

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and JBS-USA

By Dan Shea

Much has been said and written in praise of this phenomenal woman since her passing in September 2020, especially about her substantial influence in the world as a champion of justice, and as a legal, cultural and feminist icon. We join in the celebration of her life by remembering her love of opera and her superb taste in tenors.

Following is a reprint of two articles from the JBS-USA Journal 13, Fall 2001, recounting the June 26, 2001 presentation by Bertil Bengtsson at the Smithsonian Institute in cooperation with the Embassy of Sweden and JBS-USA, an event attended by Justice Ginsburg.

Her later letters to JBS President Dan Shea are also here. (Note her reference to the radiation of her mail, in the era of anthrax and Ricin threats through the USPS.)

DON PRUITT



Bertil Bengtsson and Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg

The Smithsonian Presents Bertil Bengtsson on Jussi: A Swedish Tenor's American Odyssey

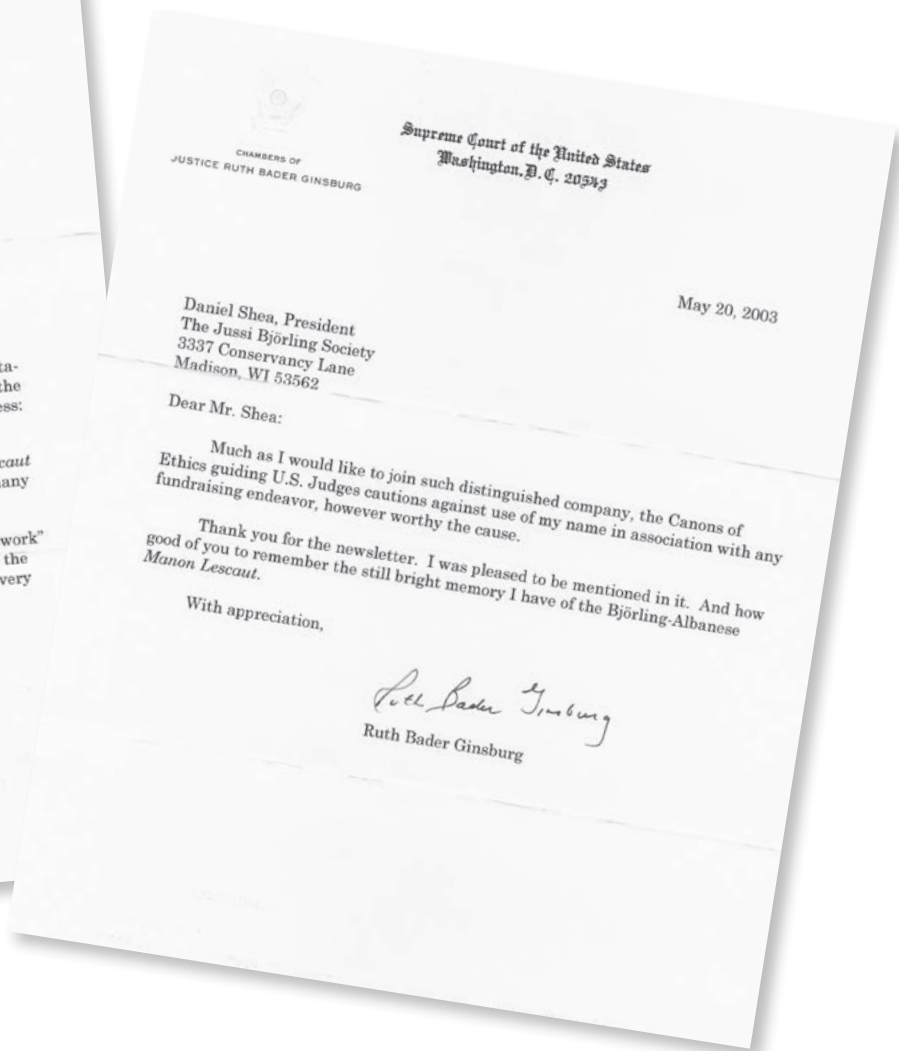
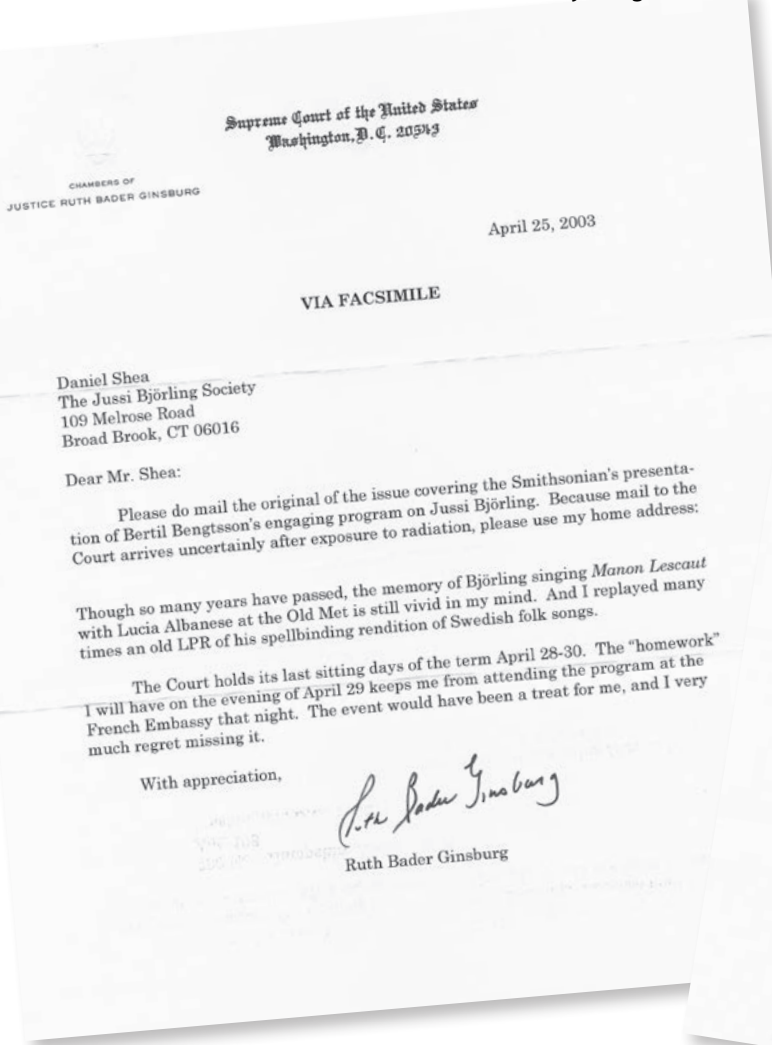
By Dan Shea, based on reports from Bea Bobotek, Enrique Gilardoni, Beau Kaplan and Don Pruitt

As Bertil Bengtsson prepared for his two presentations at the JBS Conference at Gustavus, he received a welcome invitation from the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, DC. Thanks to information provided them by JBS member **Bea Bobotek**, they knew of his availability to speak on Jussi and his career: it would be an attractive program for their continuing lecture series. Bertil worked out some agreements between the Smithsonian and the Embassy of Sweden and accepted. By the time June 26 arrived, word had gone out in the monthly Smithsonian Associates magazine and a nearly sold-out audience of over 200 would appear for the “evening seminar and light buffet reception” at the modern Ring Auditorium of the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden. The whole

event was presented “in cooperation with the Embassy of Sweden and the Jussi Bjoerling Society – USA,” in view of some fine cost-sharing and planning expertise shared by the Embassy’s Cultural Counselor **Nancy Westman**, Smithsonian officials and JBS, working with Bea’s leadership.

Thus Bertil and his friend Elaine Karlsson added Washington to their itinerary, and joined friends Bea, Beau Kaplan and Enrique and Maria-Luisa Gilardoni there, as well as Embassy officials **Nina Ersman** and **Margareta Paul**. The event itself was a big success: Bertil gave his fine lecture, a variant of what he was to present at Gustavus, amply illustrated with recordings, slides and videotapes, including a *Firestone Hour* “Flower Song” from *Carmen*, and a “La donna è mobile” from

the *Ed Sullivan Show*. The slides showed Jussi with Anna-Lisa in costume for *Roméo et Juliette*, a backstage shot at the Met of *Roméo* with Anders and Lars standing with “the kissing lady” Bidú Sayão, and candid shots of Jussi with Anna-Lisa relaxing in Bermuda and Hawaii. The distinguished audience was in fact very enthusiastic, and an elegant reception followed....We were especially pleased with [Don Pruitt’s] photo of Bertil conferring with **Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg**. Assume the discussion was of Jussi and opera — rather than some fine point of US or Swedish jurisprudence. (Actually, Justice Ginsburg is a well known supporter of the arts in Washington, and has been interviewed on a Met Opera broadcast intermission, so her interest in Jussi was not so surprising.) ■



More on Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Bertil Bengtsson's Smithsonian Lecture

By Dan Shea

We were pleased to learn that Supreme Court Justice Ginsburg had attended Bertil's lecture in Washington, described elsewhere in this *Journal*, but not really surprised: Justice Ginsburg is a well known supporter of the arts and especially an opera fan. In fact, she told about her enthusiasm for opera during an interview on a Met intermission feature last season, as you may recall. But in checking some biographical notes on her (www.supremecourthistory.org/justice/ginsburg.htm and also via google.com) we

were surprised to learn of her additional connections to Sweden and to the classical music recording industry!

In fact, after graduating from Harvard Law School Justice Ginsburg participated in a comparative law project sponsored by Columbia Law School that culminated in a book on judicial procedure in Sweden, coauthored with Anders Bruzelius (1965). Her official autobiography states that "After almost daily tutoring in Swedish for several months, she traveled to Sweden to observe Swedish courts in operation." Further,

during the years 1990-1993 she "spent some of her spare time assisting in the translations of the Swedish Code of Judicial Procedure into English." She concludes by mentioning that "She is an opera devotee who has appeared in full period costume — complete with wig and fan — as an extra in a Washington Opera production." She has been married since 1954 to Martin D. Ginsburg; they have a daughter, Jane, who teaches at Columbia Law School, and a son, James, who produces classical recordings. ■