

THE SWEDISH NIGHTINGALE
Jenny Lind's U.S. Tour, 1850-1852

Introduction

The "Swedish Nightingale", Jenny Lind (1820-1887), was a world-class Swedish opera singer who was contracted by the showman P. T. Barnum to perform in the United States from 1850-52. Public expectations were raised through extensive advance publicity and Barnum enjoyed the corresponding financial bonanza. Lind, by contrast, donated much of her fee income to charitable causes. These contemporary newspaper articles illustrate the extreme degree of public interest at different stages in the concert series.

Barnum Contract (circa May 1850)

Jenny Lind's Visit to America ---There have been many reports in circulation as to the intended visit of this amiable and gifted lady to the U. States. We are now enabled to state the facts and particulars on the best authority, that of a private letter from Mdlle. Lind, and a perusal of the documents relating to the engagement, with which we have been favored by Mr. Barnum's agent. The latter were signed at Lübeck, on the 9th inst., and are in substance as follows, omitting the sums of money out of delicacy to Mdlle. Lind, with the remark that those already specified by some of our contemporaries are quite incorrect.

Mr. Barnum, the speculator, agrees to provide Mdlle. Lind a waiting maid servant to superintend the baggage for herself and party, to pay all travelling expenses, including those of her companion, (the amiable relative who accompanied her in England) a secretary, and the professional fees of M. Benedict and Signor Belletti, the musical conductor, and the vocalist whom she has particularly selected, to place at her disposal in each city a carriage and a pair of horses, and to secure her a certain sum for each concert or oratorio in which she shall sing. That after seventy-five concerts, if Mr. Barnum shall have realized a sum named, exclusive of all current expenses, then in addition to the first amount, a further sum of one fifth of nightly profits of the remaining 75 concerts.

We may state the terms given to Messrs. Benedict and Belletti are very liberal -- such as, in reference to Mr. Benedict, could alone have tempted him from his eminent position in the metropolis. Mdlle. Lind, on her part, agrees to sing in 150 concerts, including oratorios, in one year, if possible -- or, if not, within eighteen months; to have full control as to the number of nights or concerts in each week, and the number of pieces in each concert -- the former, as well as the latter, to be conditional on her health and safety of voice. In no case is she to appear in opera.

Arrival by Atlantic Steamer (?8 September 1850)

JENNY LIND. The advent of Napoleon when he returned to Paris from Elba, was not half as glorious as that of the Nightingale into New York. He came in martial array and with the lurid light which victory flames forth upon her favorites. But the angel of goodness and of song found a victory in every heart, a triumph in the presence of tens of thousands, who came out to pay their tribute of admiration and love to genius, generosity and virtue.

The Tribune contains a long and interesting account of her arrival, reception, and first concert. She was met on board the Atlantic, just inside the narrows, by Mr. Barnum and others. She received Mr. B. with great cordiality. She was greeted on the arrival of the steamer near Canal street pier by the presence of thousands who lined the spars and rigging of vessels and every other spot which would command a sight, while every fender at the Hoboken-St. Ferry House was topped with a piece of living statuary. In addition to the usual flags at the pier, a splendid Swedish banner was floating in the air. The distinguished visitors all expressed their astonishment at seeing so many well-dressed people in the crowd. Mdlle. Lind, especially, was very much struck with the air of respectability which marked the thousands assembled. Turning to Mr. Barnum she asked, "Have you no poor people in your country? Everyone here appears to be well dressed."

The populace were only kept away from the gangway by a gate across the pier, which was subsequently broken down by the mass and many persons nearly crushed to death. Inside the gate were triumphal arches of evergreen and flowers with mottos welcoming Jenny Lind to America. It was with difficulty that Mr. Barnum's carriage, which contained her, could get through the crowd which clung to the wheels and flocked about the windows.

Jenny was driven to the Irving House, where an elegant suite of apartments were in readiness for her. The crowd soon filled the block around the house and when she appeared at one of the parlor windows, on Broadway, she was vociferously cheered and kissed her hand and bowed repeatedly in answer.

Her arrival created nearly as much excitement in the Irving House as in the streets. All the passages leading to her apartments were crowded. The great flag of Sweden and Norway was hoisted on the flagstaff of the Irving House immediately upon her arrival. Throughout the evening crowds continued to collect about the hotel, and so incessant were their calls that she was obliged to appear twice again at the windows.

After 11 o'clock the crowd began to gather again, as it was known that the Musical Fund Society of this city intended giving Mdlle. Lind a serenade at midnight. At the appointed time the serenading band, numbering 200 instruments, made its appearance, and taking its station in Reade street,

played several national airs under the windows of Mdlle. Lind's apartments. The crowd by this time occupied all the space in front of the Irving House, extending some distance up and down Broadway, many thousands in all. Mdlle. Lind's appearance at the window was the signal for a storm of shouts and cheers prolonged almost without end. During the performance of Yankee Doodle, she kept tune to the music with much spirit, and at the close requested its repetition. She waved her handkerchief to the company and withdrew; but cheer on cheer followed and she was obliged to appear again and again, till the reluctant throng was finally obliged to disperse. Among those present in the street were numbers of ladies.

Invitations, visits and gifts of all kinds are showered upon Mdlle. Lind to an embarrassing degree. If she employs but one secretary, the poor man must have a terrible time of it to acknowledge all the bouquets, hats, gloves, handkerchiefs, &c., which she receives. Among the invitations received by Mdlle. Lind was one from the Institution of the Blind, which she at once signified her intention of visiting, and singing for the gratification of the pupils. [...]

Feted in Manhattan: The First Concert (11 September 1850)

THE CONCERT TONIGHT.

Tonight will be a new Avatar in our musical history—the first appearance of another divinity in the world of Song. It will be an occasion entirely unprecedented in this country; for even the divine Malibran sang to comparatively small audiences and to a much more imperfect musical taste. Jenny Lind comes among us in the maturity of her powers and the zenith of her fame. The splendid reception which has been given her, no less on account of her splendid benevolence and lofty personal character than her transcendent genius, is an earnest of the prepossession with which her appearance tonight will be hailed. To justify all this inordinate expectation—to fill up with palpable truth the outlines drawn by so many excited imaginations—will be no slight achievement; but we believe that Mdlle. Lind is equal to it. The power of a name that, without actual performance, can bring together six or seven thousand people, at a cost of some \$35,000 for tickets alone, must rest on a marvelous gift indeed, to retain its spell on the public mind. Nevertheless, we have no fear that the spell will be broken or the gift grow dim.

Even leaving out of view the expectations which will be gathered within the space of Castle Garden this evening, the sight of the hall and the audience will be worth at least half the price of a ticket. The improvements are advancing rapidly, and everything will be complete in ample time for this evening's performance. Mr. Barnum has furnished tickets of admission to ten Boston and fifteen Philadelphia papers, every one of which has signified its intention of being represented. There were only about 400 promenade tickets sold, when the sale was stopped, to prevent an inconvenient crowd inside the walls.

Tomorrow morning the tickets for the Concert of Friday night, will be sold at public auction, in the Garden.

We are authorized to announce the following regulations for the government of carriages and hacks, which are made to prevent confusion this evening at Castle garden. All carriages will enter the large gate at the corner of State street and Whitehall, and pass out through the gate in Battery Place, at the head of Greenwich street. At the close of the Concert the carriages will take up their company in precisely the same order. When a carriage arrives at the entrance gate at the end of the bridge the names of parties will be called out by the Inspector of Hacks, and if not present the carriage will pass on and come around again in line.

Persons who come in carriages are advised to remain a few minutes, in order to let the other portion of the audience pass out first, and those who are not in carriages will have the kindness to pass out without delay as soon as the Concert is finished. Particular attention to these instructions will prevent much confusion and materially expedite the egress and comfort of the audience.

TWO HOURS AT REHEARSAL.

The second rehearsal of tonight's grand concert came off yesterday at Castle garden. About 100 persons were present, principally musical amateurs and members of the Press. The Orchestra is composed of excellent material, and with a little of Mr. Benedict's drilling, will equal, if not surpass, the best we have ever had in this country. The Overtures to "Oberon" and "The Crusades" gave ample evidence of its capacity. Of the vocalists, Belletti appeared first and sang the "Sorgete" from Rossini's *Maometto Secondo*. All present were surprised and delighted with the richness and purity of his voice and the remarkable finish and grace of his execution. He is, unquestionably, the most satisfactory baritone who has yet visited us. Mdlle. Lind was about to commence *Casta Diva* when the first of the hundred guns fired for California, New-Mexico, Texas and the Ten Millions, thundered just outside the Castle. The Orchestra laid down their instruments and the expectant visitors were obliged to wait half an hour, until patriotism could be satisfied. When, at last, the strain was resumed, Mdlle. Lind again came forward. She was very pale, and seemed to exercise a strong effort to commence the first notes. But the sound of her own voice reassured her, and losing herself in the inspiration of the music, she took her hearers with her into a region of wonder and delight, where cold, unsympathetic criticism was a thing impossible. Her voice is electrical in its effect, and we do not think there is an audience in the nation capable of hearing it unmoved.

After what we have said yesterday concerning her performance, and what expectations we have still reserved for this evening, it is hardly necessary to forestall public curiosity by a further account of what we

have heard. It will be enough to say, that the favored few who heard it her yesterday were, to use a Southern expression, completely "enthused," and that there is no difference of opinion among them in regard to the effect on the grand audience that assembles tonight.

JENNY LIND'S FIRST CONCERT.

Jenny Lind's first Concert is over, and all doubts are at an end. She is the greatest singer we have ever heard, and her success is all that was anticipated from her genius and her fame. As this is something of an era in our history of Art, we give a detailed account of all that took place on the occasion.

All the preparatory arrangements for the Concert were made with great care, and from the admirable system observed, none of the usual disagreeable features of such an event were experienced. Outside of the gate there was a double row of Policemen extending up the main avenue of the Battery grounds. Carriages only were permitted to drive up to the gate from the Whitehall side, and pass off into Battery-place. At one time the line of carriages extended to Whitehall and up State-St. into Broadway. The order specified in yesterday's Tribune was observed, by which means everything was accomplished in a quiet and orderly manner. The Chief of Police, with about 60 men, came on the ground at 5 o'clock, and maintained the most complete order to the end.

Mr. Barnum, according to promise, had put up a substantial framework, and thrown an immense awning over the bridge, which is some 200 feet in length. This was brilliantly lighted, and had almost the appearance of a triumphal avenue on entering the gate.

There was an immense crowd on the Battery clustering around the gates during the whole evening, but no acts of disorder occurred. When Jenny Lind's carriage came, but very few persons knew it, and no great excitement followed. The principal annoyance was occasioned by a noisy crowd of boys in boats, who gathered around the outer wall of the Castle, and being by their position, secure from the Police, tried to disturb those within by a hideous clamor of shouts and yells, accompanied by a discordant din of drums and fifes. There must have been more than 200 boats and a thousand persons on the water. They caused some annoyance to that portion of the audience in the back seats of the balcony, but the nuisance was felt by none in the parquet. By 10 o'clock they had either become tired or ashamed of the contemptible outrage they were attempting, and dispersed. We may here remark that if the River Police asked for by Chief Matsell had been in existence, this attempt could not have been made.

On entering the Castle, a company of ushers, distinguished by their badges, were in readiness to direct the visitors to that part of the hall where their seats were located. Colored lamps and hangings suspended to the

pillars indicated at a glance the different divisions, and the task of seating the whole audience of near seven thousand persons was thus accomplished without the least inconvenience. The hall was brilliantly lighted, though from its vast extent the stage looked somewhat dim. The wooden partition which was built up in place of the drop curtain, is covered with a painting representing the combined standards of America and Sweden, below which are arabesque ornaments in white and gold. Considering the short time allowed for these improvements, the change was remarkable. The only instance of bad taste which we noticed was a large motto, worked in flowers, suspended over the pillars of the balcony directly in front of the stage. "Welcome, Sweet Warbler," (so ran the words,) was not only tame and common-place, but decidedly out of place.

The sight of the grand hall, with its gay decoration, its glittering lamps, and its vast throng of expectant auditors, was in itself almost worth a \$5 ticket. We were surprised to notice that not more than one-eighth of the audience were ladies. They must stay at home, it seems, when the tickets are high, but the gentlemen go, nevertheless. For its size, the audience was one of the most quiet, refined and appreciative we ever saw assembled in this city. Not more than one-third were seated before 7 o'clock, and when the eventful hour arrived, they were still coming in. A few of the seats were not taken when the orchestra had assembled and Mr. Benedict, who was greeted with loud cheers on his appearance, gave the first flourish of his baton.

The musical performances commenced with Jules Benedict's Overture to his opera, *The Crusaders*, himself conducting the orchestra of 60 instruments. It was an admirably balanced and effective orchestra, and notwithstanding that we had to listen, as it were, around a corner, we felt the unity and full force of its strong chords, and traced the precise and delicate outline of its melodies with a distinctness which proved that a clear musical idea was there, too clearly embodied to be lost even in that vast space. We liked the first half of the composition best; it had the dark shading and wild vigor and pathos of Van Weber; the allegro which set in upon it was more in the light popular manner of Auber and the French. Yet Mr. Benedict has proved his mastery in this work, which the vast audience acknowledged with very hearty plaudits.

Signor Belletti was the next mark of expectation. In one of Rossini's most ornate and florid bravura songs (from *Maometto Secondo*) he produced a baritone of such warm, rich, solid, resonant and feeling quality as we perhaps have never heard in this country (though without closer observation from the less remote position in which a baritone naturally requires to be heard, we hardly dare to place it above Badioli's); while in refinement of conception and of execution he left little to be desired.

Now came a moment of breathless expectation. A moment more, and Jenny Lind, clad in a white dress which well became the frank sincerity of her face, came forward through the orchestra. It is impossible to describe the spontaneous burst of welcome which greeted her. The vast assembly rose as

one man, and for some minutes nothing could be seen but the waving of hands and handkerchiefs, nothing heard but a storm of tumultuous cheers. The enthusiasm of the moment, for a time beyond all bounds, was at last subdued, after prolonging itself by its own fruitless efforts to subdue itself, and the divine songstress, with that perfect bearing, that air of all dignity and sweetness, blending a child-like simplicity and half-trembling womanly modesty with the beautiful confidence of Genius and serene wisdom of Art, addressed herself to song, as the orchestral symphony prepared the way for the voice in *Casta Diva*. A better test piece could not have been selected for her debut. Every soprano lady has sung it to us; but nearly everyone has seemed only trying to make something of it, while Jenny Lind was the very music of it for the time being. We would say no less than that; for the wisest and [most honest] part of criticism on such a first hearing of a thing so perfect, was to give itself purely unto it, without question, and attempt no analysis of what too truly fills one to have yet began to be an object of thought.

If it were possible, we would describe the quality of that voice, so pure, so sweet, so fine, so whole and all-pervading in its lowest breathings and minutest fioriture as well as in its strongest volume. We never heard tones which in their sweetness went so far. They brought the most distant and ill-seated auditor close to her. They were tones, every one of them, and the whole air had to take the law of their vibrations. The voice and the delivery had in them all the good qualities of all the good singers. Song in her has that integral beauty which at once proclaims it as a type for all, and is most naturally worshipped as such by the multitude.

Of those who have been before her we were most frequently reminded of Madame Bishop's quality (not quantity) of voice. Their voices are of metal somewhat akin. Jenny Lind's had incomparably more power and more at all times in reserve; but it had a shade of that same veiled quality in its lowest tones, consistently with the same (but much more) ripeness and sweetness, and perfect freedom from the crudeness often called clearness, as they rise. There is the same kind of versatile and subtle talent, too, in Jenny Lind, as appeared later in the equal inspiration and perfection of her various characters and styles of song. Hers is a genuine soprano, reaching the extra high notes with that ease and certainty which make each highest one a triumph of expression purely, and not a physical marvel; the gradual growth and sostenuto of her tones; the light and shade, the rhythmic undulation and balance of her passages; the bird-like ecstasy of her trill; the faultless precision and fluency of her chromatic scales: above all, the sure reservation of such volume of voice as to crown each protracted climax with glory, not needing a new effort to raise force for the final blow; and indeed all the points one looks for in a mistress of the vocal art, were eminently hers in *Casta Diva*. But the charm lay not in any point, but rather in the inspired vitality, the hearty, genuine outpouring of the whole—the real and yet truly ideal humanity of all her singing. That is what has won the world to Jenny Lind; it is that her whole soul and being goes out in her song, and that her voice becomes the impersonation of that song's soul if it have any, that is, if it be a song. There is plainly no vanity in her, no mere aim to effect; it is all frank and real and harmoniously earnest.

She next bewitched all the delicate naiveté and sparkling espièglerie, interchanged with true love pathos, of her duet with Belletti, from Rossini's *I Turchi in Italia*, the music being in the same voice with that of his "Barber of Seville." The distinct rapidity, without hurry, of many passages, was remarkable in both performers. But perhaps the most wonderful exhibition of her vocal skill and pliancy and of her active intimacy with Nature, was in the Trio Concertante, with two flutes, from Meyerbeer's "Camp of Silesia." Exquisitely her voice played in echo between the tasteful flute-warblings of Messrs. Kyle and Siede.

But do not talk of her flute-like voice; the flute tone is not one a real voice need cultivate; except where it silvers the edges of a dark mass of orchestral harmony, the flute's unmitigated sweetness must and should contrast with the more clarinet and reed-like quality of a voice as rich and human as that of Jenny Lind.

Naturally the favorites of the evening were the two national songs. Her Swedish "*Herdsmen's Song*" was singularly quaint, wild and innocent. The odd musical interval (a sharp seventh) of the repeated loud call of the cows, the joyful laugh, and the echo, as if her singing had brought the very mountains there, were extremely characteristic. This was loudly encored and repeated; and when again encored was of course answered with her "Greeting to America," the National Prize Song, written by Bayard Taylor, and set to a vigorous and familiar style of music, well harmonizing with the words, by Benedict. The greeting had a soul in it, coming from those lips. We here give the words:

GREETING TO AMERICA.

WORDS BY BAYARD TAYLOR—MUSIC BY JULES BENEDICT

I greet, with a full heart, the Land of the West,
Whose banner of stars o'er a world is unrolled;
Whose empire o'ershadows Atlantic's wide breast
And opes to the sunset its gateway of gold!
The land of the mountain, the land of the lake,
And rivers that roll in magnificent tide—
Where the souls of the mighty from slumber awake
And hallow the soil for whose freedom they died!

Thou Oracle of Empire! though wide be the foam
That severs the land of my fathers and thee,
I hear, from thy bosom, the welcome of home,

For Song has a home in the hearts of the Free!
And long as thy waters shall gleam in the sun,
And long as thy heroes remember their scars,
Be the hands of thy children united as one,
And Peace shed her light on thy Banner of Stars!

We have but now to acknowledge the fine style of Belletti's *Largo al Factotum* (though the gay barber's song always requires the stage,) and the admirable orchestra performance of Weber's Overture to Oberon.

We are now sure of Jenny Lind, the Singer and the Artist. Last night she was herself, and well-accompanied, and gloriously responded to. But we have yet to hear her in the kind of music which seems to us most to need and to deserve such a singer—in the Agatha of *Der Freischütz*, and in Mozart and the deep music of the great modern German operas.

At the close, the audience (who made no movement to leave till the last note had been uttered) broke out in a tempest of cheers, only less vehement than those which welcomed her in *Casta Diva*. She came forward again, bowed with a bright, grateful face, and retired. The cheers were now mingled with shouts of "Barnum!" who at last came forward, and with some difficulty obtained sufficient order to speak. "My friends," said he, "you have often heard it asked, 'Where's Barnum?'" Amid the cheers and laughter which followed this, we could only catch the words: "Henceforth, you may say, 'Barnum's nowhere!'"

Mr. Barnum, after expressing his gratification at the splendid welcome which had been given Mdlle. Lind, stated that he would disclose a piece of news which he could no longer keep secret, and which would show how well that welcome was deserved. Mdlle. Lind on Monday morning informed him, that it was her intention to give her share of the net proceeds of the present Concert, amounting to considerably more than \$10,000, to the various Charities in this city.

This announcement was the signal for another storm. We did not count the number of cheers given, but we never witnessed such a pitch of enthusiasm. Mr. Barnum then proceeded to read the list of her donations, interrupted at every name by a fresh burst of applause:

To the Fire Department Fund . . .	\$3,000
Musical Fund Society . . .	2,000
Home for the Friendless. . .	500
Society for the Relief of Indigent Females. . .	500
Dramatic Fund Association. . .	500

Home for Colored and Aged Persons	. 500
Colored and Orphan Association	. . . 500
Lying in Asylum for Destitute Females	500
New-York Orphan Asylum	. . . 500
Protestant Half-Orphan Asylum	. . . 500
Roman Catholic Half-Orphan Asylum	. 500
Old Ladies' Asylum	. . . 500

Total	. . . \$10,000

In case the money coming to her shall exceed this sum, she will hereafter designate the charity to which it is to be appropriated. Mr. Barnum was then about retiring, when there was a universal call for Jenny Lind. The songstress, however, had already taken her departure, and the excited crowd, after giving a few more cheers, followed her example, and slowly surged out of the Castle door, and down the canopied bridge, in a glow of good humor and admiration. A few disorderly vagrants collected on the bridges leading to the Bath Houses, hooted at the throng as it passed out, but everybody went home quietly, with a new joy at his heart, and a new thought in his brain.

THE SERENADE.

The members of the Musical Fund Society, on hearing of Mdlle. Lind's magnificent donation to them, immediately repaired to the New York Hotel, accompanied by Dodworth's Band. The occasion was not so much a serenade as a renewal of the ovation in the Garden. The band played animated airs; the thousands assembled roused the midnight with their incessant cheers; and at last Mdlle. Lind was obliged to appear on the balcony and acknowledge their jubilant salutation. She was accompanied by her cousin and her secretary. The Members of the Society expressed their heartfelt thanks on the occasion, and at last the great crowd dispersed. So ends the night of Jenny Lind's first Concert in America—truly the greatest triumph of her life.

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Mobbed in Petersburg, Va (January 1851)

[ironic, Ed.] Our city came very near escaping the Jenny Lind fever, and would have done so, but for the fact that Jenny, like her neighbors, must commit the very unsentimental act of eating and drinking; and she, therefore, together with the other passengers from the North, sat down to an excellent supper at Jarrett's Hotel, on Saturday night, about 9 o'clock. No sooner was it known that the Nightingale had reached the Hotel than

multitudes flocked to it, determined, if they could not hear her sing, to see her eat. The rush and crush exceeded anything which has ever been seen in this "neck of woods". Old women and young women—persons with families, and persons "in the family way," were there, and there were rustling and bustling, and squeezing and pulling, and tugging, to get a sight of the fair Swede. Jenny, however, took it all very philosophically, and went to supper "with what appetite she had." A gentleman who witnessed her performances at the supper table, tells us that she eats remarkably well, indeed; in fact, quite as well as any person whom he ever saw eat. He went so far as to say that she chewed her food and swallowed it, and that when she wished to drink, she raised the cup or glass with her right hand, and placing it to her ruby lips, imbibed. Our informant seemed to be very enthusiastic in his description of the scene. The locomotive, Henry D. Bird, drew the train in which the Nightingale left the city, and, on starting, whistled the Bird Song in compliment to that "angel."

Harassed in Pittsburg, Pa (25 April 1851)

I learn from a gentleman who was present that Jenny Lind was most outrageously insulted at Pittsburg on the night of her concert. A crowd of several thousand rowdies gathered around the theatre, keeping up a perpetual hooting, interspersed with blackguard cries, and insulting words to the fair songstress. Stones were thrown into her dressing room, and at her carriage on leaving the theatre. Of course, the respectable portion of the community were greatly offended; but Jenny positively refused to sing again, although an advertisement had been issued for a concert on Saturday evening. On that morning she called her carriage and proceeded to the Brownsville boat, sending word to Mr. Barnum that she was on board.

Merchandising

Befitting the show-business nature of the singer's visit, it was reported that new-born baby girls were named after her. Her name was also used to promote a wide range of commercial goods and services: the following list is not exhaustive:

Theatre, Music hall, Store, Steamer, Race horse, Cow, Shoes, Tie, Bonnet, Perfume, Hair gloss, Cigar, Chewing tobacco, Sausage (joke?), Commemorative seal (keepsake), Daguerreotype

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Digital Sources:

1. Illinois Digital Newspaper Collection
2. California Digital Newspaper Collection
3. Northern New York State Historic Newspapers

4. Historic American Newspapers

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