

Record Label  
 Date and place of recording  
 Serial Number  
 Matrix Number  
 Song Title  
 Composers ("M")  
 Lyricists ("T")  
 Catalog or Order Number

You don't have to read German to understand the contents. In fact, the publisher will provide an English translation of the Foreword with its explanation of each artist's entry.

In a sense this compilation is a triumph over war, since many, though not all, of the original recording ledgers and documents were destroyed during World War II (the exceptions are some recently discovered Hanover recording ledgers documenting the Deutsche Grammophon output from around 1936 to 1945). As a result, the author has had to rely on a variety of sources, each with its particular reliability, such as the recordings themselves from a variety of private collections, company catalogs, new release lists, articles in trade publications and other secondary sources.

This volume, as well as its companions, should be on every research library's shelf. If you're looking for further information on this fascinating era of popular music, here are some books I have come across that illuminate the cabaret tradition these records contain:

*Cabaret Performance Europe 1890-1920*. Vol. 1. Edited by L. Senelick. Johns Hopkins University Press. \$12.95.

*Cabaret Performance Europe 1920-1940*. Vol. 2. Edited by L. Senelick. Johns Hopkins University Press. \$19.95.

Each of these books contains English translations of sketches, songs, monologues, and memoirs of some popular German musical artists. The translations are reasonably accurate and capture some of the flavor of the era.

*Berlin Cabaret*, by Peter Jekavich. Harvard University Press, 1993. \$39.95.

Relying primarily on copies of sheet music, Jekavich tries to recreate the history of this particular art-form from the turn of the century to the beginning of World War II. Probably the most comprehensive source on the subject in the English language.

*Reviewed by William E. Walling.*

### ***A Jussi Björling Phonography, 2nd Edition.***

*Compiled by Harald Henrysson. Stockholm, Svenskt Musikhistoriskt Arkiv, 1993. 382 pp. Portland, OR: Amadeus Press, 1993. ISBN 91-85172-10-3.*

This volume is the culmination of some twenty years of research by Harald Henrysson, who acknowledges contributions from more than 200 individuals and institutions in two dozen countries. Not surprisingly it contains an awesome quantity of detail about Jussi Björling's career and performances preserved on sound recordings and films.

From the late 1930s through the mid-1950s, the Swedish singer Jussi Björling was arguably the finest lyric tenor in opera. Although his bright, beautiful voice generally lacked the caressingly sweet tones of a Beniamino Gigli, he did not have the excessive mannerisms that sometimes marred Gigli's performances. He could express

passion and tenderness with great sincerity, but his was essentially a “cool” voice. His total repertory encompassed 55 leading roles, but during most of his career he concentrated on about a dozen mainstream operas primarily those of Gounod, Puccini, and Verdi.

Although not quite fifty years old when he died on September 9, 1960, Björling’s recording career spanned forty years and his legacy of sound recordings comprises more than 650 performances including 36 complete, or substantially complete, operas, three large sacred works, and many songs and arias. Multiple versions exist of several the complete opera recordings. Björling also recorded complete opera roles, e.g., Calaf in *Turandot*, which he never performed on stage.

Of those recorded performances made during commercial studio sessions, 243 were released. The remaining 600-plus originated from live opera performances, concerts, and films. Some of his finest recordings stem from these sources – the Metropolitan Opera Historic Broadcast release of *Roméo et Juliette* from 1947 springs immediately to mind. This is a genuinely great performance.

His first discs were made – as a nine-year-old boy soprano – with his brothers Olle and Gösta for Columbia in 1920 during an American tour of the “Björling Male Quartet” (led by Jussi’s father, David). His last recording was made during a radio concert just 35 days before he died. The continuing popularity of Björling’s recordings nearly 34 years after his death – Henrysson notes about 150 reissues in CD-format – becomes an even greater testament to his artistry when one considers that only a minority of those purchasing his CDs can have heard him in person.

To one who did hear him, the occasion could be stamped indelibly onto the memory. An example is one of the concerts not cited in Henrysson’s chronology, that of April 2, 1952 in Constitution Hall, Washington, D.C.

Constitution Hall was sold out and Björling filled the auditorium with his ringing voice. His charm and warm informality established a remarkable rapport with his listeners – quite in contrast with his operatic appearances in which he usually had to win over his audience by voice alone to compensate for his often wooden acting and stage movement. To a program of twelve songs and arias he added another dozen as encores scattered throughout the six sections into which the concert was divided. The audience response was overwhelmingly enthusiastic; people called for favorite numbers and Björling seemed content to sing on and on. The arias ranged from Handel’s “Largo,” to the romantic works of Flotow and Verdi, to the verismo arias of Leoncavallo, Giordano, and Puccini. The songs – several of which he recorded with the same accompanist, Frederick Schauwecker, for Victor in New York about a week later (*i.a.*, LM 1771) – included works by Schubert, Grieg, Sjöberg, Rachmaninoff, Richard Strauss, de Curtis, and Tosti.

Although Henrysson’s book illustrates Björling’s typical concert repertory in the listings of recordings derived from concerts, he does not discuss the tenor’s programming preferences (as, for example, John Ardoin’s comments in *The Callas Legacy* do about her concerts). And while Henrysson does not comment extensively on Björling’s artistry or relationship with his audiences and singing colleagues, he includes both a bibliography and a list, by author, of significant liner notes. This latter is a welcome inclusion and should be a part of any discography. To have addressed these topics in detail in the *Phonography* would have probably overwhelmed the compiler if not the reader.

The book is a mass of detail as it is. Its organization appears to have been dictated as much by the manner in which the contents have been compiled over the years as by Henrysson’s thoughtful method of presentation. The heart of the book is in two

parts: the first is a summary of Björling's life and career and the second the "phonography" proper. Henrysson, as he explains in his introduction, has chosen the term phonography over the more widely used "discography."

The life and career section includes a detailed chronological table of key events in Björling's life. These events include all the opera and concert appearances that Henrysson and his contributors have traced and all of Björling's recording engagements. This part of the book is also supplemented by a listing of his opera, operetta, and oratorio repertory and summary discussions of his recorded repertory.

The recordings discussions are divided into periods – the acoustic Columbias; early HMV recordings; HMV international celebrity discs; the RCA recordings; and live, radio, and film recordings. There is also a brief discussion of recordings that were projected but never realized, particularly the aborted *un Ballo in Maschera* commenced in summer 1960.

The "phonography" – quite the largest part of the book – is divided into four sections: a chronological list of recordings; disk and tape issues; indexes; and the bibliography.

The chronological list of recordings is subdivided into three topics: first – the commercial record company takes with a substantial endnotes section; second – live recordings, broadcasts, and films with a detailed appendix covering performances and broadcasts probably not preserved; third – a key to the index numbers used in both editions of the *Phonography* and in the 1969 *Jussi Björling: A Record List*.

The disk and tape issues section, cross-referenced to the chronological list contains all reported commercial issues by format for each item. Endnotes are provided for a number of issues.

The indexes section includes thorough listings for composers and titles (with endnotes), titles, and performers. The bibliography is as noted above.

The volume opens with the forewords to both this and the first edition. Given the controversial genesis of this work – a collaboration from which Henrysson considered himself obliged to dissociate, the forewords are more than usually important to read for one to understand how this book came about.

It must be admitted that *A Jussi Björling Phonography* is not exceptionally "user friendly." It requires a good bit of referring back and forth between sections to obtain all the information it has to offer on a particular recording, or a particular title which the tenor recorded more than once, or something he recorded both commercially in a studio and via live performance. Even so, the logic of its organization is readily apparent and, as one becomes familiar with the book, its wealth of detail, meticulous scholarship, and accuracy go far to offset the additional searching it sometimes requires. There is, furthermore, a detailed explanation of the arrangement of the various listings, and there is extensive cross-referencing used throughout the book. Checking it against a modest but varied Björling collection indicated that if there are errors – I did not encounter any – they consist of minor omissions of particular facts or of records issued since 1992. Certainly Henrysson has not perpetuated any of the kinds of wrong facts which seem to take lives of their own in books about famous persons. A professional proofreader might find a mistake or two, but I did not.

This is not a book to introduce one to the art of Jussi Björling, nor is that its purpose. His many surviving recordings will do that and, since virtually any of them will convert all but the most hard hearted, to listen is to become an admirer of this wonderful tenor voice. For those who go on to become Björling collectors, this book will be indispensable. Individuals and institutions having the first edition will find this second well worth acquiring. *Reviewed by Elwood A. McKee*