



**Jussi
BJÖRLING**

Collection, Vol. 5

**Lieder and Songs
1939-1952**

Schubert

R. Strauss

Wolf

Grieg

Rachmaninov

Sibelius

Liszt

Jussi Björling: Collection, Vol. 5 Lieder and Songs (1939-1952)

Jussi Björling was born in February 1911 (on the 5th according to the midwife's register, though he celebrated his birthday on the 2nd in accordance with the church register). His birthplace was near the centre of the city of Borlänge in Sweden's province of Dalarna. Stora Tuna, often given as his birthplace, was the name of the parish where the family was then living and from which Borlänge had some years earlier been established as a separate municipality; today, Stora Tuna is part of Borlänge. Jussi's father David was also a tenor and singing teacher, who taught his three oldest boys Olle, Jussi and Gösta to sing from their earliest childhood. He let them perform in public before Jussi was five and as the Björling Quartet they toured extensively in Sweden, and from 1919 to 1921 also in the United States. Jussi's mother Ester had already died in 1917, soon after having given birth to a fourth son. David died in August 1926, and about a year later the group, which also for some time included the fourth brother Karl, disbanded and Jussi entered the Stockholm Conservatory in 1928. Here, and at the Opera School, his teacher was the famous baritone John Forsell, also manager of the Royal Opera.

In 1930, at the age of nineteen, Jussi made his official début at the Royal Opera in Stockholm as Don Ottavio in Mozart's *Don Giovanni* and in the next few years he sang a wide repertoire of rôles there. His first major breakthrough came at a recital at Tivoli in Copenhagen in the summer of 1931. As an opera singer, he made his first solo tours outside Sweden in 1936 and 1937, still singing his rôles in Swedish. He then appeared in Czechoslovakia, Germany and Hungary but primarily at the Vienna Opera and was everywhere greeted with great acclaim. In the autumn of 1937 he gave his first London recital en route to the United States, where his schedule included three General Motors radio concerts from Carnegie Hall and opera performances in Chicago in *Rigoletto* and *La bohème*. Jussi Björling's successful Metropolitan

début came in November 1938 as Rodolfo.

In 1939 Jussi Björling made his Covent Garden début in *Il trovatore* and in 1940 he opened the Metropolitan season for the first time in the new production of *Un ballo in maschera*, where he appeared as King Gustaf III of Sweden. During the later war years, he mainly remained in his native country; however, his Italian opera début took place in 1943 in *Il trovatore* in Florence.

In the autumn of 1945 Jussi Björling returned to the United States for an eight-month tour and during the rest of his life he sang extensively there, as an opera artist primarily with the Metropolitan, San Francisco and Chicago operas but still more in recital and concert, often appearing on radio and television in programmes like *Ford Sunday Evening Hour*, *Voice of Firestone* and *Standard Hour*. Björling always returned to Sweden and spent the summers with his wife Anna-Lisa and their three children at Siarö in the Stockholm archipelago. He also sang often in opera and concert in Sweden and the other Nordic countries, where he enjoyed an enormous popularity. He appeared twice in Milan with the La Scala company (*Rigoletto* in 1946, *Un ballo in maschera* in 1951) but returned to Covent Garden only in 1960 (*La bohème*), though he was heard in recital many times in Britain in the 1950s. In 1954 he made an extensive concert tour to South Africa.

Jussi Björling's complete opera and operetta repertoire comprised 55 rôles, but most of them were, like Almagiva in *Barbiere* or Arnold in *Guillaume Tell*, abandoned on his road to world fame. In fact his total opera repertoire after the war consisted of twelve rôles. He continued to sing ten operas which he had learned in Stockholm up to 1936: *Aida*, *Il trovatore*, *Un ballo in maschera*, *Rigoletto*, *La bohème*, *Tosca*, *Cavalleria rusticana* and *Pagliacci* in the Italian repertoire and Gounod's *Faust* and *Romé et Juliette* in the French. In later years, he added Puccini's *Manon*

Lescaut and Verdi's *Don Carlos*, the latter in the famous production which in 1950 opened the Met's season and Rudolf Bing's era as general manager.

During his last years Jussi Björling suffered from heart disease. His life was prematurely ended by a heart attack in his sleep at his beloved Siarö on 9th September 1960. It is now more evident than ever that the world then lost one of its most outstanding artists: for instance, in several recent polls in different countries he has been selected as the greatest tenor or even the greatest singer of the last century.

Fortunately Jussi Björling left behind a vast recorded output through which we are able to experience his artistry. He began to record very early, even if one disregards six childhood recordings he and his brothers made in 1920 during their American tour. His first published tenor recordings were made in December 1929 in Stockholm for Skandinaviska Grammophon AB, the Swedish HMV representative, and his last gramophone recording was Verdi's *Requiem* in Vienna in June 1960.

A great opera tenor is seldom also a great *Lieder* singer; Jussi Björling was one of the very few who had success in both fields. Even if he is internationally more famous as an opera singer, as a mature artist, he was much more active in concert than in opera. During the period from his American debut in the autumn of 1937 until his death in 1960, he appeared on more than 900 occasions in concert and recital, more than twice as often as in opera. The 21 different *Lieder* and songs by twelve composers and in five languages on this disc offer a good selection from Björling's concert repertoire, which may not have been very large but which was remarkably varied.

The first three songs on the disc were recorded in July 1939 in Stockholm by the local HMV company. They were Björling's first recordings of German *Lieder* and he was partnered by his preferred Swedish accompanist at the time, Harry Ebert (1897-1986). Ebert, who had studied with Sergey Rachmaninov and Alfred Cortot among others, began his partnership with Björling a few years earlier after returning from a long

period in France. Their cooperation would last until 1959. Ebert was Björling's accompanist on three of his American tours before these tours came to a halt during the war (on his first tour, in 1937/38, Björling was partnered by the German Hubert Giesen), and the series of *Lieder* recordings that had begun successfully in Stockholm was continued during the following Björling/Ebert tour to the United States. The two *Lieder* sessions in an RCA Victor studio in New York early in 1940 were also Björling's first recordings outside Scandinavia. In all, eleven songs were recorded, but of those, only seven were ever issued on 78 rpm records, five of which are found on this disc.

In the spring of 1952, when the LP record had established itself as a new medium, RCA Victor arranged another *Lieder* and song recording session for Jussi Björling at the Manhattan Center in New York. Sixteen items were selected in order to fit onto an LP. It was recorded on one day, 11th April, shortly after he had finished the recording of *Il trovatore* (issued on Naxos 8.110240/41) and a series of *Don Carlos* performances at the Met. A week later he returned to Sweden. The LP was issued as 'Jussi Bjoerling in Song' in the United States, but never reissued on CD by the company. This time the pianist was Frederick Schauwecker (1896-1975), who accompanied Jussi Björling at almost all his American recitals after 1945, and who had earlier been the accompanist of two other noted tenors, Giovanni Martinelli and Richard Crooks.

Though Jussi Björling sang operas by Mozart, Donizetti and Rossini early in his career, his stage repertoire as a mature artist included only operas from the second part of the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century. The great bulk of songs in his repertoire also belong to this period, but there is a major exception: *Lieder* by Franz Schubert always had an important place in his programmes. Of the seven included here, three were special favourites from his earliest years as a tenor: *Wandrer's Nachtlid* (16), *An Sylvia* (4) and *Die böse Farbe* (23). They were the first songs Björling performed in a language other than his native Swedish (except for a few songs in English he

learned as a boy). They were sung at his breakthrough Copenhagen recital on 29th July 1931 as well as at his first public recital in a German-speaking country, in Vienna on 13th March 1936. *Wanders Nachtlied* (The Wanderer's Night Song), with text by Goethe, evokes the serenity of night, when nature is at rest, and expresses the wanderer's thought that he will also soon find rest. The text of the song praising Sylvia, who 'excels each mortal thing dwelling upon this dull earth' is a translation from Shakespeare's *Two Gentlemen of Verona*. *Die böse Farbe* (The Wicked Colour) is the only song from the famous cycle *Die schöne Müllerin* that Björling performed. The hated colour is green, symbolizing the poet's jealousy of a young huntsman, to whom the beautiful miller-maid has transferred her affection.

Die Allmacht (The Almighty) (15) is a grandiose song of praise: 'Great is Jehovah, the Lord; the earth and the heavens bear witness to His might'. Reviews show that Björling may not have been sufficiently mature for this song when he took it on in 1935, but seventeen years later he could sing it with rare authority. Very different in mood is *Die Forelle* (The Trout) (24), an animated song about a quick fish in a clear brook, finally caught by the fisherman when he muddies the water. In 1939 Björling took up two more Schubert songs. In the well-known *Ständchen* (Serenade) (5, 22), the poet asks his beloved to come to him, imagining his message conveyed by the nightingale's enchanting song. *An die Leier* (To the Lyre) (6) is based on an ancient Greek original. The singer intends to perform heroic songs, but whatever he does, his strings will play only of love.

The earliest composition on this disc is *Adelaide* (3) by Ludwig van Beethoven, written a year before Schubert was born. Björling took up *Adelaide* in 1938 and his recording from the following year has been widely admired as one of the best *Lieder* recordings ever, perfectly catching the poetic mood of the song. The poet sees the image of his beloved everywhere in nature and visualises it finally on the purple petals of a flower on his grave.

Johannes Brahms and Hugo Wolf continued the Schubert song tradition, and Björling had a couple of songs by each of them in his repertoire. Brahms's *Die Mainacht* (The May Night) (11) expresses a wanderer's longing for love: in the moonlight he is reminded of his loneliness when he hears the song of nightingales and the cooing of doves. In Wolf's *Verborgenheit* (Secrecy) (19), the singer wants to escape from the world with his sorrow: 'let my heart in lonely seclusion hoard its rapture and its pain'.

If Schubert was the first focus in Björling's German *Lieder* repertoire, Richard Strauss became in the late 1930s another, eventually represented by six songs, three of which are found here. *Morgen* (Tomorrow) (1, 13) and *Cécilie* (2) entered his repertoire in 1937 and joined Beethoven's *Adelaide* for his first *Lieder* recordings two years later. *Morgen* describes dreamingly how the two lovers will slowly walk in the sun to the shore, forgetful of everything around them. *Cécilie* evokes another, rapturous mood: 'If you could know of my longing for you, my anguish and loneliness, and what it would be like to live in bliss, you would come and live with me'. The charming *Ständchen* (Serenade) (12) is a lover's appeal to his sweetheart to awake, slip softly away and join him in the garden in the moonlight, where they will kiss under the linden branches. One song by the Hungarian Franz Liszt was also in Jussi Björling's repertoire: the sincere *Es muss ein Wunderbares sein* (Wondrous rapture it must be) (18), which acclaim the unchanged love of two souls 'from the first kiss unto death'.

Jussi Björling's interpretations of German *Lieder* were in his early years often praised for their stylishness, good taste and refinement but criticized for lack of feeling and depth. He always stressed the basically lyrical character of the songs and avoided exaggerated dramatization, and in the late 1930s he began to be recognised as a master also of the German lied. It is hard to deny, however, that the songs in his native language were closest to his heart and that his interpretations of them were on an outstanding level by every measure. During his whole international career,

his concert programmes contained several songs in Swedish which became much appreciated by his listeners who were often previously unfamiliar with them.

With seven songs, the Finn Jean Sibelius was the Scandinavian composer best represented in Jussi Björling's repertoire. Like most of Sibelius's songs, these were written to Swedish texts. There seems to have been an affinity of mind between Björling and Sibelius, and the singer could be proud to have received the composer's recognition as a 'genial mastersinger' and a 'brilliant interpreter'. *Svarta rosor* (Black Roses) (7,17) was in 1931 the first Sibelius song in Björling's repertoire, and in his mature years he would interpret its inner suffering with complete identification: 'In my heart a rosebush is growing... the stems are full of thorns causing me pain and anguish, for sorrow has night-black roses'. As is the case with Schubert's *Ständchen* and Richard Strauss' *Morgen*, we can here compare two versions with twelve years between them. The ballad-like *Säv, säv, susa* (Sigh, rushes, sigh) (8) tells the story of young Ingalill, who 'cried like a wild duck shot in the wing' when she drowned herself in the lake because people hated her 'for money and for her young love'.

Tonerna (Music) (14) was one of the most beloved items in Jussi Björling's repertoire, both in Sweden and abroad, and often given as an encore. 'Music' is a reasonably close translation of the title that literally means 'The Notes', but 'Visions' was the poetic though misleading English version generally used on Björling's recital programmes. The composer of *Tonerna*, Carl Sjöberg (1861-1900) was a physician who is today remembered in music history for this inspired tune only. The text expresses the experience that a struggling mind and heart can find rest only in music. Its author, Erik Gustaf Geijer, famous as a historian, deserves special

attention here because he was also a composer of several songs which Jussi Björling used to perform early in his career, although none of them was recorded. *Tonerna* was sung by Jussi Björling in public much earlier than any of the other songs on this disc, already when he was twelve or thirteen and touring with his father and brothers.

The two songs here by Norway's great composer Edvard Grieg, *En svane* (A Swan) (9) and *En drøm* (A Dream) (10) were included in Björling's repertoire at the beginning of the 1950s. *En svane*, with text by the famous playwright Henrik Ibsen, is about the swan who lives a life in silence to burst out in song only just before death. *En drøm* was written to a German poem (*Ein Traum*), but Björling always sang it in Norwegian. The poet sees himself in a dream sitting beside a beautiful maiden on the edge of the forest in the spring. The dream turns into reality and the happy man promises never to let his maiden go.

Björling's palette of songs is here completed by one Russian song, *Lilacs* (20) by Sergey Rachmaninov and one Italian, *Ideale* (My Ideal) (21) by F. Paolo Tosti. Björling had two Russian songs in his repertoire, both by Rachmaninov and sung in English translation. In *Lilacs* (Siren' in the Russian original), the singer sees the flowers in the early morning and wonders what luck might be hidden beneath their branches. One lilac bloom is all he would ever wish as his share of fortune. Finally, Jussi Björling shows in *Ideale* complete mastery of the Italian musical idiom, which was a necessary quality for one of the greatest opera singers of all time. A poetic description of how the beloved one once animated the poet's life ends in a plea: 'Come back, my sweet ideal, and in your face I will see a new day shining!'

Harald Henrysson

Producer's Note

Our intention when restoring this recording was to recreate as much as possible of Jussi Björling's unique voice and his rich spectrum of overtones. We have been extremely economical with noise reduction in order to minimize the influence of such techniques upon the voice, instruments and overtones.

If you, the listener, wish to experience a nostalgic feeling of how the recording sounded when played on gramophones from the 1940s and 1950s, we suggest that you turn down the treble on your amplifier. Try turning it down considerably – perhaps even to the minimum adjustment – until you find a setting that corresponds to your memory of how the voice used to sound. The intention is for the listener, to have the opportunity to hear Jussi Björling in accordance with his own preferences and tastes. As a listening reference, we have consulted members of the Jussi Björling Society.

Stefan Lindström

Stefan Lindström

Stefan Lindström has worked in the field of recording techniques and sound reproduction since the 1970s, and has made many gramophone recordings of everything from pop and jazz to chamber music. At an early stage he started to act as a consultant on the restoration of old recordings for various archives and institutions. During the past decades he has worked with sound restoration and archiving, and has restored a large number of reissues of old material from wax cylinders, wire recorders and shellac going back to the earliest of recording technology.

The Naxos historical label aims to make available the greatest recordings in the history of recorded music, in the best and truest sound that contemporary technology can provide. To achieve this aim, Naxos has engaged a number of respected restorers who have the dedication, skill and experience to produce restorations that have set new standards in the field of historical recordings.

R. STRAUSS:			BRAHMS:	
① Morgen, Op. 27, No. 4 15th July 1939 - DA 1704	3:17	⑪ Die Mainacht, Op. 43, No. 2 11th April 1952 – LM 1771	4:13	
R. STRAUSS:		R. STRAUSS:		
② Cécilie, Op. 27, No. 2 15th July 1939 - DA 1704	1:56	⑫ Ständchen, Op. 17, No. 2 11th April 1952 – LM 1771	2:18	
BETHOVEN:		R. STRAUSS:		
③ Adelaide, Op. 46 15th July 1939 - DA 1705	6:46	⑬ Morgen, Op. 27, No. 4 11th April 1952 - LM 1771	3:41	
SCHUBERT:		SJÖBERG:		
④ An Sylvia, D. 891 30th January 1940 – DB 5759 12831	4:22	⑭ Tonerna (1892) 11th April 1952 - LM 1771	3:17	
SCHUBERT: Schwanengesang, D. 957		SCHUBERT:		
⑤ Ständchen (Leise flehen meine Lieder) 30th January 1940 – DB 5759 12831	4:09	⑮ Die Allmacht, D. 852 11th April 1952 - LM 1771	5:41	
SCHUBERT:		SCHUBERT:		
⑥ An die Leier, D. 737 30th January 1940 – DB 5787	4:07	⑯ Wandrers Nachtlied, D. 768 (Über allen Gipfeln ist Ruh) 11th April 1952 – LM 1771	2:44	
SIBELIUS:		SIBELIUS:		
⑦ Svarta rosor, Op. 36, No.1 30th January 1940 - Victor 4531	2:09	⑰ Svarta rosor, Op. 36, No. 1 11th April 1952 – LM 1771	2:15	
SIBELIUS:		LISZT:		
⑧ Säv, säv, susa, Op. 36, No. 4 1st March 1940 - Victor 4531	2:15	⑱ Es muss ein Wunderbares sein, S. 314 11th April 1952 - LM 1771	2:28	
GRIEG:		WOLF:		
⑨ En svane, Op. 25, No. 2 11th April 1952 – LM 1771	2:33	⑲ Verborgenheit (1888) 11th April 1952 - LM 1771	3:24	
GRIEG:		RACHMANINOV:		
⑩ En drøm, Op. 48, No. 6 11th April 1952 – LM 1771	2:02	⑳ Lilacs, Op. 21, No. 5 11th April 1952 - LM 1771	1:59	

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| TOSTI: | | | SCHUBERT: | |
| 21 Ideale (1882) | 3:16 | | 24 Die Forelle, D. 550 | 1:51 |
| 11th April 1952 – LM 1771 | | | 11th April 1952 – LM 1771 | |
| SCHUBERT: from Schwanengesang, D. 957 | | | 1-8 with Harry Ebert, Piano | |
| 22 Ständchen (Leise flehen meine Lieder) | 4:29 | | 9-24 with Frederick Schauwecker, Piano | |
| 11th April 1952 – LM 1771 | | | | |
| SCHUBERT: Die schöne Müllerin, D. 795 | | | All items performed in German, except for | |
| 23 Die böse Farbe | 2:23 | | 7-8, 14 & 17, in Swedish | |
| 11th April 1952– LM 1771 | | | 9 & 10 in Norwegian | |
| | | | 20, in English | |
| | | | 21, in Italian | |

You are welcome to contact one of the Jussi Björling Societies!

* The Jussi Bjorling Society-USA
www.jussibjorlingsociety.com. To join, write to Daniel Shea,
 3337 Conservancy Lane, Middleton WI 53562 USA
 Tel 608-836-6911, E-mail: dshea@chorus.net

* The Jussi Bjorling Appreciation Society
 To join, write to Eric Wimbles, Glenaire, 58 Mill Road, Crowle, North
 Lincolnshire, DN17 4LN, UK, or email him at erickwimbles@onetel.net.uk

* Jussi Björlingsällskapet (The Scandinavian Jussi Björling Society)
www.jussibjorlingsallskapet.com. To join, contact the Jussi Björling
 Museum (see below).

You are welcome to visit or contact the Jussi Björling Museum,
 which has the world's largest collection related to Jussi Björling.
 Address: Borgansvägen 25, SE-78433 Borlänge, Sweden.
<http://www.borlange.se/kommun/jussi/>



8.110789

ADD

Jussi Björling (1911-1960)

Lieder and Songs

(1939-52)

 Playing
Time
77:37

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- 1 **R. STRAUSS:** Morgen, Op. 27, No. 4 [rec. 1939]
- 2 **R. STRAUSS:** Cäcilie, Op. 27, No. 2
- 3 **BEETHOVEN:** Adelaide, Op. 46
- 4 **SCHUBERT:** An Sylvia, D. 891
- 5 **SCHUBERT:** Schwanengesang: Ständchen D. 957 [rec. 1940]
- 6 **SCHUBERT:** An die Leier, D. 737
- 7 **SIBELIUS:** Svarta rosor, Op. 36, No.1
- 8 **SIBELIUS:** Säv, säv, susa, Op. 36, No. 4
- 9 **GRIEG:** En svane, Op. 25, No. 2
- 10 **GRIEG:** En dröm, Op. 48, No. 6
- 11 **BRAHMS:** Die Mainacht, Op. 43. No. 2
- 12 **R. STRAUSS:** Ständchen, Op. 17, No. 2
- 13 **R. STRAUSS:** Morgen, Op. 27, No. 4 [rec. 1952]
- 14 **SJÖBERG:** Tonerna (1892)
- 15 **SCHUBERT:** Die Allmacht, D. 852
- 16 **SCHUBERT:** Wandrers Nachtlied, D. 768
- 17 **SIBELIUS:** Svarta rosor, Op. 36, No. 1
- 18 **LISZT:** Es muss ein Wunderbares sein, S. 314
- 19 **WOLF:** Verborgenheit (1888)
- 20 **RACHMANINOV:** Lilacs, Op. 21, No. 5
- 21 **TOSTI:** Ideale (1882)
- 22 **SCHUBERT:** Schwanengesang: Ständchen D. 957 [rec. 1952]
- 23 **SCHUBERT:** Die schöne Müllerin: Die böse Farbe, D. 795
- 24 **SCHUBERT:** Die Forelle, D. 550

Considered by both critics and public as one of the greatest tenors of the 20th century, Jussi Björling left behind a vast recorded legacy. Volume 5 in the Naxos Jussi Björling Collection features a remarkably varied selection of twenty-one *Lieder* and songs by twelve composers in five languages, including seven by Schubert who always had an important place in Björling's programmes. If a great opera tenor is seldom also a great *Lieder* singer, Björling was one of the very few who had great success in both fields. Volume 1 of the Naxos series (8.110722) features his complete recordings of opera and operetta in Swedish, Volume 2 (8.110740) a selection of songs in Swedish, while Volumes 3 and 4 (8.110754 & 8.110788) focus on opera arias and duets.

MADE IN
THE EU

Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Stefan Lindström SSR AB
Special thanks to Harold Löwing and Jussi Björlingmuséet for the loan of the records

www.naxos.com

A complete track list can be found in the booklet
Cover image: Jussi Björling (Jussi Björling Museum)

