



Lee's Letter

Finding the Past

Occasionally, we speak about “rediscovering” the past. What can be much more rewarding is discovering for the first time things relating to the past that we never knew. There is a phenomenon among historians that the further removed we are from an era or an event, the more we know about it. This is because those experiencing it for the first time rarely pay attention to details and concentrate only on the larger picture. Subsequently, a multitude of once-forgotten facts or occurrences that lend a whole new meaning to the event are often realized.

Growing up, I was very close to my father. I was fascinated by his work as an artist and by the stories he would tell of his earlier experiences in music. I frequently assisted him in stretching his canvases and was fortunate enough to accompany him on trips to the galleries that sold his paintings. In so doing, I became quite familiar with the many scenes he painted and his favorite subjects. It would not be an

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Another Berthelsen

John Berthelsen continued the family tradition in his own unique style



Johann Berthelsen



John Berthelsen

The idea of inherited artistic talent has long been a subject of discussion. Whether the talent is innate or developed as a function of exposure and environment, or both, remains a mystery. Charles Wilson Peale not only named his children after Old Masters but educated them to paint in a style very similar to his own. Three generations of the Wyeth family demonstrate certain similarities but maintain their own signature manner. Although all three children of Johann Berthelsen exhibited singular artistic and musical talent, John, the older son, not only chose to paint as a regular avocation but evolved stylistically from popular and

easy saleable subjects to serious genre painting. His style, which differed considerably

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Johann Berthelsen
The Johann Berthelsen Conservancy, LLC

“The Canvas” is published by
The Johann Berthelsen Conservancy, LLC
www.berthelsenart.com • 414-962-7865

Edited by Frank Burke
To reach Frank Burke or to be added to the mailing list, email him at frank@berthelsenart.com

Orville Harrold—a voice from the Golden Age

During the time in which he lived and taught in Indiana, Johann Berthelsen created an informal “salon” that incorporated the leading business, artistic and literary figures, including developer Carl Fisher, author Booth Tarkington, poet James Whitcomb Riley, and others. One member of the group to whom he was especially close and with whom he had much in common was the renowned operatic tenor Orville Harrold.

Largely forgotten today, Harrold was considered one of the leading musical talents in the early part of the 20th century and excelled in both operatic and musical theatre roles.

Born in Cowan, Indiana, in 1877, Harrold came from a farm family. His musical talent was recognized at an early age, and in his teens, he studied voice and performed in church choruses and in a vocal quartet.

By coincidence, he was urged to pursue a career in music by the famed contralto Ernestine Schumann-Heink, who also provided encouragement to the young baritone Johann Berthelsen. Harrold moved to New York in 1908 to further his studies in voice and acting and made his debut that year in a light operetta. Within a year, he was noticed by famous impresario Oscar Hammerstein I who directed him to a leading voice teacher and sponsored his lessons.



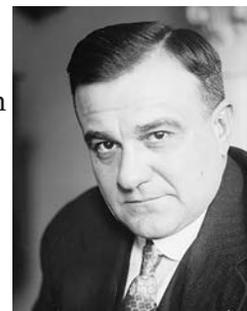
Hammerstein, the father of the famous Broadway lyricist and partner of Richard Rodgers, had established opera companies at New York’s Manhattan Opera House and in Philadelphia. Hammerstein’s New York company employed some of the leading singers of the day, including the Irish tenor John McCormack. Harrold enjoyed great success with both the New York and Philadelphia companies in the 1910 season.

While he would go on to perform in London, his reputation and popularity were largely enhanced with the public when he created the role of Captain Dick Warrington in Victor Herbert’s *Naughty Marietta*. Herbert wrote “Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life” especially for Harrold, who was noted for the ease in which he sang the climactic high C in the beautiful ballad, “I’m Falling in Love with Someone.”

Considered one of the leading tenors in New York, Harrold frequently returned to the Midwest, singing with several leading Chicago opera companies. His popularity was assured by the breadth of his repertoire in performances ranging from concerts at Carnegie Hall to vaudeville at the Palace Theater.

In 1919, Harrold made his debut at the Metropolitan Opera opposite Enrico Caruso as Prince Leopold in Halévy’s “La Juive.” His singing so impressed the great Enrico Caruso that Caruso presented him with one of his Pagliacci costumes, which he wore when he sat for a portrait by his friend and fellow Hoosier, Wayman Adams, and when he sang the role in many opera houses.

Following his retirement from the Metropolitan in 1924, he never again sang in opera but continued to perform in concerts, musicals, and vaudeville. He died in 1933.



In discussing singing with his sons and others, Johann Berthelsen would use Harrold’s recordings as excellent examples of vocal production. More than as a singer, though, he cherished the memory of Harrold as a friend who never let fame spoil him and who always had time to come home again. **JB**

“Treasure Cave”

yields unique Berthelsen painting—and two more!



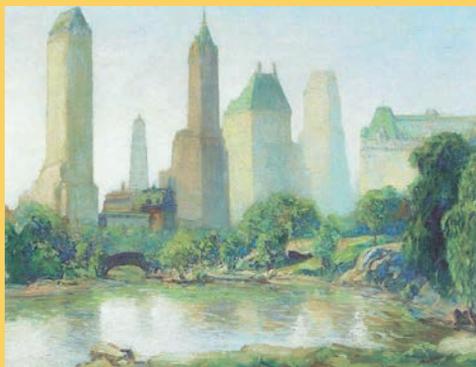
The words “Treasure Cave” call to mind visions of pirate ships, mysterious islands, and chests of gold. Few would associate the term with a common storage locker, but for one very lucky bidder who was trying to salvage a folded American flag belonging to a fallen hero at an auction of unclaimed property, it resulted in the discovery of three original Berthelsens—one of which is significant in the artist’s life.

As a rule, Johann Berthelsen’s work consisted of images of places with which he was intimately familiar on a personal basis. Among the exceptions are his paintings of Paris and, more recently, a portrait of “The Little Mermaid” statue that looks out over Copenhagen’s harbor and was one of the three paintings recovered from the storage locker. The others include two images of the Grand Army Plaza near New York’s Plaza Hotel on

a summer’s night and another depicting the nearby equestrian General Sherman statue in snow.

The significance of “The Little Mermaid” portrait derives from the fact that it was painted by Johann Berthelsen as a gift for his good friend, Niels Bamberger. Like Johann, Niels was a native of Denmark who operated a gallery of Danish art, collectibles, and artifacts in Manhattan. It was one of the few places where Johann

1928 lives again in *exquisite* *Berthelsen* *painting*



Recently, a significant early work by Johann Berthelsen was offered for auction. The 28" x 36" canvas, painted in 1928, depicts Central Park in spring surrounded by the towers of the New York skyline. An excellent example of Berthelsen's earlier work, it shows his command of perspective, as well as his ability to capture a scene at a specific moment in time.

Lee Berthelsen recalls, "At the time this view was painted, my father was actively teaching singing and would get up between 4:30 and 5:00 a.m. to paint from life. His views of Central Park have always been among his most popular works, and years ago, the journalist and television personality Ed Sullivan commented in his column about the beauty of Central Park in the early morning and mentioned that it was best captured in the paintings of Johann Berthelsen." 



"Paris Scene" by John Berthelsen

from that of his father, imbued his work with a singular appeal—something that Johann enthusiastically encouraged.

John Berthelsen was born in 1930. During the Korean War, he served in the United States Air Force as a meteorologist and afterwards attended and graduated from Columbia University.

Although Johann Berthelsen's multiple careers encompassed the arts of music and painting, his firsthand awareness of the insecurity that is a part of any artistic career caused him to encourage his children toward more stable professional pursuits in the business sector. Like his brother, Lee, John's professional career had its start in the hotel business. He ultimately became involved in land planning, which occasioned an assignment in Panama.

John's happy memories of childhood experiences in rural New Milford, Connecticut, instilled a lifelong love of the country, and he ultimately

settled in a historic house in Chelsea, Vermont, and subsequently maintained a position as Director of State Planning. He would later work for Dartmouth University as Curator of their Map Museum.

Throughout his life, John was fascinated by painting and the graphic arts. Through his father, his work was shown to a French bookstore owner in Rockefeller Center who encouraged John to continue his sketches of Parisian scenes. Aware that a more French sounding name would lend a greater degree of authenticity to his work, he began to sign it as "Jean Berté." The sketches became popular and provided additional income for his studies at Columbia University.

On settling in New England, he was inspired by the scenery to seriously develop his ability as a landscape painter. His extensive body of work encompassed scenes of the Vermont mountains, the coast of Maine, the Canadian Maritimes, and other locales. Where the paintings of Johann Berthelsen reflect an exacting emphasis on detail, those of his son are more suggestive of his subjects and, in some cases, move toward the abstract. Where his father worked primarily in oil and pastel, John's body of work includes oil, acrylic, and a larger emphasis on watercolor and ink than Johann's portfolio.

Although he married late in life, John's deep affection for and devotion to his family was vividly demonstrated by his love for the disadvantaged daughter of his wife's son. Always an important influence

in her life, he ultimately willed the entire proceeds of his estate to her care.



“Winter in Quebec” by John Berthelsen

By both circumstances and inclination, John Berthelsen avoided any excessive commercialization of his work, preferring instead to place select pieces with local galleries or to give them to friends or local businesses. As a result, his reputation remained primarily local. To those who know his work, and especially to those who knew him as a generous individual and wonderful raconteur, his art reflects not only a very special sense of place but the warm memory of a unique and talented individual. When he passed in June of 2017, he left a legacy that is much more than paint and canvas. **JB**



“Lighthouse — York Beach, Maine” by John Berthelsen

exaggeration to say that I grew to know more than anyone else in the family about him and his work.

Since founding The Johann Berthelsen Conservancy, however, I have come to discover many things that I did not previously know. Through the generosity of the galleries and friends of the Conservancy, we have found paintings of buildings and scenes that I was totally unaware of. In discussions with family members and others, I have found information regarding my father’s career, both as a singer and as a voice instructor. Much of my work has also rekindled and brought back to life old memories of people and events from long ago. For example, a major auction house recently sold a 28" x 36" spring scene of Central Park originally painted from life in 1928 and once hung in our New York City apartment in the 1930s.

In this issue of our newsletter, you will read about some of the hitherto unknown Berthelsens that have come to light. You will also learn aspects of Johann Berthelsen’s professional activities that might well lead to further discoveries and, though it saddened me to have to write it, there is a tribute to my late brother who carried on the family’s artistic tradition in his own unique style—just as my father would have wished.

In addition to the many practical activities in which our Conservancy is involved, including the authentication of Berthelsen paintings, the detection of forgeries, and the guidance we provide to individuals seeking to purchase or sell existing paintings, perhaps the greatest satisfaction has come in the sense of sharing what I have felt with all of you, our readers and Berthelsen enthusiasts. Through you, we have been able to recover much information about the complex individual who was not only a superb artist but a talented musician, a great teacher, a wonderful father, and a dear friend to so many, and that perhaps is his most important legacy.

Yours sincerely,

Lee Berthelsen

Chairman

The Johann Berthelsen Conservancy, LLC

lee@berthelsenart.com

Berthelsen could visit, relax, and enjoy a long conversation in Danish with his good friend.

Niels’s life was interesting in its own right in that, during the Second World War as a 6-year-old child, his life, along with the lives of hundreds of other Danes, was saved from the Nazis by Danish patriot Aage Bertelsen. The daring escape is recorded in a book titled “October ‘43” written by him and published in 1954.

“The Little Mermaid,” a favorite character in the work of Hans Christian Andersen, is displayed on a rock at the Langelinie Promenade and was created by Edvard Eriksen and unveiled in 1913. It was commissioned by Carl Jacobsen, son of the founder of Carlsberg Brewery, after seeing a ballet based on the fairytale. The head of the mermaid is modeled after Ellen Price, the ballerina.

Famed throughout the world, the statue is to the Danish people what the Statue of Liberty represents to Americans—a proud representation of their homeland. As such, it was an excellent subject for Johann Berthelsen’s tribute to a close friend and fellow Dane.

In recognizing the significance of the discovery, Lee Berthelsen commented, “For both personal and artistic



reasons, this painting represents a major discovery and a highly significant contribution to the catalog of my father’s work. I have to smile when I think that, like any mischievous little girl, our mermaid played hide-and-seek with us for many years. Fortunately, she has now magically reappeared, and we can admire her beauty.”