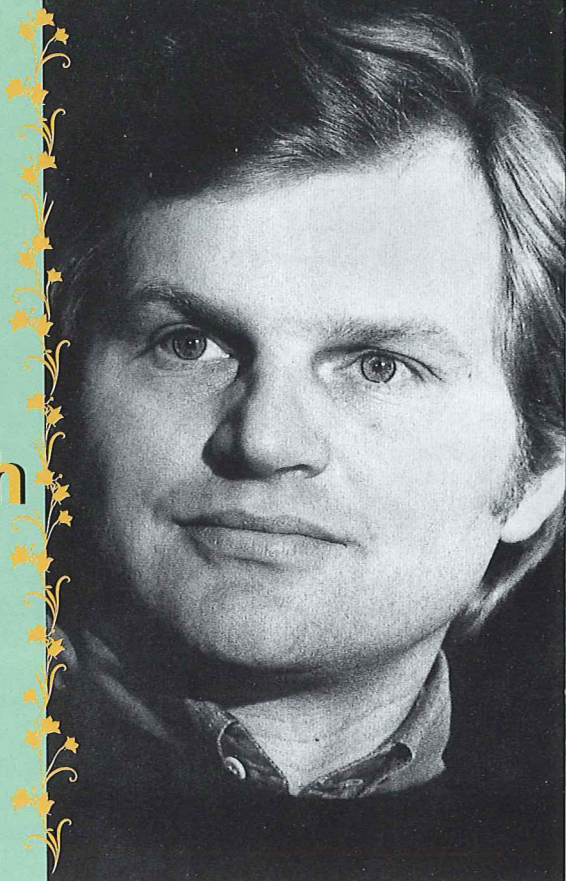


**GREAT
SWEDISH
SINGERS**



Gösta Winbergh

tenor



Much loved tenor

After Gösta Winbergh's unexpected and tragically early death on March 18th 2002 – in Vienna after a performance as Florestan in Beethoven's *Fidelio* – it was natural, understandable and frustrating that some admirers and friends talked about two things, which time now makes recede behind what must have been a very fulfilling career. Some talked about how much more Winbergh could have done if he had been allowed to live longer. Others worried about his place in a Swedish tenor pantheon dominated by Jussi Björling – whose career was cut short by death at an even younger age – and Nicolai Gedda.

As far as the first question is concerned the range of Winbergh's repertoire was already amazing. Without losing anything of his agility and freshness of timbre, the Mozart tenor developed gradually into a Wagnerian, who could sing Lohengrin or Siegmund one night,

Don José or Idomeneo the other. In a concert not long before his death I heard him sing Italian spinto tenor arias with ringing high notes and then defeat a young "coloratura" soprano in the roudes in thirds of a Mozart duet. The second question was of course really an insult to everybody involved – tenor singing is no Olympic contest even if some fans may think so – but can in perspective be of some interest.

Apart from Jussi's unique voice and artistic personality no one in our generation could become a national idol of his stature because of the huge changes in media structure and the aggressive dominance of popular or rather commercial culture. Even the (in)famous "Three Tenors" never became treasured over all class barriers by whole nations in their native countries as Jussi was. That is not possible anymore.

And to compare anyone with the sophisticated intellectual Nicolai Gedda – the tenors' Fischer-Dieskau and possibly the classical singer who made more

records than any other – is also futile. Jussi and Gedda both – for different reasons – stand so much apart. Gösta Winbergh has the right to his own niche in the plethora of great Swedish tenors, which – apart from the two most unique ones – includes Martin Öhman, Torsten Ralf, Set Svanholm, perhaps also Arvid Ödmann, David Stockman and Einar Beyron.

Gösta Winbergh was born in 1943. He started studying singing rather late, at twenty-four. Before that he had worked for a construction firm and reputedly also sang with a pop band. But soon he was safely anchored in the best Swedish vocal tradition, studying with Martin Öhman and Erik Saedén. He got his operatic training at the Opera School in Stockholm and made his debut in 1971 as Rodolfo in Puccini's *La Bohème* at Gothenburg's Stora Teatern. He was a member of the Royal Opera in Stockholm from 1973 to 1981, often returning for guest appearances until what became his last there as Lohengrin in 2001. When he

died, the Royal Opera with its illustrious Wagner tradition, lost its male protagonist for the new production of *Tristan und Isolde* with Nina Stemme in 2004. But Winbergh's thirty years career looks in retrospect most brilliant even without this and other crowning achievements like the Siegfrieds he was never to perform in Zurich.

At the beginning Winbergh wisely turned away from Puccini – too many Rodolfos at the start – and concentrated much on Mozart and the kind of repertoire that made him one of the most attractive performers of the Stockholm Opera and the Drottningholm Court Theatre in the 1970s. One heard and saw him as a youthful Ferrando and David in Götz Friedrich's productions of *Così fan tutte* and *Die Meistersinger*, as Mozart's Don Ottavio and Titus, but also lyric parts demanding both vocal agility and agile acting in operas by Gluck, Piccinni, Vogler, Rossini and Donizetti. His first international appearances were in San Francisco already in the mid 70s. He was

Belmonte at Glyndebourne in 1980, Titus at Covent Garden in 1982, Don Ottavio at the Metropolitan in 1983 and Tamino at La Scala in 1985. Then he had found an artistic base – and a second home – at the Zurich Opera, where he carefully tried out a heavier repertory without really ever abandoning the Mozart roles that had been so important for the development of his voice.

He was a frequent guest all over the world, singing much in Chicago, Munich, Vienna and Paris. Among his later parts on stage or record – where indeed he could have been used much more – were rarer stuff like Admetos in Gluck's *Alceste*, Chausson's *Le Roi Arthur*, Bacchus in (the original version of) *Ariadne auf Naxos* and the Emperor in *Die Frau ohne Schatten*. He returned to La Scala as Idomeneo in 1990, just before his first Lohengrin in Robert Wilson's experimental production at Zurich in 1991.

He gradually added Walther von Stolzing, Parsifal, Tristan and Siegmund and – with the current dearth of “schwerer Heldenentöne” – the whole world of opera wished him to take on the two Siegfrieds. This never happened. At the time of his sudden death they had long been talked of, scheduled, studied, postponed and possibly abandoned. His home audiences at Zurich and Stockholm had not given up hoping for a Winbergh *Ring*.

At the time of his death there was much written about what Gösta Winbergh could have achieved or not if he had been asked to take on the position of artistic director of the Royal Swedish Opera. He was suggested and even interviewed for this job at least twice in the 90s. Those who speculated on his function there for some time as an artistic adviser were even less informed. Winbergh played an important part as one of several references in artistic matters to



Rodolfo 1974, Royal Swedish Opera

the management at the time. But very much as a friend, a link to the highest level of international opera, a source of inspiration for the ensemble, a role model for other singers. Not as an expert in repertoire, staging or management, fields where Winbergh never had any opportunity to develop in the middle of a busy career.

First and foremost he was a great singer and a consummate stage artist. If his acting seldom penetrated deeply it was dramatically effective and never operatically flashy. He could be frighteningly intense as Don José while his silver-clad Lohengrin in Götz Friedrich's rather difficult post-modern version made you think of Marlon Brando, no less. Likewise, Winbergh was a model of clear enunciation while his way with words and interpretation of text was never as detailed as Gedda's or as forceful as Svanholm's. In this he was also a model of balance between word and singing line, all emotions ensconced in his seemingly endless legato. What one

remembers of Winbergh on stage is the union of a warm, strong personality and a glorious, naturally beautiful sound.

Winbergh's excellent method and wise husbanding of vocal resources made everyone think his career could have lasted well into his sixties without diminishing artistic dividends. The voice had matured, it seemed fuller and stronger, but there was as yet absolutely no sign of vocal decline. In 2002 he sang as beautifully as ever. Regardless of his relative greatness compared to this or that other historic tenor, no other has yet filled Winbergh's place.

His death was of course a tragedy for his family, his friends and colleagues, his audience. But in perspective he had the privilege of ending his career at its zenith. As an artist he was spared inevitable decline. His voice – like Jussi's – will only be remembered in full glory in the memory of those who heard him.

Perhaps it is true that he whom the gods love dies – comparatively – young?

Stefan Johansson

Head of dramaturgy Royal Swedish Opera

**All recordings previously not published,
with courtesy Swedish Broadcasting Corporation**

- 1–2. Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra – Gary Bertini
Concert Hall, Stockholm • February 13, 1977
3. Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra – Frieder Meschwitz
Cirkus, Stockholm • August 22, 1975
4. Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra – Ulf Söderblom
Cirkus, Stockholm • August 24, 1979
- 5–6. Royal Orchestra – Berislav Klobucar
Royal Opera House, Stockholm • October 1, 1977
7. Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra – Ulf Söderblom
Cirkus, Stockholm • August 24, 1979
8. Norrköping Symphony Orchestra – Franz Welser-Möst
Berwald Hall, Stockholm • January 18, 1987
9. Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra – Frieder Meschwitz
Cirkus, Stockholm • August 22, 1975
10. Royal Orchestra – Okko Kamu
Royal Opera House, Stockholm • November 21, 1978
- 11–13. Stora Teatern Orchestra – Gunnar Staern
Stora Teatern, Gothenburg • November 10, 1971

With courtesy Royal Swedish Opera • In some cases, we were unable to locate sources for reproduction rights. For any arising claim, please contact us.

Remastering: Sylve Sjöberg • Photo page 5: Enar Merkel Rydberg
Photo front page: private photo • Layout: Christer Eklund
Notes: Stefan Johansson • Selection: Hanna Hedman

La Clemenza di Tito (W.A. Mozart)

1. **Del più sublime soglio** 3'00"
 2. **Ah, se fosse intorno** 2'36"
 Titus act 1

L'Africaine (G. Meyerbeer)

3. **Ô Paradis!** 3'27"
 Vasco da Gama act IV

Faust (Ch. Gounod)

4. **Mon coeur est pénétré** 9'46"
 Faust finale act V
 with Elisabeth Söderström (Marguerite)
 and Erik Saedén (Méphistophélès)

Die Meistersinger (R. Wagner)

5. **Mein Herr! Der Singer
 Meisterschlag** 7'16"
 David act I
 with Sven-Olof Eliasson (Walther)
6. **Gleich, Meister! Hier!** 7'31"
 David act III
 with Leif Roar (Hans Sachs)

Lakmé (L. Delibes)

7. **D'où viens tu?** 7'05"
 duet Lakmé/Gérald act 1
 with Britt-Marie Aruhn

Manon (J. Massenet)

8. **J'ai marqué l'heure du départ** 8'11"
 duet Des Grieux/Manon act I
 with Gunnel Bohman

L'Arlesiana (F. Cilèa)

9. **È la solita storia** 4'50"
 Federico act II

Maskarade (C. Nielsen)

10. **Roser! Roser!** (Sw) 4'34"
 duet Leander/Leonora act III
 with Anita Soldh

Debut 1971 – Stora Teatern, Gothenburg

La Bohème (G. Puccini)

11. **Che gelida manina** (Sw) 4'28"
 Rodolfo act I
12. **Marcello! Finalmente!** (Sw) 4'40"
 Rodolfo/Marcello/Mimi act III
13. **In un coupè? ... O Mimi** (Sw) 4'07"
 Rodolfo/Marcello act IV
 with Per Stokholm (Marcello)
 and Christina Gorne (Mimi)

GÖSTA WINBERGH, tenor

La Clemenza di Tito (W.A. Mozart)

1. **Del più sublime soglio** 3'00"
 2. **Ah, se fosse intorno** 2'36"
 Titus act 1

L'Africaine (G. Meyerbeer)

3. **Ô Paradis!** 3'27"
 Vasco da Gama act IV

Faust (Ch. Gounod)

4. **Mon coeur est pénétré** 9'46"
 Faust finale act V
 with **Elisabeth Söderström** (Marguerite)
 and **Erik Saedén** (Méphistophèles)

Die Meistersinger (R. Wagner)

5. **Mein Herr! Der Singer**
Meisterschlag 7'16"
 David act I
 with **Sven-Olof Eliasson** (Walther)
6. **Gleich, Meister! Hier!** 7'31"
 David act III
 with **Leif Roar** (Hans Sachs)

Lakmé (L. Delibes)

7. **D'où viens tu?** 7'05"
 duet Lakmé/Gérald act 1
 with **Britt-Marie Aruhn**

Manon (J. Massenet)

8. **J'ai marqué l'heure du départ** 8'11"
 duet Des Grieux/Manon act I
 with **Gunnel Bohman**

L'Arlesiana (F. Cilèa)

9. **È la solita storia** 4'50"
 Federico act II

Maskarade (C. Nielsen)

10. **Roser! Roser!** (Sw) 4'34"
 duet Leander/Leonora act III
 with **Anita Soldh**

Debut 1971 – Stora Teatern, Gothenburg

La Bohème (G. Puccini)

11. **Che gelida manina** (Sw) 4'28"
 Rodolfo act I
12. **Marcello! Finalmente!** (Sw) 4'40"
 Rodolfo/Marcello/Mimi act III
13. **In un coupé? ... O Mimi** (Sw) 4'07"
 Rodolfo/Marcello act IV
 with **Per Stokholm** (Marcello)
 and **Christina Gorne** (Mimi)

