

STOCKHOLM PREMIERE by Peter Palmquist

Stockholm is not New York or London, something that must have been forgotten when the security for what was described as the biggest movie premiere ever in Sweden was planned; I have never seen so many guards with nothing to do. It was as if a police squad had been called in to take care of a football derby but had ended up at an after-church coffee gathering instead. The security guards routinely shouted “stand back” now and then as if they had to control the masses pushing to get close to the Swedish stars, the international giants like Meryl Streep, Pierce Brosnan or the ABBA members themselves, but people were already keeping a healthy distance. Instead of screaming and pushing, they settled for applause or, at the most, discretely handed over something for them to sign, as if saying, “Yes, we love you, but we don’t want to make you feel uncomfortable.”

Then again, stars in Sweden are not STARS; most arrived on foot or in a cab, with only one or two limousines standing out. Frida (no limo) laughed a little when she had to get a stamp on her hand to make sure she would be allowed to get into the after party. As you must know by now, basically the whole cast was there, as were ABBA’s own director Lasse Hallström, several of the children and grandchildren of our heroes and, of course, for the first time since the musical *Mamma Mia!* opened in Stockholm, all of ABBA showed up.

Many of the Fan Club members who had got a ticket initially said they would have preferred London instead, but any such feelings were instantly blown away when they saw Agnetha and Frida dancing with Meryl Streep on the red carpet. It was so obvious that, even though it had clearly been planned for the ABBA-girls to greet her, the big smiles on their faces were no fake Hollywood smiles, but they were really genuinely happy to see each other again and



hardly wanted to let go of each others’ hands.

When all four ABBA members joined the cast on the balcony, the customary Swedish reserve was suddenly blown away; people were shouting and crying as if they had spotted some old friends they had thought were lost forever. Of course, it WAS fantastic to see them all together, looking so happy and smiling at each other. They were all true to their own style; Benny in a classic but relaxed suit with a colourful jacket – this time red – Frida in a designer dress, Agnetha in her favourite colour black and white, with a shirt leaving her shoulders bare while Björn was unusually toned down in an all-white suit, with only the two-toned shoes showing his fondness for the extravagant. All four looked as if they were as pleasantly surprised as the fans and press – Hey! That’s you! And you! And you!

Inside the theater, any restraint was gone, too; people were singing along, clapping their hands and whistling, giving Streep a standing ovation for *The Winner Takes It All*, and some were even dancing in the aisle. I am proud to say that this started in the area where the fans were sitting, but the rest of the audience soon





took it up, too. At some point, I was watching Benny, Frida and Meryl Streep who were clearly pleased with the situation, and I am sure the rest were just as amused.

As in the rest of the world, the premiere was only the beginning of a tidal wave of ABBA and *Mamma Mia!* sweeping the country. Already after two weeks in the cinemas, more than one in 20 Swedes had seen the film, the soundtrack went gold on the day it was released, making it the third *MM!* CD to achieve gold status in Sweden - the others were the original and the Swedish cast recordings - and it remains on top of the chart. A bemused Björn said, "I didn't expect it to have such an impact and that it would sell so fast." When asked if ABBA had ever been bigger than in the aftermath of the film premieres, he replied, "Not in this way. No matter how you look at it, there is some pop-here here as well. It's a different dimension to when we were active."

Undoubtedly, ABBA and *Mamma Mia!* will keep promoting each other for many, many years to come!



Photos by Ursula Esser (except group photo)