



# Newsletter

of the Jussi Björling Societies of the USA & UK

No. 36—August 2020

Peter C. Hammond, Contributing Editor

## Jussi Björling Society-USA at Symphony Center *Chicago Conference*

**T**he Jussi Björling Society-USA is excited to announce that plans for our 2021 Conference in Chicago are being finalized, and we are now accepting advance registrations with the enclosed form, or online.

**The dates are April 8 (eve), 9 and 10, 2021.** The Conference will include nine distinguished speakers, group tickets to two wonderful concerts, and group discounted hotel rooms.

The venue will be the 9th Floor **Thomas Club at Symphony Center**, 220 South Michigan Avenue. We intend to bring together the very best in musical events and presenters to provide an enriching and enjoyable weekend for our membership—something to look forward to!

The Conference, our first in Chicago, will also be an important part of our continuing recruitment efforts for new members. We will reach out to the city's musical, educational, and Swedish communities. It is our hope to win fresh interest and new members for the Society, and to remind Chicago of Jussi's two decades of performances in the city - including his 1937 United States opera debut!

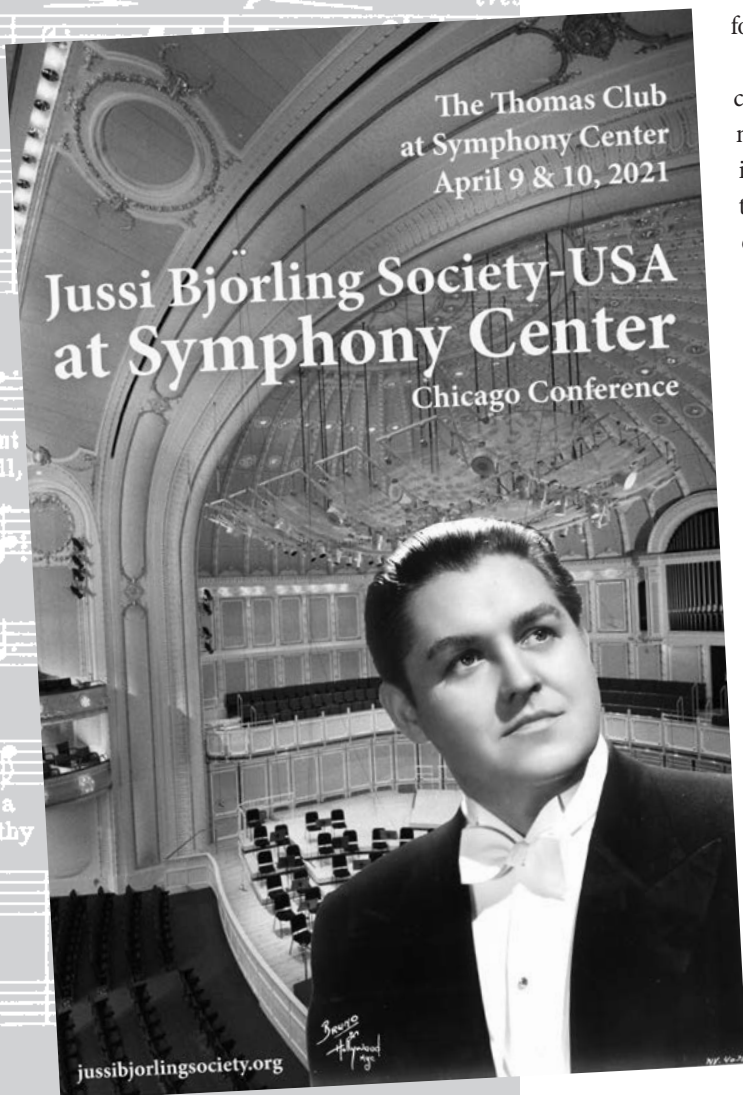
Following is the order of events as currently planned:

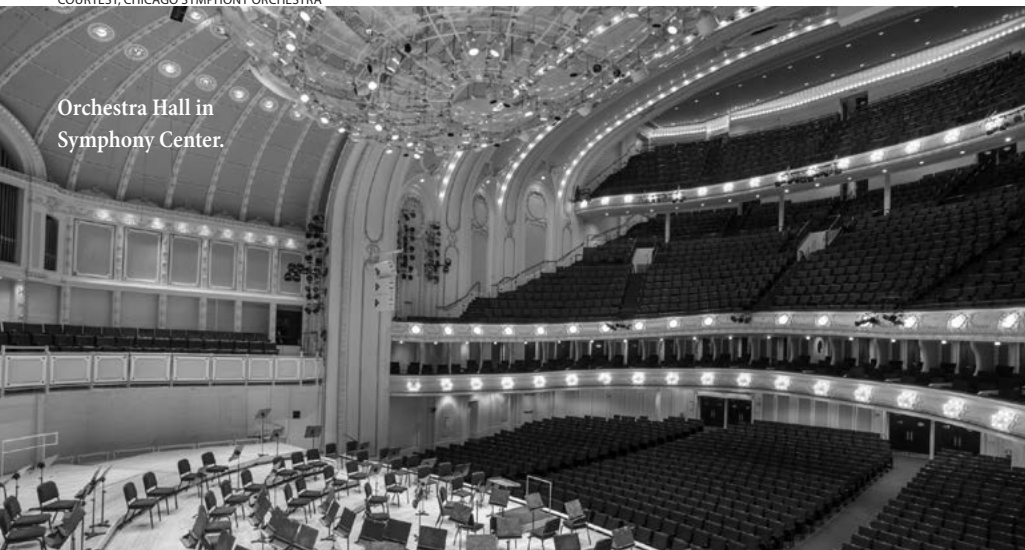
**THURSDAY, APRIL 8:** The Conference opens with a 5:00 pm dinner at Opus Restaurant in Symphony Center, followed by a 7:30 pm concert by the **Chicago Symphony Orchestra**. JBS will have a block of discounted seats in beautiful Orchestra Hall.

The CSO concert program will include the Prelude and Liebestod from *Tristan und Isolde*, followed by the Wagner "Wesendonck Lieder" with Amanda Majeski, soprano. The Saint-Saëns Organ Symphony will conclude the evening. Fabien Gabel is guest conductor.

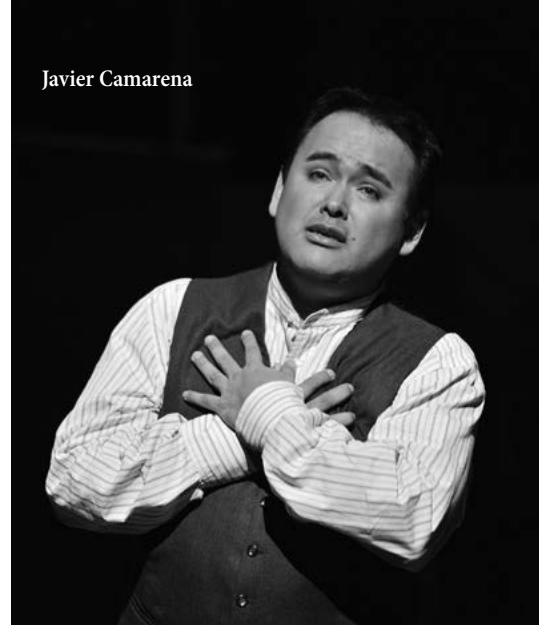
American lyric soprano **Amanda Majeski** specializes in Mozart and Strauss heroines, and performs to enthusiastic reviews at the Metropolitan Opera, Lyric Opera of Chicago, and Oper Frankfurt, as well as Glyndebourne Festival, Opernhaus Zürich, the Paris Opera and Teatro Real.

Conductor **Fabien Gabel** is recognized internationally as one of the stars of a new generation of conductors, having established a broad repertoire ranging from core symphonic works to contemporary new works and championing lesser-known works by French composers. He has been the Music Director of the *Orchestre Symphonique de Québec* since 2012 and Music Director of the innovative *Orchestre Français des Jeunes* since 2017.





Orchestra Hall in  
Symphony Center.



Javier Camarena

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**FRIDAY, APRIL 9: Conference sessions** will be held from 9 am to 12 noon, and from 1:30 pm to 4:30 pm, in the 9th Floor Thomas Club in Symphony Center. You may take a virtual tour of the venue by visiting the CSO website at <https://cso.org/about/facility-rentals/virtual-tour/> and selecting the 9th Floor Club.

During the break for lunch, attendees may sign up in advance for boxed lunches in the venue, or may choose to have lunch in a neighboring café or restaurant.

**Friday evening** is free, but we will soon provide you with a list of performances, concerts and events occurring that night in the area, including Lyric Opera of Chicago, the Auditorium Theatre, Chicago Opera Theatre, and others. This will give you plenty of time to make your own plans and purchase your own advance tickets.

\* \* \*

**SATURDAY, APRIL 10: Conference sessions** resume at 9 am and conclude at 1 pm.

**Saturday afternoon** is free, and you will find entirely too much to choose from, whether a leisurely lunch or glamorous shopping in the Loop. Don't forget the Chicago Art Institute beckons just across the street from Symphony Center.

**Saturday evening** we reconvene at the Harris Theatre, 205 East Randolph Street, (a 5-minute taxi ride from the hotel) for the

7:30 pm concert of tenor **Javier Camarena**, the preeminent Mozart and bel canto specialist of his generation. Praised for his burnished tone, gleaming high notes and flawless coloratura, he regularly appears in leading roles alongside today's foremost stars at the world's top opera houses, and was the face of *Opera News's* 80th anniversary edition this past January. A Jussi enthusiast, he is also a member of our Honorary Advisory Board. JBS will have a block of discounted tickets for this exciting concert.

**Following the concert**, we plan a final gathering in the lounge of the hotel for optional drinks and light fare.

\* \* \*

**THE HOTEL:** JBS has a block of generously discounted hotel rooms at the **Silversmith Hotel**. Located at 10 South Wabash, the hotel is only four blocks away from Symphony Center, and offers room service, fitness center and free WiFi among its amenities. Rooms include large walk-in showers, coffee makers, safes, and

**The COVID-19 Issue:** JBS is very aware that no one will feel comfortable travelling if the virus still poses a health threat, and that our plans may have to change as a result of the pandemic. Therefore, the Board of Directors will be monitoring the situation throughout the fall, and is prepared to postpone the entire conference to a later date if necessary. This decision will be reached by the close of 2020. **In the event of postponement, attendees will have the option of having their registration and ticket fees transferred to the new conference dates, or refunded in full.**

small refrigerators. Breakfast and dinner are available on premises at their Adamus Restaurant.

\* \* \*

**WE RECOMMEND** you make your Conference reservations soon! The Thomas Club has a seating capacity of 95, and the Conference is open to the public, so the potential for selling out is likely. Please use the enclosed registration form to send along with your check. For payment with credit card, please visit our website to fill out the online registration form, at [www.jussibjorlingsociety.org](http://www.jussibjorlingsociety.org).

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**THE CONFERENCE SPEAKERS:**

**Lars Björling**, Jussi's youngest son, was present at his father's last performances at the Metropolitan Opera in the fall of 1959, and provides a detailed and warmly personal account of those performances in the upcoming *Immortal Performances* CD set (to be released November 2020).



Silversmith Hotel

**Andrew Farkas** is co-author with Anna-Lisa Björling of the acclaimed Björling biography, *Jussi*. He is the co-author or editor of three other opera biographies and a bio-bibliography. He contributed book chapters, articles, bibliographies and reviews to a number of international publications, anthologies, encyclopedias and music magazines. He developed and directed the Library of the newly established University of North Florida (1970-2003). He was awarded the 1991 Distinguished Professor Award, and upon his retirement he was given the Library Director Emeritus title.

**Henry Fogel** is Producer/Host of *Collectors' Corner with Henry Fogel* for WFMT Radio Network, a series including a broad range of orchestral, vocal, chamber and solo-instrumental music. Recently retired as the dean of Roosevelt University's Chicago College of Performing Arts, he was also for many years president and CEO of the Chicago Symphony, and has held many important positions in music administration over the past 55 years.

**Stephen Hastings** has been the Milan correspondent of *Opera News* since 1991, and is the author of the masterful 2012 book, *The Björling Sound, A Recorded Legacy*. Born in London and educated in Oxford, he was editor of the Italian monthly *Musica* for many years. He is a frequent contributor to JBS publications, and has spoken at almost all JBS conferences, both in the United States and in Sweden.

**Harald Henrysson** is Founding Curator of the Jussi Björling Museum in Borlänge, Sweden, and an ultimate resource on the

life and career of the artist. He is the author of a new book, *David Björling and His Sons in America*, as well as three published editions of *A Jussi Björling Phonography*. Co-founder of the Jussi Björling Society in Sweden, he has contributed notes for some 40 LP/CD recordings, and co-authored a JB Chronology on the web. In 2006, Henrysson received the Jussi Björling Award (*Jussi Björlingstipendiet*) from the Stockholm Royal Opera Soloists Foundation, and in 2011, the Scandinavian Jussi Björling Society Prize (*Jussi Björlingsällskapets Pris*).

**Nils-Göran Olve** is a former chairman of the Friends of the Royal Opera in Stockholm, and contributes regularly to the Swedish Jussi Björling Society as interviewer, lecturer, and writer. He also regularly provides articles on historic singers for the UK magazine *The Record Collector*. With a doctorate from the Stockholm School of Economics, he has written more than twenty books on management control.

**Conrad L. Osborne**, renowned critic, author, voice teacher and performer, is the author of the definitive book on the subject, *Opera as Opera: The State of the Art*. He also posts the extensive blog "Osborne on Opera". As an international music critic, he has written for *High Fidelity/Musical America*, *The New York Times*, and *Opera News*, among many others. He also serves as an Administrative Consultant, with affiliations over the years with Affiliate Artists, National Opera Institute, and the Martha Baird Rockefeller Fund for Music.

**Roger Pines** is dramaturg at Lyric Opera of Chicago, where he joined the

staff in 1995. An annual panelist on the Metropolitan Opera broadcasts' "Opera Quiz" since 2006, he also writes regularly for *Opera News*, *Opera* (U.K.), opera-company programs nationally and internationally, and CD and DVD releases by major recording companies. Having taught the opera repertoire course of Northwestern University's Bienen School of Music last year, he will return to teach it again in 2020-21.

**Fred Plotkin** is one of America's foremost opera experts and has distinguished himself as a writer, speaker, consultant, teacher, and expert on all things Italian. He does a great deal of broadcasting (including his program "Fred Plotkin on Fridays" on *idagio.com*) and is the lead opera writer for New York's *WQXR.org*. His book, *Opera 101: A Complete Guide to Learning and Loving Opera* is the best-selling opera education text in America.

#### MASTER OF CEREMONIES:

**Walter B. Rudolph**, retired broadcaster and musicologist, is a former President of JBS-USA. In addition to Jussi Björling, he has particularly followed the careers of Hans Hotter and Giorgio Tozzi. His most recent presentation was to the Richard Wagner Society in Washington, DC.

\* \* \*

**Anders, Lars, and Ann-Charlotte Björling** are invited special guests. We also anticipate some lively panel discussions and surprise musical visitors! ■



*Announcing Immortal Performances'  
New Release*

**Jussi Björling — A Tribute  
His Final Fabulous Met  
Season — 1959**

**The 6-CD Set Includes:  
THREE COMPLETE OPERAS**

**Mascagni: CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA 16 November 1959:** Nino Verchi, cond; Jussi Björling (Turiddu); Giulietta Simionato (Santuzza); Walter Cassel (Alfio); Rosalind Elias (Lola); Thelma Votipka (Lucia)

**Puccini: TOSCA 21 November 1959:** Dimitri Mitropoulos, cond; Mary Curtis-Verna (Tosca); Jussi Björling (Cavaradossi); Cornell MacNeil (Scarpia)

**Gounod: FAUST 19 December 1959:** Jean Morel, cond; Jussi Björling (Faust); Elisabeth Söderström (Marguerite); Robert Merrill (Valentin); Cesare Siepi (Méphistophélès); Mildred Miller (Siebel)

**THE SET ALSO INCLUDES SCENES AND ARIAS FROM:**

**JB First Concert in the USA, 28 November 1937:** General Motors Radio Concert from Carnegie Hall, with Maria Jeritza

**JB Fifth Concert in the USA, 19 December 1937:** General Motors Radio Concert from Carnegie Hall

**Hilversum, Holland Radio Concert, 8 June, 1939**

**Act III, Scene 2, *Il trovatore* 12 May 1939,** Covent Garden, with Gina Cigna

**Act III, *Tosca* 12 February 1959,** with Kjerstin Dellert, Royal Opera Stockholm

**Acts III and IV, *La bohème*, 30 September 1957,** Malmö Municipal Theater, with Ethel Mårtensson

**Editor's Note:** Members may pre-order their copies at a discounted price using the enclosed Audio and Book Order Form, or online at [www.jussibjorlingsociety.org](http://www.jussibjorlingsociety.org)

IMMORTAL PERFORMANCES



**JUSSI  
BJÖRLING**  
A  
TRIBUTE

**HIS FINAL FABULOUS MET SEASON - 1959**  
(includes two performances never previously available)

CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA, complete Met 1959  
TOSCA, complete Met 1959 ♦ FAUST, complete Met 1959  
also  
Björling's New York radio debut (1937)  
plus subsequent scenes and arias from the operatic stage and concerts,  
including rare broadcasts from Swedish Radio  
SPECIAL ARTICLES - RARE PHOTOS

IMMORTAL PERFORMANCES



**JUSSI BJÖRLING**  
HIS FABULOUS FINAL SEASON AT THE MET  
— THREE COMPLETE OPERAS —  
Mascagni: CAVALLERIA RUSTICANA  
Puccini: TOSCA ♦ Gounod: FAUST  
also  
LA BOHÈME - Malmö excerpts 1957 - TOSCA Act III Sweden 1959  
includes  
Reminiscence of the 1959 Met season by Lars Björling  
Article by Harald Henrysson  
Photos and operatic scenes, arias, duets and concerts 1936-1959

RESTORATION 2020  
NOTICE: SIX CDS FOR THE PRICE OF FIVE

© 2020 Immortal Performances Printed and made in Canada Total Time: 7:25:58  
[www.immortalperformances.org](http://www.immortalperformances.org)



# Jussi Björling

## His Final Season at the Met 1959

by Richard Caniell  
Founder and Sound Engineer, *Immortal Performances*

It is an extraordinary fact that Jussi Björling's final season of his life, afflicted though he was with heart problems, revealed his voice at its most refulgent, his characterizations the utmost in expressiveness. Fortunately, we have preservasions which corroborate the truth of this while communicating that his vocal art had achieved a fusion of fiery passion and refinement of expression without parallel in any other tenor of the twentieth century.

The three roles he sang in his ultimate Met season are presented in our tribute in the order in which they were heard. The first two — *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Tosca* — derive from single-mike house lines in far better sonics than have been hearable in tape copies passed between collectors. The last, *Faust*, from a justly famed broadcast, is here presented in the best sound and with the broadcast commentary by Milton Cross, recreating this occasion with memorable fidelity.

In addition, the set offers as bonuses the complete third act of *Tosca* from Jussi's final performance at the Royal Opera, Stockholm, in 1959. We have previously released the complete *Manon Lescaut* he sang there in 1959 (IP 1110-2) and other scenes and arias that add further dimension to his history. Our releases of Björling's vocal art over the years include the 1940 Verdi *Requiem*, 1940 *Roméo et Juliette*, 1940 *Un ballo in maschera*, 1941 *Il trovatore*, 1947 *Roméo et Juliette* and 1959 *Manon Lescaut*. This present release would not have been possible without the generous contribution and encouragement of Harald Henrysson, Sue Flaster, Kristian Krogholm, Jan-Olof Damberg of the Björling Museum and Stephen Hastings.

My personal involvement with Jussi Björling began in the early 1940s when I acquired a number of 78-rpm discs of his singing and then had the opportunity to see him at the Met in a 1947 *Il trovatore*. Up until then, the tenors I most cherished were Gigli and Melchior, so that Björling's virile, shining tenor voice spanned the distance between these two, introducing me to a voice with great lyric warmth mixed with a glowing power of expression. My regard for his singing increased exponentially as I came to hear him in all his recorded roles; I came to regard him as the greatest tenor among the lyric dramatic voices of his era. Out of this came the interest and energy to share his achievement with other music lovers and thus ensued our *Immortal Performances* CD sets, the latest of which is among the most thrilling of all. ■

# John Steane on Richard Caniell

In a book published almost forty years ago I wrote of the invaluable supply of 'private' recordings, mostly taken 'off-the-air' of live performances, some of them from the 1930s, noting that unfortunately they came with much factual misinformation and were unreliable in matters such as speed and pitch. I added that it was to be hoped that one day these faults could be amended, with proper editing of the originals and with more scholarly care over documentation. In one instance (and by no means the most important) I said that attention of this kind, by whoever provided it, "would earn eternal gratitude." Richard Caniell is the man who has done most to win that gratitude in the intervening years.

Working with a small, dedicated body of assistants, in a privately run but officially recognized organization on a non-profit-making basis, he has now amassed a library of some hundreds of these recordings, all made publicly available, in maximum clarity of sound, with speeds and pitches corrected and full documentation provided. Many of the recordings are of symphonic and operatic performances renowned in reputation but otherwise lost to present-day listeners as hearing-experience. The artists – conductors, instrumentalists and singers – are, typically, the very greatest of the last century.

These are the cold facts and are (or could be) open to all. The purpose of my writing now is to pay a more personal tribute. Living and working in England, I have never met Mr. Caniell and do not suppose now that I ever will. But over the years he has been close and vivid as a man of exceptional devotion to his calling. And that is what it is. As a young man, he heard a record of music conducted by Toscanini which moved him more deeply than he thought music could ever do, and that was the start. A record-man, with a passion for greatness in performance, he followed where this led. Then the realization that so many recordings lay undiscovered, 'un-mined' and essentially wasted drove him to work in this field, and, where most of us would be content to research and leave the practicalities to others, he got down to the job himself. He mastered the technical business and (most crucial of all) was prepared to put in the hours of labor, identifying minute faults and correcting them. At all stages he has met with setbacks that I know would have deterred me and would have discouraged anybody. If ever any private enterprise in this field of preservation and restoration deserved support, this of Mr. Caniell's most surely does. ■

*The late John Steane (1929-2011) is the author of The Grand Tradition: Seventy Years of Singing on Record, 1900-1970 (Duckworth and Scribner), Voices: Singers and Critics, and three volumes of Singers of the Century (all Duckworth and Amadeus). He contributed to such publications as Opera, Opera Now, Musical Times, and The New Grove Dictionary of Music. From 1975 to 1995 he was a frequent broadcaster on BBC Radio 3.*

# Jussi Björling on the Opera Stage: A List of Companies with Which He Sang

Compiled by Harald Henrysson

Arranged according to the number of complete opera or operetta performances with each company.

In the second column: number of performances.

Three numbers indicate: performances on the home stage + performances on tour = total number.

In the third column: first and last year of performing with the company.

Kungliga Teatern / Operan (Royal Opera), Stockholm	659+272=931	1930-60
Metropolitan Opera, New York	90+29=119	1938-59
San Francisco Opera	26+18=44	1940-58
Chicago City Opera, Chicago Opera Company, Lyric Theater of Chicago, Lyric Opera of Chicago	36	1937-58
Wiener Staatsoper (Vienna State Opera)	15	1936-37
Teatro alla Scala (La Scala Opera), Milan	9	1946-51
Royal Opera (Covent Garden), London	6	1939-60
Suomalaisen Ooppera (Finnish Opera), Helsinki	5	1943-55
Det Kongelige Teater (Royal Theater), Copenhagen	4	1942-45
Teatro Comunale (Municipal Theater), Florence	4	1943
Národní Divadlo (National Theater), Prague	3	1936
Magyar Királyi Állami Operaház (Hungarian Royal State Opera House), Budapest	3	1937-42
Sächsische Staatsoper (Saxonian State Opera), Dresden	2	1937
New Orleans Opera	2	1950
Connecticut Opera, Hartford	2	1951-53
Malmö Stadsteater (Municipal Theater)	2	1957
Tulsa Opera	2	1959
Cosmopolitan Opera, San Francisco	2	1960
Zemské Divadlo (County Theater), Brno	1	1936
Nürnberg Opernhaus (Nuremberg Opera House)	1	1937
Deutsches Opernhaus (German Opera House), Berlin	1	1937
Neues Deutsches Theater (New German Theater), Prague	1	1937
San Antonio Grand Opera	1	1949
Opera Guild of Greater Miami	1	1954
Württembergische Staatsoper (Wurttemberg State Opera), Stuttgart	1	1954
Narodno Pozorište (National Theater), Belgrade	1	1954
Hrvatsko Narodno Kazaliste (Croatian National Theater), Zagreb	1	1954
New York City Opera (on tour)	0+1=1	1956
Stadttheater (Municipal Theater), Zurich	1	1957

The total number of performances is 1202. This includes two (in Stockholm & New York) where JB had to be replaced during the performance, but not the Met *Fledermaus* gala where he did not sing music from the operetta. In addition to the complete performances, in Stockholm he once sang two acts of *L'illustre Fregona*, and several times single acts of other operas; in Paris, he sang act 1 of *Bohème*.

Harald Henrysson, Founding Curator of the Jussi Björling Museum in Borlänge, Sweden, is a member of the JBS-USA Advisory Board.



In front of the Stockholm Royal  
Opera House

# Information on the new Jussi Björling discussion group at [Bjorling2@groups.io](mailto:Bjorling2@groups.io)

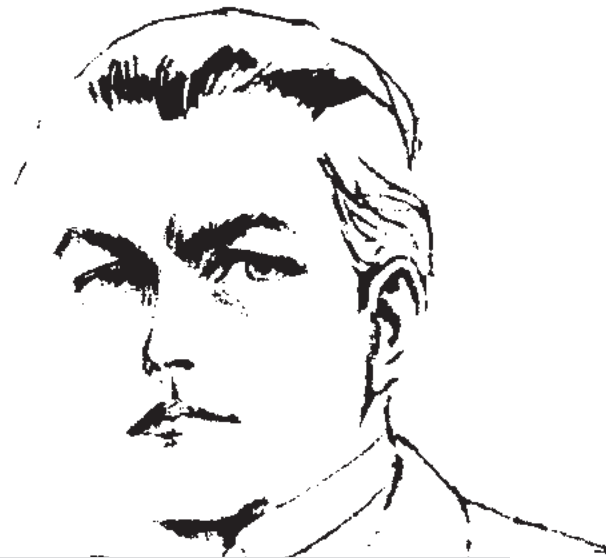
by Dan Shea

Would you like occasionally to express an opinion about singing to friends who understand your enthusiasm for Björling and other great historical singers, or even current opera singers? Well, some of us have fun talking about slightly abstruse topics like Jussi's four recordings of Beethoven's song "Adelaide," for instance comparing the 1949 version from Jussi's Hollywood Bowl concert (newly available!) with the other three, and even with versions by other singers.

Or, how about Mozart's aria "Il mio tesoro" from *Don Giovanni*? How does Jussi's live version from a high-pressure Carnegie Hall concert compare with other favorites, like Richard Tauber's or John McCormack's? That was a hot topic on the group just a couple of months ago.

Consider joining our Jussi-group! Supported by the JBS membership, it's free and easy to do (and easy to un-do, if you decide that you want to unsubscribe). Just write to moderator John Borders at [Bjorling2+owner@groups.io](mailto:Bjorling2+owner@groups.io) and ask him to add your name and email address to his list. You may also join through the link on the home page of our website, [www.jussibjorlingsociety.org](http://www.jussibjorlingsociety.org).

You'll have several choices on how mail will appear on your computer. We suggest you ask for delivery any time that it arrives. That way you'll be ready to add your comments! ■



## New honorary member of Sweden's Jussi Björling Society 2020

*Reprinted from the Jussi Björling Sällskapet website, March 2020*

It is with happiness and respect we welcome **Susan Flaster** as new honorary member in The Jussi Björling Society. Although Sue, as most people call her, lives in Charleston, South Carolina, she has spent a lot of time in Sweden, not least in Säter, Dalecarlia, where she spends some time of the year and lives and works with her Swedish husband, Harald Henrysson. Both have a strong connection in Jussi Björling's life and achievement.

And Sue has also meant a lot to our sister society, The Jussi Björling Society – USA, where she has been both president and secretary. She is still active in the American society and deals with contacts and distribution of records and books. Sue Flaster is the twenty-sixth in the row of the society's honorary members.

*Congratulations to Sue from JBS-USA! ■*

## Announcing a Change in JBS Publication Schedule

You may have noticed that our 2020 *Journal* this year was significantly longer than usual, and has been slowly expanding in recent years. And you will find that this *Newsletter* has also grown beyond its traditional eight-page format. With these deliberate changes in mind, the Board of Directors has decided to eliminate the Fall *Newsletter* (which has always been a challenge, coming out only three months prior to the *Journal*). This decision will also result in the elimination of layout, printing and postage costs.

But not to worry. The Fall *Newsletter's* eight pages of information will be absorbed in the formats of the other two publications, so you will not miss a thing! Our publication schedule henceforth will be the *Journal* in February, and the August *Newsletter* six months later. Please also look for day-to-day news on our Facebook and Instagram accounts, as well as our website, all growing resources! ■

# In Memoriam

## Kerstin Meyer and Margareta Hallin

by Peter C. Hammond—with a personal memorial tribute to Kerstin Meyer by Bengt Krantz



Kerstin Meyer as the title character in *Carmen*

ENAR MERKEL RYDBERG, ROYAL SWEDISH OPERA

Two Swedish artists of note with connections to Jussi Björling passed away earlier this year, soprano Margareta Hallin and mezzo-soprano Kerstin Meyer.

### Kerstin Meyer 1928-2020

Mezzo-soprano Kerstin Meyer, who died at the age of 92 on April 14, 2020, appeared in several operas with Jussi. Recordings survive featuring him with Meyer as Maddalena in *Rigoletto* in 1957 and as Azucena in *Il trovatore* in 1960 at the Royal Opera House in Stockholm, the latter being the same role in which she had made her debut there in 1952. She was a longtime member of the Royal Swedish Opera and the Hamburg State Opera and

made many guest appearances at the major opera houses of London, Milan, New York, Vienna, and elsewhere. She often performed in concert with Elisabeth Söderström, with whom she had shared a teacher, along with another pupil named Anna-Lisa Berg, later Björling.

Our friend and colleague, Bengt Krantz, Chairman of the Swedish Jussi Björling Society, has been kind enough to share this memorial tribute with us:

“Only 66 days after the passing of Margareta Hallin, I have the painful duty to announce that still another Honorary Member of the Swedish Jussi Björling Society has died. The opera and concert singer Kerstin Meyer, also a Court Singer and professor, left our mortal life on the 14th of April at the age of 92.

“A cheerful, curious, sympathetic and lovable representative of the singers’ guild has left us. With that, one of the last important Swedish singers that sang together

with Jussi Björling is now a part of eternity.

“Kerstin Meyer was abundantly active at The Royal Opera House of Stockholm, where she participated in 74 productions following her debut in 1952. Her roles included a vast selection of classic mezzo-soprano parts in a variety of different languages, predominantly from the German, French and Italian repertoire. She also appeared in contemporary repertoire, premieres, and Swedish works. In addition, she was active in opera houses outside the Swedish border. She approached all categories of music with vitality, enthusiasm and devotion.

“Meyer was also one of the relatively few opera singers that was seen frequently in public, often in the company of Kjerstin Dellert and Elisabeth Söderström.

“Her educational activities included, besides substantial work as a voice coach, a period as headmaster at the High School of Opera in Stockholm. In that way she kept contact all her life with music, through the art of opera and concert singing.

“The voice of Kerstin Meyer is preserved in numerous recordings, produced in the homeland and internationally. She also participated in the film adaptation of *Värmlänningarna* in 1957, with Per Myrberg and Busk Margit Jonsson in the leading roles. It is hard to find something as purely Swedish as this film.

“*Rigoletto* and *Trovatore* are two works where Meyer met Jussi Björling on stage. She also tried her hand at English operetta at Oscarsteatern in Stockholm in 1980 when she appeared as Buttercup in *HMS Pinafore* by Gilbert & Sullivan. Her majestic farewell occurred at Malmö Opera in *A Little Night Music* by Stephen Sondheim, when she was 85. The same year she was a lovely host in “Sommar” on Swedish Radio.

“Personal memories of Kerstin Meyer include when, full of excitement, she came back from the USA with her husband, culture journalist Björn Bexelius. They had seen *Ernani* at the Metropolitan, and they had observed that Folkoperan was performing the opera at their then-present address at Roslagsgatan in Stockholm. She persuaded her husband to see what



*Ernani* in Stockholm could offer, since they were not impressed with the Metropolitan production. It was enormously invigorating and gratifying when she generously assured us that *Ernani* at the small theatre at Roslagsgatan far surpassed the MET in acting and singing. That authoritative statement warmed a young opera singer's heart.

"Kerstin Meyer was loyal to The Jussi Björling Swedish Society and contributed many great moments at concerts and gatherings. She was also a distinguished host at many concerts in other contexts. One unforgettable occasion was when she and Torsten Föllinger were hosts at "Opera Baddies" at The Royal Academy of Music in 1991, arranged by Hans Hiort. It was the seniors' turn to show up on the tightrope, and the concert was crowned with an acclaimed performance by Hjördis Schymberg, then 82 years of age. The warmth, love and humor that beamed from Kerstin that afternoon is kept in fond memory. Sadly, almost every singer from that occasion is gone now.

"Kerstin Meyer was honored with many distinctions, among them Illis Quorum, Litteris et Artibus, The Theatre Associations Gold Medal, and CBE, Commander of the British Empire.

"We continue to cherish the memory of a grand singer and a brilliant fellow human. Because that was Kerstin Meyer." ■

—Bengt Krantz

**References for Hallin and Meyer article:**

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Margareta Hallin as Mimì in *La bohème*

ENAR MERKEL RYDBERG, ROYAL SWEDISH OPERA

## Margareta Hallin 1931–2020

**M**argareta Hallin had an interesting and varied career, beginning with her debut in 1955 as Rosina in *The Barber of Seville* with the Royal Swedish Opera in Stockholm. She went on to sing more than 1,500 performances at the Royal Opera House over the next twenty-nine years and now has a bust there in her honor. This focus on Sweden was by her own choice; Nicolai Gedda, for one, thought that with her "beautiful coloratura soprano voice" she could have had an international career.

Although she never appeared in opera with Jussi, she took part with him and other Royal Opera soloists in the Gröna Lund concert of June 9, 1960. Recordings of duets with Jussi were planned in 1960, but prevented by his death.

Hallin received *Jussi Björlingstipendiet* (The Jussi Björling Award) in 1970. She also acted in films and released several pop hit records. After retiring from singing in 1984, Hallin began composing music, including a chamber opera based on the Strindberg play *Miss Julie*. Margareta Hallin died at the age of 88 on February 9, 2020. ■

# In Memoriam

## Rosalind Elias (1930 – 2020)

Tribute from the Metropolitan Opera, May 2020

“The Metropolitan Opera mourns the death of one of our most beloved artists, mezzo-soprano Rosalind Elias, who sang 687 performances with the company over a period of 42 years. She made her Met debut in 1954 at just 23 years of age as Grimgerde in *Die Walküre* and initially sang supporting roles, but soon graduated to larger parts such as Siébel in *Faust*, Maddalena in *Rigoletto*, and Suzuki in *Madama Butterfly*. Then, in 1958, she was chosen to sing the leading role of Erika in the world premiere of Samuel Barber’s *Vanessa*. At her request, the composer added the aria “Must the Winter Come So Soon,” which is now a staple concert piece for mezzo-sopranos. It turned out to be a breakout role for her, and more major parts followed. She created another role by Barber eight years later when the world premiere of his *Antony and Cleopatra* opened the new Metropolitan Opera House at Lincoln Center, with Elias as Charmian.

“Elias sang an incredible 54 different roles at the Met, plus the mezzo solos in special performances of the Verdi *Requiem* given in memory of John F. Kennedy shortly after his assassination. Her warm, sensuous timbre suited a wide variety of parts, including the title role in Bizet’s *Carmen*, Dorabella in Mozart’s *Così fan tutte*, Zerlina in Mozart’s *Don Giovanni*, Laura in Ponchielli’s *La Gioconda*, and Charlotte in Massenet’s *Werther*. Svelte and attractive, she was often assigned “pants roles,” playing the part of a boy, such as Hansel in Humperdinck’s *Hansel and Gretel*, Cherubino in Mozart’s *Le nozze di Figaro*, and Octavian in Strauss’s *Der Rosenkavalier*.

“Roz’ was as charming offstage as onstage and was cherished as a generous and supportive colleague. A devoted company member, she continued attending Met rehearsals and performances right



METROPOLITAN OPERA ARCHIVES

Ms. Elias in her breakout role in 1958 as Erika in Samuel Barber’s *Vanessa*.

up until recently, and her many friends always looked forward to seeing her in the audience. We will sorely miss her gracious presence, and we offer our sincerest condolences to her family and legions of friends and admirers.” ■

*Editor’s Note:* In June 1960, Ms. Elias recorded the Verdi *Requiem* with Jussi, and spoke of her colleague with appreciation: “Rosalind had a high regard for Jussi; when asked about him, she replied, ‘Hey! If you mention Jussi Björling, you cannot speak about anybody else! He was incomparable. He was unique!’” Anna-Lisa Björling, Andrew Farkas: *Jussi* (Amadeus Press, 1996, page 337.)

# In Memoriam

## Art Skantz, Our Dedicated Colleague

By Dan Shea

We deeply regret to tell you that Art Skantz, a longtime Björling Society member and a past Treasurer and board member, died last January 26. As Treasurer from 2004 to 2011, he was the conscientious keeper of the JBS books and an always helpful supporter of worthy projects. Art had high-level experience in corporate finance. Further, he and his wife Marilyn had great memories of having heard Jussi at Lyric Opera during the 1950s. Clearly he was well qualified to serve JBS-USA as financial officer!

Art was proud of the fact that he had overcome an impoverished childhood during the Depression, in the tiny town of Ely MN, 25 miles from the Canadian border where winter temperatures can be -40 degrees (the point where  $F = C$ ). He identified with his Finnish heritage and its notion of *sisu*, the ability to stoically finish a useful task successfully. And that surely had to have been part of his decision to devote a good chunk of his time in retirement, with all the enjoyable distractions of a large family and many other cultural interests, to work for this organization that honors Jussi Björling's career.

One of Art's first tasks as Treasurer was to keep track of the finances for our mini-conference at the LA Opera in February 2005. The following year we organized another mini-conference at Minneapolis's American Swedish Institute, and Art and Marilyn invited our JBS board to have its annual meeting at their beautiful home in nearby St. Louis Park. By now Art was playing an important part in helping plan JBS activities.

The next few years brought continued growth in our activities. There was a mini-conference in Charleston that Sue Flaster had been planning, as well as several substantial CD projects maturing as we headed for an important goal: a conference



PHOTO OF ART SKANTZ COURTESY OF ALLAN BUCHALTER

to be held in June 2011 at Gustavus Adolphus College to mark Jussi's centennial. That four-day event would require a huge amount of planning, much of that financial: registration fees for the attendees; speakers and singers to be paid; CDs, books and other items to be sold. Art's experience with *sisu* would be important during those days!

I recall visiting Art and Marilyn early in 2014, shortly before they left their home in St. Louis Park. They described many happy family times there with their family: six children with their spouses, and their children (11 of those!). But they also were looking forward to their move to an independent living condo in Wayzata MN, where there would be facilities for their good family times to continue.

All of us at JBS-USA extend our special condolences to Marilyn and her family. ■

*Dan Shea is co-founder and board member of JBS-USA, and a frequent contributor to our publications.*

### Hanna Hedman, 1934-2020

We report with sadness the death of Hanna Hedman. Hanna was married to Frank Hedman, who in 1979 founded the *Bluebell* recording label, which she managed successfully after Frank's death in 1990. Among her notable issues were many Jussi Björling recordings, especially live performance recordings from Stockholm. *Bluebell's* "Great Swedish Singers" series presented such artists as Schymberg, Söderström, Gedda, Hasslo, Berglund, Wixell and Björker. Hanna was a remarkable person, idiosyncratic, funny and generous. She died just before her 86th birthday. An in-depth article about Frank, Hanna, and *Bluebell* will be published in our next *Journal*.

JUSSI BJÖRLING SOCIETY

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Jussi, Rosalind Elias, RCA Producer Richard Mohr, Giorgio Tozzi and Leontyne Price during recording session of the Verdi *Requiem*, in the Sofiensaal, Vienna, June 1960.