



Görel at the Super Troupers sessions in 1980.

Görel Hanser's work with Björn and Benny started long before ABBA came about. It was already in 1969 that she got the position as Stikkan's secretary at Sweden Music, which was a small business back then. She had to do everything that was needed in a music company, which came in handy as the singer/songwriter duo grew to a foursome and one of the biggest pop groups ever.

"When we were in the midst of it you didn't really grasp just how big it was," Görel said. "Sure, we drank champagne when ABBA was topping a chart, but after a while.. I don't want to say it became the daily round, but we had to keep on working as usual. It wasn't until after ABBA was over that you actually could take in what a fantastic journey we had."

And it was in this "after" that Anita and Helga decided to start an ABBA fan club.

Do you remember your first impression when they came to ask for permission to do it?

"It was so long ago! As I recall it – Helga and Anita may have a different view – they didn't come out of the blue with nothing to show. They had already started the fan club and had been going on for a while when they first came here to talk about the club. They had already made a good impression and seemed serious, and we thought that if there was going to be an official fan club it had to be done properly. It was important for us to be honest and make sure that they were fully aware that ABBA didn't exist as a

group anymore, that we couldn't offer things like a monthly newsletter or so. But they understood and obviously the club is filling a function and is important to many fans."

How did other fan clubs react when this one got your approval and an official seal?  
"There were some grumbling at first as others got a bit jealous, saying that they were doing basically the same thing, but I haven't heard anything like that lately and I think that they've accepted that there is one official fan club. I do answer the odd letter from other fan clubs now and then, but there are no other clubs that are working as professionally and on this scale. Then, of course, there are others that we don't even know about."

How much of your work time is still related to ABBA?  
"It depends on what you mean by ABBA. Like when we work with everything related to Mamma Mia! and the licensing around that, it's still based on ABBA. But, as you know, we don't release anything that's ABBA. That's done by Universal. We have a close and good relationship and they check everything with us. All in all I would say that it's not too much time that is related to ABBA."

As if to spite her, the phone rings. Before we sat down to talk she apologized that her assistant was studying English so she might be interrupted by the phone during the interview. "Hold on a second," she says to the caller. "Are you talking about ABBA? No, sorry, they don't enjoy things like that." The person on the other end of the line seems a bit reluctant to accept that ABBA won't be living up to his wishes, but Görel is obviously used to the sometimes unrealistic expectations and ends the call professionally, yet friendly.

Do you think that the fans are also too demanding sometimes?  
"No, not in general. We used to get a lot of letters, and sometimes when you replied and answered the questions that wasn't enough. They demanded more and more and wrote back

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until she was part of the team behind the lyrics for ABBA's *Hovnas Vittne*.

Although she studied to be a secretary, she wanted to be a teacher and only intended to stay a short while at Sweden Music before pursuing that dream. It was a small business back then so she had to handle everything that comes up in a music company, and it didn't take long for her to become one of the most important persons there. Titles are usually not that important in Sweden, but according to Stikkan it happened that Americans refused to talk to a secretary – although she was, in fact, the one who handled all the contacts with ABBA's worldwide labels – and he named her Vice President of Polar, a job that she had

over and over, and the next letter you gave a little shorter reply. After a while you didn't write back at all to that person. Then you got a nasty letter or heard stories of how we don't answer letters, and that's a bit sad. In the end it feels like it's easier not to answer at all. But we can't get too personally involved."

A room can tell a lot about a person. Görel's office is almost as friendly and blond as she is herself. Her brown dog Bruno – who's also on her screensaver – is clearly content to be there and helps make the room feel cozy, almost like home. Yet it is very well organized and, though there are some piles of records – the Danish version of *The Complete Studio Recordings*, *ABBA Number Ones* and *Anders Ekborg's* album – it doesn't feel cluttered. I suddenly realize that many fans who travel to Sweden in hope of seeing one of their idols would be very envious of me sitting here next to Benny's studio and talking to Görel.

Are there still are a lot of fans coming here?  
"There's still the occasional fan coming to the

in reality held for quite some time.

Görel stayed with Polar until 1987 when she started Music & Artist Service, which represents the likes of Tommy Körberg, Helen Sjöholm and Anders Ekborg, as well as the running Benny's Mono Music. She has also been the production manager of *Kristina Från Duvemåla* from day one. When it moved to Stockholm and *Briggen Teaterproduktion* was created she is still CEO.

ABBA and Stikkan paid their tribute to Görel on *Sång Till Görel* [Song For Görel], which was recorded for her 40th birthday, and summed it pretty well in the lines: "Where is Görel, say? We can't manage anything without you!"

door now and then, especially if there's a BAO tour or if there's summer vacations in Holland or so, but it's not so much that it gets disturbing. Of course we all have work to do and can't spend much time talking to them, but that's another story."

Does it make it easier or harder for you that there is a fan club? Like now you had to take time to meet me. And is it an advantage that it is in Holland as opposed to Sweden?

"It makes it easier, definitely. They take care of a lot of the things we would have been dealing with otherwise. And Anita and Helga are very easy to deal with, they don't come and demand a lot of things. I think it's good that it's not in Sweden, it might have been harder without the distance."

For a Swede Görel smiles a lot, and she has a real smile that shows in the eyes as well. I'll be back, I think, and almost say, "I'll be back in 2011 to ask about the fan club's 25th anniversary!"

-Peter Palmquist



Helga, Görel, Carolina (Görel's daughter) and Anita in Hamburg