Die Sängerin Jenny Lind. Daguerrotypie von Kolburn, August 1850.

**Jenny Lind**

Birth name: Johanna Maria Lind

* 6 October 1820 in Stockholm, Schweden
† 2 November 1887 in Malvern Wells, Worcestershire, England

Soprano

"Jenny is related to Trollhättan Falls, Niagara Falls and all fresh, immediately natural forces; and the effect she makes is approximately the same as the effect of these natural forces."


**Profile**

Due to her voice, described as extraordinary, her vocal technique and dramatic skill, Jenny Lind is considered one of the outstanding sopranos of the 19th century. It is evident from contemporary depictions that her pianissimo in particular - her "messa di voce" - as well as her trills were considered amongst the most notable characteristics of her vocal ability. Moreover, she enchanted her audience with astonishingly natural and sensitive dramatic performances, rapidly becoming a star of the stage. After having risen to the position of prima donna of the Royal Theatre in Stockholm at the age of 22, she was engaged in 1844 by the then Prussian General Music Director Giacomo Meyerbeer as a guest at the Berlin Opera. Especially in the roles of Vielka (Meyerbeer: "Ein Feldlager in Schlesien", "A Silesian Encampment"), Norma (Bellini: "Norma") und Amina (Bellini: "La sonnambula"), she thrilled her contemporaries and formed the basis of her international career. Further seasons followed in Berlin, Vienna and London, outlining a meteoric yet relatively brief operatic career, already terminated by Jenny Lind in 1849. The singer did not retire from public life, however, but concentrated on the concert area beginning in September 1850 with an extended American tour. In combination with the excellent marketing strategy of her manager Phineas T. Barnum, she attained the pinnacle of her success and popularity. Jenny Lind became a world star.

This artist also owed her extraordinary, legendary fame, not least, to her social commitment and marked sense of charity. Special concerts and contributions to foundations and private persons accompanied Lind's entire career and, together with her natural demeanour, gave her the aura of a saviour who, in particular, also conquered the wider public and became generally known outside the artistic world.

**Cities an countries**

Jenny Lind, although closely tied with her Swedish homeland, led a cosmopolitan life as an international star. Beginning in her native Stockholm, where the singer received her training and ultimately rose to the position of prima donna, the centres of her activities were Berlin, Vienna and London as well as the USA, especially New York, Boston and Philadelphia. She gave guest performances in numerous cities as a result of her intensive concert life.

**Biography**
In no way did Jenny Lind grow up in the orderly circumstances that one would like to attest to her, due to her flawless appearance. She was born as the illegitimate daughter of the Anna Maria Fellborg and the bookkeeper Niklas Johan Lind. The name and profession of the father, however, vary according to the source. Thus Nils-Olof Franzén (Jenny Lind. Die schwedische Nachtigall. Eine Biographie, Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1990, p. 9, p. 34) refers to the name variant Niklas Jonas Fredricsson, whereas Lotten Dahlgren (Jenny Lind utom scenen. Förtroliga brev till hennes förmyndare H. M. Munthe, Stockholm: Wahlström & Widstrand, 1928, p. 409) refers to the father as Nils Johan Lind and as a manufacturer. He had wanted to escape creditors in 1820 with his change of name (Franzén, p. 9). The parents did not get married until May 1835, after a lawsuit had been carried on since 1834 over Jenny Lind’s accommodation. Since the mother already had a child from her first marriage (which ended in divorce in 1812) and Lind’s father did not feel obliged to support his daughter, the one-year-old Jenny was given to the trading family Ferndal, who lived in the country in Sollentuna-Ed. In 1824 she was brought by the mother back to Stockholm, where she now lived with her stepsister Amalie and her grandmother.

Jenny Lind’s mother, Anna Maria Fellborg, earned her living primarily by giving private instruction in French, religion, history, geography, arithmetic, painting and piano (see Eva Öhrström: Jenny Lind. The Swedish Nightingale, Stockholm: Swedish Institute, 2000, p. 6). In addition, one of her pupils, Louise Johansson, lived with her as a border. From 1844 until 1848 she was the companion of the singer. Her journal entries from these years offer informative insights into the private and artistic life of Jenny Lind (Resa med Jenny Lind. Sällskapsdamen Louisa Johanssons dagböcker, utg. med inledning och kommentarer av Åke Davidsson, Bibliothecae Regiae Universitatis Upsaliensis Vol. 3, Stockholm 1986). In 1828 the mother gave up her boarding house and moved with Amalie to Linköping, whilst Jenny remained in Stockholm and lodged as a foster child with a childless couple (see Franzén, p. 13). It was not until Jenny Lind became a pupil at the Royal Theatre in 1830 that the mother returned because her gifted daughter could now live with her at the state’s expense.

Jenny Lind initially received vocal instruction from Carl Magnus Crælius, a tenor and actor as well as a member of the Royal Academy of Music in Stockholm who ensured her admission to the Theatre. She was then taught by the tenor Isaak Berg. The pupil gained her first stage experience in November 1830, initially as a dancer in the play “Edwinsky and Floreska or the Polish Colliery”. During her training, which lasted until 1837, Jenny Lind took on more speaking than acting roles, especially since her still immature and sensitive soprano voice lost sound around 1832. Although this problem became less acute during the ensuing years, she received her first contract at the Royal Theatre in January 1837 (according to Franzén, p. 42, only starting in July) in her capacity as trained actress. When the fourth act of Meyerbeer’s “Robert le diable” was performed ‘concertante’ in December 1837, the young artist took on the role of Alice with great success. On 7 March 1838 followed the role of Agathe in Carl Maria von Weber’s ”Freischütz”. Due to a statement by Jenny Lind recorded in the specialist literature, this date does not merely mark her debut, but has also been repeatedly praised as the ”hour of birth” of the singer Jenny Lind: “I got up that morning one creature, and I went to bed another, for I had found my vocation” (quoted from Jenny Maude: The life of Jenny Lind, London: Cassell, 1926, p. 8). The Swede continued to play spoken roles, but increasingly sang operatic roles such as Emmeline in Joseph Weigl’s ”The Swiss Family”, Euryanthe in Weber’s opera of the same name and Pamina in Mozart’s ”Magic Flute” (see Henry Scott Holland/William Smith Rockstro: Memoir of Madame Jenny Lind-Goldschmidt: Her Early Art-Life and Dramatic Career. 1820-1851. >From Original Documents, Letters, Ms. Diaries &c., Collected by Mr. Otto Goldschmidt, Bd. 1, London: John Murray, 1891, p. 57).

It was especially the new, now complete performance of Meyerbeer’s ”Robert le diable”, however, that ensured Jenny Lind’s meteoric rise as a singer and consolidated her popularity beyond Stockholm. When she organised a concert in June 1839, she was escorted home by students – this was to occur frequently during the course of her career. In January 1840 she was named Court Singer by King Karl XIV Johan. In addition, she became a member of the Musical Academy.

In her private life, arguments continued to occur between Jenny Lind and her mother, so that the daughter had fled to a boarding house owned by the Theatre in 1834. The mother then sued the Theatre and Jenny Lind had to return home in June 1836. Beginning in the autumn of 1839, however, she lived with the composer and poet Adolf Fredrik Lindblad and his wife. Through them, Lind
became acquainted with important personalities of cultural life, such as the poet and historian Erik Gustaf Geijer and the authors Carl Jonas Love Almqvist, Malla Silfversholm and Fredrika Bremer.

Ambitious as she was by her own admission (see the letter to H. Weselgren of 7 September 1865 in: Hol land/Rockstro, Vol. 2, p. 300 and p. 446) and further strengthened in her intentions by Geijer, Jenny Lind took a season’s leave of absence from the Royal Theatre in 1841 in order to continue her vocal training with Manuel Garcia in Paris. The brother of the star singer Pauline Viardot-Garcia and Maria Malibran initially verified, however, that Lind had no more voice (see Maude, p. 16) and prescribed a rest from singing for the Swedish singer lasting several weeks. There followed a period of despondency and self-doubt. The instruction from Garcia lasted ten months and was marked by slow and careful practice in which, for the benefit of highly difficult vocal control (trills, "messa di voce", piano), the training of breathing technique was particularly emphasised. She also sang for Meyerbeer in Paris (Giacomo Meyerbeer: Briefwechsel und Tagebücher, ed. Heinz and Gudrun Becker, Vol. 3, Berlin: de Gruyter, 1975, p. 743), who was most enthusiastic over her voice (Maude, p. 10ff). No engagement followed, however.

In August 1842 Jenny Lind returned to the Stockholm stage, where she exceeded all expectations thanks to her vocal mastery and even more brilliant acting (Franzén, pp. 79ff) and, at 22 years of age, rose to the position there of prima donna assoluta.

Ostensibly driven by the Lindblad’s infatuation (Franzén, p. 93, p. 96), Jenny Lind left Stockholm and undertook a tour in the summer of 1843 through Sweden, Finland and Denmark, where she was convinced by the dancer and choreographer Auguste Bournonville to perform at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen. Here, for the first time, Lind enjoyed a great success on the operatic stage outside of Sweden. Hans Christian Andersen was enraptured by Jenny Lind to the point of infatuation; the singer, however, shared his feelings only on the level of friendship. Beginning in 1843 she was in a relationship with the tenor Julius Günther, with whom she had appeared on stage in Stockholm already since 1839.

After Jenny Lind had sung the 1843/44 season at the Royal Theatre in Stockholm again, she received an offer in May 1844 from Giacomo Meyerbeer to sing the role of Vielka in his new Berlin opera "Ein Feldlager in Schlesien" ("A Silesian Encampment"). Although the Swede was accompanied by a great fear of failure, she accepted the offer and sang the role for the first time on 5 January 1845. In connection with her performance of Norma and Amina in "La sonnambula", Lind became a frenetically celebrated prima donna in Berlin, venerated both at the court and in artists’ circles. Special emphasis should be placed on the friendship between her and Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy. This mutual artistic admiration became intensified on the part of Jenny Lind (see Johansson, entry of 17 December 1845, p. 37 and of 7 March 1846, p. 39) and apparently also of Mendelssohn Bartholdy (http://www.musikverein-wien.at/monatszeitung/show_artikel.asp?Artikel_ID=1232, as of: 1.7.2010) into a deep, inner affection that remained without consequences, however.

Starting in May 1845, Jenny Lind was on stage in Stockholm again, but returned for another season to Berlin at the end of October. In April 1846 the soprano travelled to Vienna, making her debut there in the role of Vielka again. Here, too, the audience was enthusiastic. Despite these great successes, Lind continued to consider leaving the operatic stage. Thus her engagements accepted in London from 1847 until 1849 already mark the last ones of an exceptionally successful station in her stage career. Indicative of Lind’s desire to turn away from the opera world are her two betrothals around 1848 both of which, however, were broken off after a short time (April to October 1848 with Julius Günther, autumn 1848 to May 1849 with Claudius Harris). Moreover, she was apparently ready, repeatedly, to enter into marriage with Frédéric Chopin (concerning this, see Cecilia and Jens Jorgensen: Chopin and the Swedish Nightingale, Brussels: Icons of Europe, 2003).

Meanwhile, the tranquil life in her Swedish homeland envisioned by Jenny Lind was thwarted by a lucrative offer. The journalist and showman Phineas T. Barnum offered her a contract for an extended American tour. On 11 September 1850 Jenny Lind gave her first concert in New York and travelled through the United States during the following months with her manager Barnum, the baritone Giovanni Battista Belletti, the pianist and music director Julius Benedict as well as an orchestra of about ten musicians that was supplemented by local musicians as required during the course of the tour (see Franzén, p. 258).

Since Benedict responded to an offer in London in May 1851, the Mendelssohn pupil Otto Goldschmidt replaced
him by request of Jenny Lind. The singer had already performed with the pianist, nine years her junior, in Hamburg in November 1849. On 5 February 1852 they married in Boston and continued their concertising activities in May 1852 after a three-month break – the contract with Barnum had already been terminated in June 1851. In early June, the couple returned to Europe, settling in Dresden in the autumn of 1852 following sojourns in England, Germany and Switzerland. Jenny Lind gave birth to two children there (Walter in 1853 and Jenny Maria Catherine in 1857). She continued to tour Germany, Austria, Holland and Great Britain with her husband. After the couple had refused a new offer from Barnum, the family moved to England during the summer of 1858. They continued their concertising activities and their third child (Ernst) was born in London in 1861. A growing affinity for religious music was noticeable in Jenny Lind’s repertoire during these years. She preferred to perform oratorios. Around the mid-1860s the singer gradually withdrew from public life. A benefit concert given on behalf of the railwaymen in Malvern, England in 1883 is considered her final public performance (see Franzén, p. 308f.). After having taught singing from 1883 until 1886 (see Maude, p. 216ff) at the Royal College of Music, she died on 2 November 1887 at her summer residence in Malvern.

Appreciation

It is not only the legendary beauty of her voice to which Fanny Hensel attests “absolutely accurate purity” (letter to Felix Mendelssohn Bartholdy of 21 December 1844, in: "Die Musik will gar nicht rutschen ohne Dich". Fanny und Felix Mendelssohn. Briefwechsel 1821-1846, ed. Eva Weissweiler, Berlin: Propyläen, 1997, p. 378), and her vocal ability that distinguish Jenny Lind as one of the most prominent artistic personalities of the 19th century. "I have never seen anyone perform like her; her own magic is in all her movements, a grace, naivety, and although her face – observing each part – cannot be called beautiful, it is of such grace, her eyes so poetic, that one is spontaneously moved by it", as Clara Schumann summarised Jenny Lind’s performance of Donizetti’s “La figlia del regimento” (”Daughter of the Regiment”, Berthold Litzmann: Clara Schumann: Ein Künstlerleben. Nach Tagebüchern und Briefen, Bd. 2, Leipzig: Breitkopf und Härtel, 1905, p. 148). With her extraordinary acting abilities, her subtle playing of roles as well as her efforts to present the musical text as authentically and precisely as possible (especially with older works or translations), she thrilled musicians and the public alike, setting new standards for the operatic world of her time. Thus she “increasingly left the traditional, elitist courtly opera behind her with the directness and naturalness of her performing [...]” (Sonja Gesse-Harm: Casta diva. Zur Rezeption Jenny Linds in der Musikkultur um 1850, in: Die Musikforschung 62 (2009), p. 363) and repeatedly offered a role interpretation that “takes into account the bourgeois catalogue of virtues of the time” (ibid). In addition, she achieved a remarkably wide appeal that, not least, also benefitted the composers, with her extensive concertising leading her far from Europe’s musical metropolises into small cities as well. Mention must be made of the traditionally orientated, popular repertoire, mixed with beloved opera arias, with which she reached social classes that had never before had access to operas or concerts. With this, Jenny Lind contributed to an extraordinary enrichment of musical and cultural life during the mid-nineteenth century. Thanks to her strong commitment to charity, which led to a legendary popularisation of the singer, Jenny Lind even reached the ordinary working classes. The fact that this phenomenon was not merely restricted to Europe (primarily Sweden, Germany, Austria and Great Britain), but also extended to the USA, assured the singer of a world fame that has continued to the present day.

Reception

"She was a woman who would have been admired even if she had sung like a crow", as Phineas T. Barnum once supposedly remarked on Jenny Lind (Franzén, p. 365). It is true that the singer’s reception went and still goes far beyond the musical spectrum. Not only were children and animals named after her, but also schools and hospitals. In Europe and America there are streets named after the Swedish prima donna, in California even an entire city and in Canada an island bear her name. During her lifetime, shop windows were filled with precious items ranging from Lind sweets to Lind cigars, from hairpins to furnishings and musical instruments. She even adorned the American clipper ship "Nightingale” as a figurehead (see also Karl-Eric Svärdskog: Jenny Lind and the Clipper Nightingale Figurehead, Portsmouth: Portsmouth Marine Society, 2001, as well as: Jenny Lind. Från näktergal till fågelskrämma, Göteborg: Karl-Eric Svärdskog, 2004). In addition, culinary treats were created that bore her name. Everyone, whether ordinary worker or well-situated bourgeois, should be able to partake of the benevolent artist. This made not only Jenny Lind a
millionaire. Alongside the manufacturers, it was also possible for theatre directors and music publishers who issued Lind’s special repertoire to enjoy considerable profits. For example, Benjamin Lumley, the director of the tradition-steeped London opera house “Her Majesty’s Theatre”, succeeded in saving his enterprise - endangered by the pressure of competition - through the commitment of Jenny Lind. Similarly to Barnum, Lumley ran advertisements for the Swedish star singer long before her first performance, so that the London public excitedly looked forward to this event. The prima donna was a guarantee of success, and this could have a lasting influence on the popularity of a composition or even an entire opera. Thus Donizetti’s “La figlia del reggimento” was only appreciated in the British capital after Jenny Lind had sung the leading role. Ferdinand Hiller, who directed the 33rd Lower Rhenish Music Festival in 1855, not by chance, engaged Lind as a driving force for this event (see Siegfried Kross: Johannes Brahms. Versuch einer kritischen Dokumentar-Biographie, Bd. 1, Bonn: Bouvier, 1997, p. 229). To be mentioned in connection with Jenny Lind was a distinction that was even appreciated in the highest circles of the nobility.

Ultimately, building contractors also regarded the singer as a strong partner because they gained considerable sums of money by constructing public facilities through Jenny Lind’ financial power. For example, a wing of Brompton Hospital could be reconstructed through the singer’s donation (see Holland/Rockstro, Vol. 2, pp. 224-233).

Nonetheless, it was not part of Jenny Lind’s character to exploit her position in feminist issues and to force her way into male-dominated professional domains. She always propagated domestic life whilst enjoying her privileges, together with a star’s longing for peace and quiet. Nonetheless, women of feminist persuasion saw as much of a model in Jenny Lind as did those of their female contemporaries who clung to their traditional role (see also Bluford Adams: E Pluribus Barnum. The Great Showman and the Making of U.S. Popular Culture, Minneapolis/London: University of Minnesota Press 1997, pp. 52-58).

Although the daily press always had something to report about Jenny Lind and journalists were generally full of praise for her vocal performances, one did not necessarily have to be able to read in order to have heard of this benevolent woman who was venerated almost like a saint. In the manner of legends, reports circulated about Jenny Lind’s donations, both to institutions and to individual persons. A legacy of Lind’s charitable work is manifest to the present day in the Jenny Lind Prize, which has been awarded annually since 1965 by the Royal Music Academy in Stockholm to professional female Swedish singers. The prize is endowed with 40,000 crowns, a Jenny Lind suit as well as – completely in the spirit of its originator – a concert tour through Sweden and the USA.

It was not only in connection with this image that the Lind veneration attained almost religious dimensions. Hans Christian Andersen, a friend of Jenny Lind, remarked on the singer’s performance in the following words: “One laughs, one cries; it is almost like attending church, for one becomes a better person! One senses godliness in art; where God stands before us, face to face, that is where a holy church is” (Hans Christian Andersen: Das Märchen meines Lebens. Selbstbiographie des Verfassers, übersetzt und bis zum Tode ergänzt von Emil J. Jonas, Bd. 1, Leipzig: Lindner, [around 1880], p. 311). Due to the naturalness and plainness of her person that she emulated both on stage and in private life, repeatedly emphasised by her contemporaries, one saw an almost Marian image of woman in the devoutly Protestant Swede, independent of her denomination, and appraised her as “a pure, chaste priestess” of art (from the diaries of Heinrich Brockhaus. In fünf Theilen. Als Handschrift gedruckt. Zweiter Theil, Leipzig: Brockhaus 1884, p. 76). For Phineas T. Barnum, who praised “the greatest musical wonder in the world” (P. T. Barnum: The Life of P. T. Barnum, Written by Himself, Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000, p. 297) with excellent marketing strategy, this image was of central importance in view of Jenny Lind’s American tour. White clothing, ornamented only with a few flowers and diamonds, underlined the theme of Lind’s reserved, virginal being and literally made her into a luminous figure (see also Adams, p. 47ff).

Alongside the numerous reviews of her performances and press releases about her person, Lind’s exceptional popularity was also reflected in literature. Franz Grillparzer was inspired to write the poem "Jenny Lind" (1846). Humorous pieces about the singer are found in a work of Otto Prechtl alias Robert Friedländer entitled “The Night of Jenny Lind: A Cheerful-Serious Play” (1918) and one by David Kalisch called “An Adventure with Jenny Lind: Comical Scene with Singing” (1845). In addition, the satirical magazine "Punch" also published ironical articles and many verses during Jenny Lind’s seasons in London (1847-1849) (see Maude, S. 115-126). Ludwig Reinhard’s article "Jenny Lind and the Green Flannel Jacket: A Ro-
mantic Episode from the Swedish Nightingale’s Eighteenth Year” (1846) only tells of the singer’s reception to the extent that her name is intended to divert attention from the censorship of the 1840s. Thus the author remarked: “Incidentally, the above heading is intended as nothing but a mask in order to distract the eye of the censor [...]. Articles about Lind and similar glories must have long since become a surfeit for a censor’s stomach [...].” ("Jenny Lind und die grüne Flanelljacke. Mecklenburgische Satiren und Anekdoten aus den Jahren 1844-1849", ed. Egon Schmidt, Rostock: Hinstorff 1970, p. 64).

Hans Christian Andersen reflected Lind’s subtle artistic nature with his fairytale-like story “The Nightingale” ("Nattergalen", 1843). Moreover, traces of Lind’s reception are repeatedly shown in novels and short stories, for example in the 29th chapter of the short story "Mr. Harrison’s Confessions" (1851) by the English author Elizabeth Gaskell and in Otto Flame’s "Hortense, or the Return to Baden Baden” (1933). Whereas the vocal mastery and popularity of the Swede is emphasised by both authors, Theodor Fontane brings out the Marian traits of the prima donna in the 15th and 29th chapters of his novel "The Stechlin" (1897/99). The singer receives greater narrative space in "Jenny Lind og påfuglen. En romantisk fortelling” (1949) by the Norwegian author Johan Borgen as well as in "Nordens nattergal og andre fortellinger” (1992) edited by Trygve Bjørkrheim.

The love of Hans Christian Andersen for Jenny Lind is the subject, in a very free interpretation, of the film "The Swedish Nightingale" (Germany 1940/41, Regie Peter Paul Brauer), in which Ilse Werner plays the role of the Swedish singer.


The problematic nature of art and consumerism has been confronted by the American composer Libby Larsen in "Barnum’s Bird: A Choral Opera for Chorus, Four Soloists and Instruments" (world premiere on 1 February 2002 in Washington). The libretto was written by Libby Larsen and Bridget Carpenter.

Research

Numerous biographies of Jenny Lind have been published since the mid-19th century. This notwithstanding, the singer’s achievements and her impact on opera and concert life during the 19th century have received little attention from musicologists.


Need for Research

The remarkable extent of Jenny Lind’s popularity and the rich correspondence between the singer and artists, monarchs and other contemporaries offer a large number of sources that have so far only been sporadically printed, in some cases not in the original language. In particular, a critical edition of the correspondence of Jenny Lind appears indispensable for a well-founded research undertaking.

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