

Benny & Björn Visit Antwerp

On the 30th of March 2006 we had the possibility to meet Benny and Björn in Antwerp where Mamma Mia! had his première on the 12th of March. Early that Thursday afternoon we – Helga, Anita and Roeland – drove to Antwerp to the cozy hotel in the middle of town where Benny & Björn stayed.

Benny was the first one to come down the stairs and he invited us to another room for the interview. It was a comfortable room and Benny, who was very relaxed, offered us something to drink. Anita began conversing about her experience in Minneapolis and she and Benny discussed the concert and the fans who where there. The American concert was different compared to that at Skansen, as more songs were performed in English and the band played much longer than usual, stopping only when they saw older people were going home.

Benny told us that he had a walk through Antwerp and that he liked it very much. We talked about Carola for the Eurovision Song Contest, Nanne at our ABBA Day and his son Ludvig who agreed to perform at this year's event.

About two o'clock Helga began asking our questions before Björn joined us.

You've been in New York for auditions?

"Yes. That was a long time ago. We were there three times. Maybe ten days all together. We picked the cast, and that cast was the cast we were working with. We did a workshop just now, four weeks of rehearsals. It was like doing the show, but only in the rehearsal room. Then we had two presentations for some people that we know: friends, friends of the cast and of ours, Swedes, just to see what it was like because it is in English, one hour shorter and a much smaller cast, only 28 instead of 56."

Then we heard a rooster crowing, but it became apparent that it was Benny's mobile phone. He apologized for the interruption.

Benny continued, "So those were our questions:

What will happen to it, when these three fundamental things changed. We need to work a little more."

Is it the definitive cast?

"It is not the definitive cast, but of the 28 we have, four or five of them will not be in it. Those who are not in were fine. Good actors, very nice voices, but I don't know. Maybe not exactly what we were looking for. We had this problem that we had Helen. There was no one like her. She will not have the work permit and we don't know when it is going to happen. If we need her she has to say no to work from, let's say six months from now. We don't know what is going to happen, so it is impossible."

Is there anyone of the Swedish cast?

"No, nobody. We don't know when it will start, maybe in the autumn of 2007. Then we will have to look for a recast. We don't know but we keep them posted."

What does it depend on? We read something about the theater of The Color Purple?

"Yes. We are waiting for a theatre. It might run for six months or two years, nobody knows. So we can wait. We can wait for ten years because this is the right theater. We will wait for this."

Björn enters the room and we say greet each other. He asks if we had all the answers from Benny yet. We said no, of course! Benny tells Björn that he went out for a walk but couldn't find his way back to the hotel, so he had to call someone to help. Björn tells Benny that he walked around like a tourist with a map in his hand.

Benny starts talk more about Kristina. He wants to record everything first in English like they did with Chess. "We have everything, the orchestra and the music so it would be a nice thing to do," he said. "But we don't know yet, there are a lot of questions marks."

Are the storylines the same? It is shortened by an hour, so are the scenes the same?

"Yes," Björn said, "everything is the same. It looks the same, at least at the moment. We cut an hour out of it, but it is difficult to see what went out. It is just thirty seconds out here or there. Some of the chorus. One song is out, sung on the ship when Kristina is sick, but it might come back in. When taking some parts out, you also take out some information. This is what we need to go through again to see if something is missing. But the story is still there, like it is now."

Is the music the same too? Or are there new things added?



Talking with Benny & Björn.



Signing the gold book at city hall.



On the Antwerp Square.

"No, not yet," Björn said. "A Swedish writer, a journalist, said once: 'Try to take every second word out of things and see if it works.' If you take every second word out of it you can usually understand the meaning of it. So take every second word out of a Eurovision song."

There were rumors about a Kristina concert in Minnesota in the summer. Is that true?

"No," Benny said. "We once did this but maybe it is something we can do before Kristina really starts."

Björn added, "For the Swedish people in America, let's say the fourth or the fifth generation, because they want to know where they came from."

Will there be a Mamma Mia! movie in the future?

"Eventually there will be," Björn said, "but no definitive plans yet. We started negotiations with various people. I can't tell you any names now."

And the songs will be included?

"Yes, but some of them might be cut out," he added. "It depends on the script and the director. I haven't seen the Phantom Of The Opera myself, but Mamma Mia! is not going to be like that. You can do things in a movie that you can't do on stage. Catherine Johnson is writing the script. It's not going to be a Hollywood movie but more like the British or maybe Swedish types."

Will the English songs from BAO be released on CD?

"Yes," Benny said. "Not on the live CD, the live CD will come out soon."

Will it come out before our anniversary in April?

Björn added, "Maybe Benny can sell them at the door?" [laughter]

"We have so many songs now," Benny said. "Of the old ones we have three with English lyrics: You Are My Man, Our Last Dance and Butterfly Wings. And we have two new ones, so that makes five. Maybe we can do I Walk With You Mama, so then we have six songs. The rest can be instrumental. It might be a good idea to bring it out outside Sweden, maybe later this year. I would also like to bring out Du Bist Mein Mann in Germany before the football championships. That would be fun."

Björn asks Benny to tell him about his dream. "If someone makes a goal, the Germans that is, the audience will sing Du Bist Mein Mann." [laughter]

Then I took pictures of Benny, Björn, Helga and Anita. Benny commented, "Two girls and two boys." Björn quickly added, "It seems very familiar!" Everyone laughed of course. Then I had my very first picture taken with them. We then said our goodbyes and went into town.

Benny and Björn went to Antwerp City Hall for interviews with the press, but surely ours was the most exclusive. In the evening we saw the show again, the fourth time that month for me! Helga and Anita saw the whole show, but I saw only half because I had a press card.

The show in Antwerp is of high quality, of course, and it sounds great in Flemish. Benny and Björn appeared on stage at the end of the show. I had the possibility to be backstage then for the photo shoot. They lined up with the entire crew for photographers to take pictures. Björn gave a speech and complimented the actors. He said he liked the show and that the lyrics sounded great.

They made time to talk with them personally. Vera Man, who plays Donna, told Björn that she found it hard to know when she had to begin singing in the song I



Backstage with the cast members.



Roeland with Benny & Björn.

Do, I Do, I Do, I Do, I Do if she is asked to say yes. "What is the right time to start again?" she asked. "Well, the answer isn't easy," Björn said, "because it depends on the audience and that is different every show."

When everyone had their pictures Benny and Björn left. We went home satisfied at the end of a very nice and surprising day.

- Roeland van de Velde

(photos by Roeland van de Velde, Stany van Wijmeersch and Marieke Ballast)

Mamma Mia! in Antwerp broke all box office records in Belgium, selling one ticket every 15 seconds. The run has now been extended until the 2nd of July. For tickets, go to www.mamma-mia.be

We have fifty tickets available for the final performance of Mamma Mia! in Stockholm on the 7th of January 2007. The seats are in the first two rows and the price is 595 Swedish Crowns, roughly 65 Euros or \$85 at current exchange rates. If you are interested in buying tickets then please fill in the form before the 1st of October 2006. We will sort out the tickets depending on how many people are interested. This offer is valid for members only. (Please photocopy, or just send us a card or an e-mail.)

Name;

Address;

Email;

Telephone (including country and area codes):

Credit card information (must be valid at the end of this year!):
..... (We provide this information to the Cirkus theater ticket office which takes care of payment.)

I'm interested in:

- One ticket
- Two tickets if possible, but one ticket if only one is available.
- Only interested if two tickets can be purchased.