



**Jussi  
BJÖRLING**

**Collection, Vol. 7  
Swedish National  
Romantic Songs  
1929-1953**

**Visions [Tonerna]  
Sweden  
Summer Night  
Towards the Sea  
Thou Blessed Country**

## Jussi Björling: Collection, Vol. 7 Swedish National Romantic Songs (1929-1953)

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 center of what is today 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 broken out 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 had them perform in public before Jussi was five and as the "Björling Quartet" they toured extensively in Sweden, and 1919-21 also in the USA. Jussi's mother Ester had already died in 1917, soon after giving birth to a fourth son. David died in August 1926; 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 debut 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 greeted everywhere with great acclaim. In the autumn of 1937 he gave his first London recital en route to the USA, 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 debut came in November 1938 as Rodolfo.

In 1939, Jussi Björling made his Covent Garden debut 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 debut took place in 1943 in *Il trovatore* in Florence.

In the autumn of 1945, Jussi Björling returned to the United States for an 8-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 TV 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 Almaviva 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 before 1937: *Aida*, *Il trovatore*, *Un ballo in maschera*, *Rigoletto*, *La bohème*, *Tosca*, *Cavalleria rusticana* & *Pagliacci* in the Italian repertoire and Gounod's *Faust* and *Roméo et Juliette* in the French. In later years, he added Puccini's *Manon Lescaut* and Verdi's *Don Carlo*, 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 the 9th of September 1960. It is now more evident than ever that

the world had 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 US tour. The first two songs on this CD are among his first recordings as a tenor, made in December 1929 at the age of 18. They show a remarkably mature voice, trained by his father and practised in performance since the age of five.

*I drömmen du är mig nära* (In My Dreams You Are Near Me, [1]) is not the only song here that expresses loneliness and desperate longing. It was composed by Emil Sjögren (1853-1918), known for a rich and accomplished production of songs and chamber music. *Vita rosor* (White Roses, [2]), a song where the singer muses over the similarity between his beloved and the roses in the grove, would, unlike the preceding one, disappear from Björling's repertoire in a few years. The composer August Körling (1842-1919) was organist, conductor and teacher in Ystad in southernmost Sweden.

Wilhelm Peterson-Berger (1867-1942) is represented by three songs on this CD. In Sweden, he was one of the most influential musical personalities of his time, often called only "P-B". He was a prolific composer of operas, symphonic music and songs, and a feared critic - much influenced by Wagner's philosophy. The animosity between him and John Forsell, Björling's teacher and first opera manager, was well-known. P-B often used folk tunes in his compositions, and his familiarity with them is evident in his "four songs in Swedish folk style", to which *När jag för mig själv i mörka skogen går* (When I Walk Alone in the Dark Forest, [3]) and *Bland skogens höga furustammar* (Among the High Fir-Trees in the Forest, [4]) belong. The lyrics had been anonymously published, signed "H", but there is now proof that they were written by Wendela Hebbe, who has been called Sweden's first woman journalist. In the first song, the singer describes all the beauty of nature that he would gladly go without if he got his beloved back; in the second, the beauty of the wintry forest where he hopes he and his sweetheart will

live happily in their little cottage. Jussi Björling took up these songs very early and they, too, are among his earliest recordings - important for his career as being the reason for his first and breakthrough engagement at the Tivoli in Copenhagen in 1931. The glowing but tender evocation of the maiden in *Jungfrun under lind* (The Maiden under the Linden-Tree, [2]) was also often heard on Björling's recitals from early years, both in Sweden and abroad, but recorded only 23 years later.

*Tonerna* (Music, [5]) - this translation conveys the meaning of the title, but the song was generally presented as "Visions" on Björling's recital programmes outside Sweden - was one of the most beloved items in his repertoire, often used as an encore. It is one of three on this CD that were sung by Jussi Björling in his early tours with his father and brothers; we know that he performed it at the age of 12. *Tonerna* was set to music by the physician Carl Sjöberg (1861-1900), today remembered in music history only for this inspired tune. The text expresses the feeling that a struggling mind and heart can find rest only in music. It was written by Erik Gustaf Geijer, famous as historian and poet, but actually also the composer of some songs which Björling used to perform early in his career.

*Ack Värmland, du sköna* (Ah Värmland, Thou Fairest, [6]) evokes the beauty of the valleys and forests, the hills and waterfalls of this western Swedish province - where Björling's maternal grandmother also had her roots. The song was published with this text in 1822, but the famous tune, used in many arrangements, is much older and related to a Dutch melody. Björling had it in his repertoire in earlier years and brought it abroad, for instance for his London recital debut in 1937. Another beautiful folk tune, from the island of Gotland in the Baltic, is *Allt under himmelens fäste* (Beneath the Dome of the Sky, [7]); the text is a plaint about lost love.

*Sommarnatt* (Summer Night, [8]), hauntingly catching the atmosphere in "the subdued light of the midsummer nights", where the poet's thoughts go to his beloved, is easily associated with Sweden but actually the only song here by a non-Swedish composer. Mogens Schrader (1894-1934) (and his mother, who wrote the original text) were Danish. Jussi Björling did not have the song in his concert repertoire but recorded it twice and this

second version, with its brilliant concluding note, is the best known (the earlier one is found on Naxos 8.110740).

As composer, pianist and conductor, Wilhelm Stenhammar (1871-1927) had a very important role in Swedish music life around the turn of the century. *Sverige* (Sweden 9) was composed in 1904-05 for chorus as part of the cantata *Ett folk* (A People), with lyrics by Verner von Heidenstam, Nobel Prize winner in 1916. Jussi Björling was familiar early with this elevated patriotic song, which many times concluded concerts with his father and brothers, and it was in Sweden often the last item on his own recitals, with the audience respectfully standing. *Sverige* was also sung by the chorus at his funeral in Stockholm in 1960.

Of all the patriotic songs that Jussi Björling performed with unsurpassed conviction and authority and that “Nordic” voice quality that heightened their appeal, *Land, du välsignade* (Thou Blessed Country 10) came to be most closely associated with him. The text by Elisabet Björklund won the first prize in a competition for the best patriotic poem, and was soon set to music by Ragnar Althén (1883-1961), organist at Matteus (St. Matthew’s) Church in Stockholm for almost 40 years. Jussi Björling sang the song as early as in 1929 and brought it with him on early tours abroad. In 1937, the same year as the recording was made, he performed it from a high mast at the Gröna Lund amusement park in Stockholm, making his sensational debut there as staged in the final scene of the movie *Fram för framgång* (Head for Success).

The actor - with more than 60 movies to his credit -, film director and composer Ragnar Wistedt (1887-1954) is represented by two songs on this CD. *Sjung din hela längtan ut* (Sing Out Your Whole Yearning, 11) expresses youthful exuberance, while *Nämner du Sverige* (If You Mention Sweden, 13) is a patriotic song wholly inspired by the Swedish landscape.

The Royal Swedish Bernadotte family has had many artistically gifted members. Prince Gustaf (1827-52), the “singer prince”, was second son of King Oscar I and grandson of Carl XIV Johan, Napoleon’s former marshal who became King of Sweden and Norway in 1818. The male quartet *Sjungom studentens lyckliga dag* (Let Us Sing about the Happy Days of Students, 12), composed in 1851, soon became very popular and has been sung at

innumerable graduation ceremonies. It is of special interest as the song with which 4-year-old Jussi began his career - he performed it in trio with his brothers on 12 December 1915 in an Örebro church, when David Björling presented his three sons to the public for the first time.

Hugo Alfvén (1872-1960), internationally best known for his “Midsummer Vigil” (Swedish Rhapsody No. 1), was in his later years closely connected with Jussi Björling’s native province of Dalarna. Björling had several of his songs in his repertoire, of which *Skogen sover* (The Forest Asleep, 14), where the poet sits on a June night beside his beloved who has just fallen asleep, was the earliest favourite. *Morgon* (Morning, 15) is the best known of the Stockholm organist and composer Einar Eklöf’s (1886-1954) many songs - another elevated evocation of the beauty of Swedish nature. These two songs, unlike the others here, were recorded in the US and with piano. Harry Ebert was accompanist on the tour in the spring of 1940, when this recording was made.

The prolific song composer Gustaf Nordqvist (1886-1949), active as organist and teacher in Stockholm, is like Peterson-Berger represented by three works on this CD. The two first of them, *Bön i ofredstid* (Prayer in Time of War, 16) and *Bisp Thomas’ frihetsång* (Bishop Thomas’ Song of Freedom, 17), both recorded in 1944, were in Björling’s repertoire during WWII, when Sweden was armed to resist the threat of a German attack. He toured extensively in the country and the patriotic songs on this CD were much in demand. “Look down in grace from Heaven on our earth and grant it peace”, prays the singer in the first song. The second is based on a well-known medieval poem by bishop Thomas Simonsson of Strängnäs, written in a time of conflict between Swedes and Danes: “Freedom is the finest thing that the wide world has to offer ... O noble Swede, stand fast, improve upon our nation’s past...”. A 1939 composition competition celebrating the 500th anniversary of the poem yielded more than 900 settings! The third Nordqvist song, *Till havs* (Towards the Sea, 18), a cheerful evocation of the pleasure of sailing, is probably today the one most generally associated with Jussi Björling in Sweden. There it was a great favourite on the recital programmes of the singer, whose devotion to boating and

fishing in the Stockholm archipelago was well-known.

*Sången till havet* (Song to the Sea, [19](#)) is another song about sailing. The author of both music and lyrics, Jussi Björling's close friend Sven Salén (1890-1969), knew the subject well; he had taken a bronze medal in Olympic sailing and founded one of Sweden's largest shipping companies. He was also active as a promoter of the lighter Swedish song tradition, the "visa". His charming *Visa kring slånblom och månskära* (Song of Blackthorn and Crescent Moon, [20](#)) again paints the magic of the Swedish summer nights. These two songs were not in Björling's

concert repertoire but he recorded them for the benefit of Stadsbudskåren (The Town-Messengers' Union), an exclusive Stockholm charity organization of which both composer and singer were members. They were issued in 1954 as Björling's last 78 rpm. records in the Scandinavian HMV X series, which had presented him to record listeners in 1930 with the two first songs on this CD.

**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 1930s, 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.

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

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

\* The Jussi Björling 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: Borganäsvägen 25, SE-78433 Borlänge, Sweden.  
<http://www.borlange.se/jussibjorling>

- EMIL SJÖGREN (1853–1918)**
- 1 I drömmen du är mig nära 2:40  
[In My Dreams You Are Near Me]  
(text: Tor Hedberg)  
Recorded on 18th December 1929 - X 7536
- AUGUST KÖRLING (1842–1919)**
- 2 Vita rosor [White Roses] 2:30  
(text: Karl Alfred Melin)  
Recorded on 18th December 1929 - X 3377
- WILHELM PETERSON-BERGER (1867–1942)**
- 3 När jag för mig själv i mörka skogen går 2:13  
[When I Walk Alone in the Dark Forest]  
(text: Wendela Hebbe)  
*Abraham Lundquist Musikförlag*  
Recorded on 29th September 1930 - X 3675
- 4 Bland skogens höga furustammar 2:45  
[Among the High Fir-Trees in the Forest]  
(text: Wendela Hebbe)  
*Abraham Lundquist Musikförlag*  
Recorded on 29th September 1930 - X 3675
- CARL SJÖBERG (1861–1900)**
- 5 Tonerna [Music (Visions)] 3:14  
(text: Erik Gustaf Geijer)  
Recorded on 7th October 1936 - X 4716
- TRADITIONAL**
- 6 Ack Värmland du sköna 3:15  
[Ah Värmland, Thou Fairest]  
(text: Anders Fryxell)  
Recorded on 7th October 1936 - X 4720
- TRADITIONAL**
- 7 Allt under himmelens fäste 3:09  
[Beneath the Dome of the Sky]  
Recorded on 7th October 1936 - X 4720
- MOGENS SCHRADER (1894-1934)**
- 8 Sommarnatt [Summer Night] 3:09  
(text: Dagmar Schrader, Swedish text: Gösta Stevens)  
*Gehrman's Musikförlag*  
Recorded on 8th October 1936 - X 4716
- WILHELM STENHAMMAR (1871-1927)**
- 9 Sverige [Sweden] 2:50  
(text: Verner von Heidenstam)  
*Gehrman's Musikförlag*  
Recorded on 26th January 1937 - X 4777
- RAGNAR ALTHÉN (1883-1961)**
- 10 Land, du välsignade [Thou Blessed Country] 2:35  
(text: Elisabet Björklund)  
*Elkan & Schildknecht Carluis*  
Recorded on 26th January 1937 - X 4777
- RAGNAR WIDESTEDT (1887–1954)**
- 11 Sjung din hela längtan ut 3:15  
[Sing Out Your Whole Yearning]  
(text: Nils Perne and Georg Eliasson)  
*Nils-Georgs Musikförlag*  
Recorded on 22nd April 1937 - X 4832
- PRINCE GUSTAF (1827–52)**
- 12 Sjungom studentens lyckliga dag 3:07  
[Let Us Sing about the Happy Days of Students]  
(text: Herman Säterberg)  
Recorded on 28th April 1938 - X 6235
- RAGNAR WIDESTEDT**
- 13 Nämnar du Sverige [If You Mention Sweden] 3:08  
(text: John Coldén)  
*Elkan & Schildknecht Carluis*  
Recorded on 30th May 1938 - X 6235
- HUGO ALFVÉN (1872–1960)**
- 14 Skogen sover [The Forest Asleep] 2:26  
(text: Ernest Thiel)  
*Abraham Lundquist Musikförlag*  
Recorded on 1st March 1940 - DB 5787

- EJNAR EKLÖF (1886–1954)**
- 15 **Morgon** [Morning] 2:32  
(text: K.G. Ossiannilsson)  
*Eriksförlaget*  
Recorded on 1st March 1940 - DB 5787
- GUSTAF NORDQVIST (1886–1949)**
- 16 **Bön i ofredstid** [Prayer in Time of War] 2:44  
(text: Folke Personne)  
*Eriksförlaget*  
Recorded on 5th April 1944 - X 7077
- 17 **Bisp Thomas frihetssång** 2:05  
[Bishop Thomas' Song of Freedom]  
(text: after Thomas Simonsson)  
*Nordiska Musikförlaget*  
Recorded on 5th April 1944 - X 7077
- 18 **Till havs** [Towards the Sea] 2:16  
(text: Jonatan Reuter)  
*Nordiska Musikförlaget*  
Recorded on 30th September 1953 - X 7947
- SVEN SALÉN (1890–1969)**
- 19 **Sången till havet** [Song to the Sea] 2:36  
(text: Sven Salén)  
Recorded on 30th September 1953 - X 7964
- 20 **Visa kring slånblom och månskära** 2:55  
[Song of Blackthorn and Crescent Moon]  
(text: Nils Thorén)  
*Nordiska Musikförlaget / Populär*  
Recorded on 30th September 1953 - X 7964
- WILHELM PETERSON-BERGER**
- 21 **Jungfrun under lind** 2:51  
[The Maiden under the Linden-Tree]  
(text: the Composer, after Ernst von der Recke)  
*Abraham Lundquist Musikförlag*  
Recorded on 30th September 1953 - X 7947
- 1–2, 5–13 with Nils Grevillius and his Orchestra  
12 with male vocal quartet  
3–4 with Orchestra • Nils Grevillius  
14–15 with Harry Ebert, piano  
16–17 with Sune Waldimir and his Orchestra  
18–21 with Orchestra • Bertil Bokstedt

Playing  
Time  
58:21

**Jussi Björling (1911-1960)**  
Swedish National Romantic Songs  
(1929-1953)

8.110791

ADD



ALL RIGHTS IN THIS SOUND RECORDING, ARTWORK, TEXTS AND TRANSLATIONS RESERVED. UNAUTHORISED PUBLIC PERFORMANCE, BROADCASTING AND COPYING OF THIS COMPACT DISC PROHIBITED.  
© & © 2008 Naxos Rights International Ltd.

- 1 **SJÖGREN:** I drömmen du är mig nära  
[In My Dreams You Are Near Me]
- 2 **KÖRLING:** Vita rosor [White Roses]
- 3 **PETERSON-BERGER:** När jag för mig själv i mörka skogen går  
[When I Walk Alone in the Dark Forest]
- 4 Bland skogens höga furustammar  
[Among the High Fir-Trees in the Forest]
- 5 **SJÖBERG:** Tonerna [Music / 'Visions']
- 6 **TRADITIONAL:** Ack Värmland du sköna  
[Ah Värmland, Thou Fairest]
- 7 **TRADITIONAL:** Allt under himmelens fäste  
[Beneath the Dome of the Sky]
- 8 **SCHRADER:** Sommarnatt [Summer Night]
- 9 **STENHAMMAR:** Sverige [Sweden]
- 10 **ALTHÉN:** Land, du välsignade [Thou Blessed Country]
- 11 **WIDESTEDT:** Sjung din hela längtan ut [Sing Out Your Whole Yearning]
- 12 **PRINCE GUSTAF:** Sjungom studentens lyckliga dag  
[Let Us Sing about the Happy Days of Students]
- 13 **WIDESTEDT:** Nämnar du Sverige [If You Mention Sweden]
- 14 **ALFVÉN:** Skogen sover [The Forest Asleep]
- 15 **EKLÖF:** Morgon [Morning]
- 16 **NORDQVIST:** Bön i ofredstid [Prayer in Time of War]
- 17 Bisp Thomas frihetsång [Bishop Thomas' Song of Freedom]
- 18 Till havs [Towards the Sea]
- 19 **SALÉN:** Sången till havet [Song to the Sea]
- 20 Visa kring slånblom och månskära  
[Song of Blackthorn and Crescent Moon]
- 21 **PETERSON-BERGER:** Jungfrun under lind  
[The Maiden under the Linden-Tree]

Considered by both critics and public as one of the greatest tenors of the 20th century, Jussi Björling left behind a vast recorded legacy. This seventh volume in the Jussi Björling Collection features popular Swedish patriotic and romantic songs spanning Björling's entire career. *Tonerna* (Music), generally presented as 'Visions' in Björling's recitals outside Sweden, was one of the most popular items in his repertoire, often used as an encore. *Till havs* (Towards the Sea), a cheerful evocation of the pleasures of sailing, was another great favourite on the recital programmes of the singer, whose devotion to boating and fishing in the Stockholm archipelago was well-known. *Land, du välsignade* (Thou Blessed Country) is the patriotic song most generally associated with Jussi Björling in Sweden today.

MADE IN  
GERMANY

05537



Producer and Audio Restoration Engineer: Stefan Lindström SSR AB  
Executive Producer: Lars Johansson · Special thanks to Harold Löwing for the loan of the records and to Sue Flaster for assistance with the English text.

[www.naxos.com](http://www.naxos.com)

A complete track list can be found in the booklet  
Cover photo: Jussi Björling performing at Skansen Open Air Museum, Stockholm on 14th June, 1942 (Jussi Björling Museum)

