has served as the gold standard by which many of today's music students are trained. He serves as an inspiration and should be given the honor he rightfully deserves, even if other modifications are needed for the museum's survival.

*Lisa Mazza-Lockwood*

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I have known and loved Jussi's voice for almost 70 years — I am 86, and remember the broadcast of *Don Carlo* in 1950. My wife and I celebrated a wedding anniversary at the Museet.

*Don Pruitt*

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I am appalled and saddened that Borlänge has no concern for a singer considered one of the greatest tenors of all time and whose singing still brings me joy.

*Stephanie Digby*

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I cannot understand how anyone could sanction the closure of such a magnificent world famous jewel of a museum.

*Joseph Colley*

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I am saddened by the news of the imminent closing of the Jussi Björling Museum. To me he remains the greatest tenor of all time and I've had years of enjoyment from his recordings.

*Linda Waldman*

\* \* \*

A world cultural treasure which must not be allowed to close down.

*Everett Fox*

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Dan Shea and Göran Forsling enjoy the Museum

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Birgit Nilsson, Autographed Photos Display

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Historic Met Opera Announcement Poster



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The Museum Reception Desk

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Upstairs in the Museum: Grammy Awards, Scrapbooks, A Listening Corner



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A Museum Display

## Museum Update from Harald Henrysson

February 1, 2021

After my article was written [see page 5], the decision to close the museum has been heavily criticized, especially in the local press. The appeal initiated by the Björling Society and the Royal Opera soloists has now got more than 1400 signatures from many countries. Among those added since the article was written are Joan Baez, who once visited both the museum and Jussi's grave, Jonas Kaufmann, Cecilia Bartoli and Neil Shicoff. A fund-raising drive has also begun.

The chairman of the Borlänge Board of Cultural and Recreational Activities, Maslah Omar, has declared himself positive to studying the initiatives and suggestions for preserving and running the museum and has asked the relevant officials to do this. A first report is expected at the Town board meeting on 9 February. This means that the dismantling of the museum will not yet begin. Göran Forsling, the board member of the Jussi Björling Society who lives in Borlänge, has also had a long meeting with the chairman of the City Council, Jan Bohman, which he describes as positive, although no commitments were made.

*Continuing updates will be posted on the JBS-USA website.*

