

Lee's Letter

Welcome to the first edition of "The Canvas," a newsletter published for galleries, collectors and friends of the art of Johann Berthelsen.

It has been said that there is nothing more intimidating to a writer than a blank sheet of paper, or to an artist than an empty canvas. Although both offer limitless possibilities, they also represent the start of a deeply personal journey into sometimes uncharted territories.

That was akin to the way I felt last year when, with some family members and other associates, we started The Johann Berthelsen Conservancy, LLC. For several years, I had been aware of the need for a resource for galleries and collectors who wished to learn more about the artist, his life and work. I wanted to make my father's paintings – which can be appreciated by the general public, the connoisseur and everyone in between – available to a wider audience. Also, much of the biographical information I found on gallery websites was incorrect.

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Authentication - the Why and the How

As early as the 1950s, copies of paintings by Johann Berthelsen purporting to be originals were finding their way onto the market. In one instance, police were able to apprehend several individuals and bring charges that resulted in their imprisonment. In the years since then, the number of fraudulent artworks has only increased.

Realistically speaking, the art of Johann Berthelsen is an ideal target for forgery for a variety of reasons. He was a prolific painter and kept no records regarding the sales of his work. He frequently painted a number of versions of the same subject (primarily his New York snow scenes), and his work is exceptionally popular with a large audience.

As the value of original Berthelsen works has steadily increased, so has the problem.

In order to provide a definitive means of verification for galleries, museums and collectors,



The Johann Berthelsen Conservancy has established an authentication service. For

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Johann Berthelsen
The Johann Berthelsen Conservancy, LLC

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Friends

In the course of a lifetime in the Arts, Johann Berthelsen became acquainted with many extraordinary individuals. In this regular feature, we will introduce a number of them to you.



Courtesy of the Marcella Sembrich Memorial Association

Marcella Sembrich

When Johann Berthelsen was a student at the Chicago Musical College, Willie Ziegfeld, the school's president, would occasionally ask him to deliver a note to a visiting dignitary or VIP. Frequently, at the bottom, he would put the notation, "When you have finished reading this, please ask the young man who brought it to sing for you." On one occasion, the recipient was the famed Polish coloratura soprano, Marcella Sembrich (1858-1935). Upon hearing Johann sing, she predicted a brilliant career in opera.



Born into a musical family in Austrian Galicia, she initially studied piano and violin.

It was only after she entered the Vienna Conservatory at the age of 17 that her exceptional singing voice was discovered. In 1876, she traveled to Milan to continue studying with several of Italy's best-known voice coaches.

On June 3, 1877, at the age of 19, she made her operatic debut in Athens as Elvira in Belini's *I Puritani*. In her first season, she added four more coloratura roles, *Dinorah*, *Robert le Diable*, *La Sonnambula*, and the exceptionally challenging *Lucia di Lammermoor*. A little more than a year later, her success at the Dresden Royal Opera House brought increasing fame.

In 1880, Sembrich made her debut to rave reviews at the Royal Opera House, Covent Garden, London. During her time in England, she greatly enlarged her repertoire to include the Mozart canon and several lighter roles including Lady Harriet in *Martha*.

On October 24, 1883, three days after the inaugural performance, she sang Lucia at the new Metropolitan Opera House in New York and eventually premiered many of the roles still in the repertoire today. Unfortunately, the Metropolitan's first season was a financial disaster, due in part to the extravagant spending habits of its director, Henry Abbey. As a result, the company opted for less expensive productions from the German repertoire for more than a decade.

In 1898, Madam Sembrich returned to the Met, which remained her artistic home for 11 seasons. After she retired in 1909, she continued to give recitals until 1917. Following her retirement, she taught voice and her pupils included some of the best-known singers of her time. That lineage continues into the present day, as her pupils retired and taught young inspiring singers.



Metropolitan Opera House, courtesy of the Marcella Sembrich Memorial Association

As one of the brightest stars of what has come to be known as the “Golden Age” of opera, Sembrich held her own beside such noted performers as Caruso, Melba, Calve, Lehmann, the deRezke brothers, and others. Although gifted with remarkable talent, undoubtedly her early instrumental training helped mold the solid musicianship which served as the foundation of her style and enabled her to enjoy a long career in which the voice remained intact. Though not great in number, the recordings which she made starting in 1903 illustrated her range, power and vocal agility. To retain such capabilities through a performing life that extended more than 40 years requires more than raw talent. Madam Sembrich’s discipline, dedication and artistic sensibility reflect a musical work ethic that sustained her through a lifetime. Throughout her life, it was her custom to spend summers in the Alps. When World War I made travel impossible, she discovered the Adirondack Mountains in upstate New York, spending time at Lake Placid and later building a home on Lake George. Her former teaching studio and retreat is today the Marcella Sembrich Memorial Association, an organization dedicated to fostering appreciation for classical music, opera and the arts, while providing educational and performance opportunities to young musicians. The Association also preserves a large collection of memorabilia associated with Madam Sembrich.

The paths of Johann Berthelsen and Marcella Sembrich were to cross again. The early 1930s was

undoubtedly the low point of Johann’s life. As a result of the Depression, he had lost his voice students. With a wife and three children, he was attempting to transition to painting as a means of support but, given the national economic situation and his lack of a reputation, sales were extremely slow.



How she became aware of his situation remains unknown. But, to Johann’s great relief,



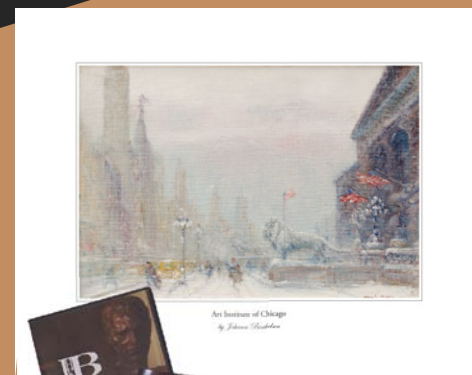
Madam Sembrich commissioned a series of 12 paintings, two of which were highly personal to her: her church in Poland, and the Metropolitan Opera House. A lifetime amateur painter, she also presented Johann with a number of brushes and palette knives that she had used, saying, “You’ll make much better use of them than I will.”

Even now, her two favorite Berthelsen paintings continue to decorate the Sembrich Memorial Association, silently testifying to the generosity of spirit that characterized a great artist and a truly exceptional human being.

For more information on the Marcella Sembrich Memorial Association, go to www.thesembrich.org.



Now Available...



The Johann Berthelsen Conservancy, LLC, is pleased to offer quality items relating to the life and art of the artist. Current offerings include regular and limited edition prints of the painting, “Chicago Art Institute,” colorful note cards featuring New York snow scenes suitable for sending or framing, and the DVD, “Johann Berthelsen – A Life in the Arts.” For further information and to order, please see our website, www.berthelsenart.com or call 414-225-9200.





a nominal fee, the artist's son, Lee Berthelsen – who worked with his father and is intimately familiar with his craft, technique and materials – will evaluate artworks and, on authentication, provide an official Certificate displaying a photograph of the work impressed with the seal of the Conservancy, so as to preclude any tampering.

The service can be provided in several ways. Where possible, a high-resolution photograph or electronic image can be submitted for evaluation. In some cases, it may be necessary to examine the work. This can be done by shipping the artwork to the Conservancy's headquarters in Milwaukee or, if multiple works are involved, by arranging for a personal visit by Mr. Berthelsen. Costs are dependent upon the amount of time and involvement required and will be determined in advance.

In announcing the service, Lee Berthelsen commented, "Considering the investment now involved in owning original Berthelsen artworks, the time and cost associated with authentication is an exceptionally prudent practice. I encourage anyone considering a purchase or sale to contact us for verification." **JB**

Perhaps most important, a significant number of paintings purported to be by my father were clearly forgeries.

Our first project involved the production of a documentary on Johann Berthelsen's life, accompanied by a number of examples of his work. I can only say that the response has been overwhelming. Galleries, museums and collectors have all voiced their unbridled enthusiasm for the program, and it has been scheduled to appear on Wisconsin Public Television.

We have also established a website – www.berthelsenart.com – featuring correct biographical information, as well as multiple other features, and we have reproduced some of the most beloved paintings as note cards and prints.

For collectors and galleries, we have launched an authentication service where, for a nominal fee, Berthelsen paintings can be authenticated and documented.

Other activities include the development of a catalogue of paintings and their locations, as well as arranging exhibits and events.

Needless to say, all of this has resulted in an almost full-time occupation, but the rewards are many. I have been able to renew old friendships and establish new ones, and I have enjoyed the great privilege accorded all art lovers – working each day surrounded by beauty.

We at the Conservancy sincerely hope that you find our efforts, including this newsletter, both helpful and entertaining. Please don't hesitate to contact us with your comments, questions or suggestions.

Yours sincerely,

Lee Berthelsen

Chairman

The Johann Berthelsen
Conservancy, LLC

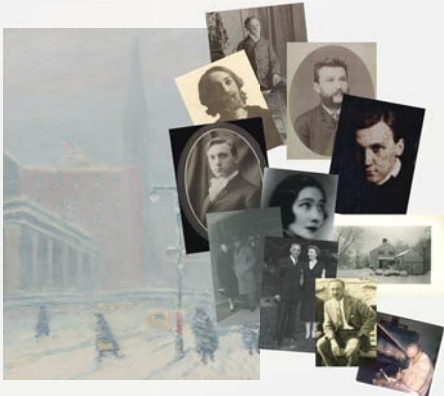
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From the canvas to the screen:

the making of the documentary,
"Johann Berthelsen – A Life in the Arts"

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I first met my good friend, Lee Berthelsen, through a shared interest in opera and classical music. When he discovered that our company had many years of experience in marketing, graphics and communications, he asked if we might be capable of producing a book on his father's artwork. After reviewing the size and scope of Johann Berthelsen's work in various media, we realized that developing a book would be an extremely expensive undertaking. Further, as we discovered previously unknown works, it would be impossible to add them without another edition. Also, our experience and research in communications told us that people today – especially younger individuals – would be much more likely to view a documentary program than they would to wade through the material in print.



As with any movie or television presentation, the starting point is the script. Working with Lee, we collected information on his father's life and associates, as well as his development as an artist. Because Lee worked side by side with him for many years, he was

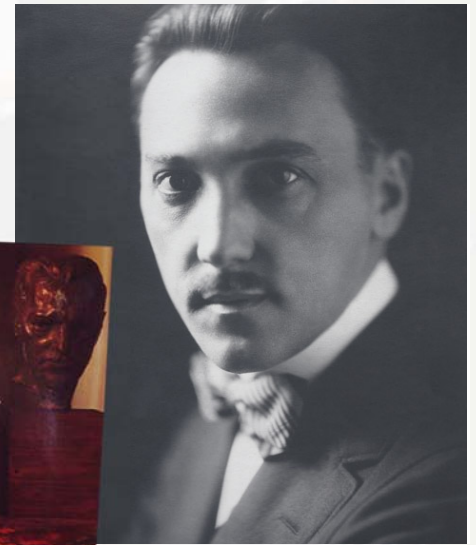
able to provide invaluable commentary on his father's craft and working methods. Johann Berthelsen's early career as an opera singer and voice teacher added another dimension to the undertaking.



Once the script had been finalized, we reviewed family photographs and memorabilia. Where there were no direct visual references, we were able to secure the use of historical photographs documenting people and places.

Once that was complete, the narration and videos were recorded and refined, the music selected, and all other elements combined.

The post-production phase involved assembling, coordinating and editing all of the materials into a cohesive presentation. On



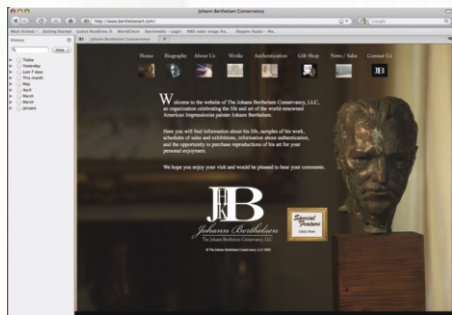
completion, the final product was sent out for duplication and the package graphics completed.

We intentionally timed the documentary at 23 minutes – the length of a conventional television broadcast minus commercials. We are pleased to announce that in recognition of Johann Berthelsen's Wisconsin connections, the program will be aired on Wisconsin Public Television's "Wisconsin Channel."

Response to the documentary has been extremely enthusiastic, with many viewers saying that they have watched it numerous times and shared it with friends and associates. The interest shown by young people is especially rewarding.

While the world captured in the paintings by Johann Berthelsen never changes, the means of sharing those scenes has undergone a radical transformation. Now, thanks to video and the internet, art lovers the world over can meet and know the artist and his exceptional work.





Art in Cyberspace – Announcing www.berthelsenart.com

Friends of Johann Berthelsen – both old and new – will be pleased to know that information regarding his life and art is as near as their computers. A new website features biographical information, examples of artworks, news and links, information about the Conservancy and authentication services, a gift shop featuring prints, note cards and the biographical DVD, “Johann Berthelsen – A Life in the Arts,” as well as a contact link to the Conservancy. The website will be kept fresh and topical through the addition of special features such as “The Love of a Lifetime” – an illustrated biography of the artist’s wife.

Plans for the future include links to museums and galleries featuring Berthelsen artworks, as well as reports on auctions and sales.

In the words of Lee Berthelsen, Chairman of The Johann Berthelsen Conservancy, LLC, “Our website fills a very

real need for collectors, enthusiasts and students. Much of the biographical information about my father which has appeared on other websites is incorrect if well-intentioned. Now, anyone can reference definitive biographical information which we are happy to make available. It is also our hope that the website will bring my father’s artworks to a wider audience and that our authentication service (see story in this newsletter) will enable galleries and collectors to avoid expensive forgeries. For those who want to take Johann Berthelsen home, we’ve established a gift shop. Any and all proceeds we receive will be funneled back into the work of the Conservancy.

“We sincerely hope that you’ll visit our website soon, and we always welcome your comments and suggestions.”