

REPORT

Fan Club Celebration Weekend

The ABBA Fan Club 30th Anniversary Celebration Weekend

The ABBA Weekend is always a celebration to look forward to, but the Fan Club's 30th anniversary weekend promised to be something rather special. This year, from 22-24 April, it was not held in Roosendaal but in Stockholm, the home of ABBA.

ABBA Walk

The festivities commenced with a guided ABBA walk through Stockholm. This was a limited last-minute event, but a few fans were lucky enough to get a place. It must have been a challenge for our lovely guide, Gabriella, to show people around who already knew so much about ABBA, but her enthusiasm was contagious. She took us from the Sheraton Hotel through Gamla Stan to the Opera House, Kungsträdgården and on to the China Theatre. She also explained ABBA's position within the Swedish political and social climate of the 1970s. However, some fans were probably more interested in more life-defining facts such as the location of the doorstep where Frida slipped in the Head Over Heels video. The tour was great fun with Gabriella's speaker blasting ABBA songs while guiding the group through busy Stockholm.

Welcome Party

On Friday evening, fans gathered in the lobby of the Pop House Hotel. It was an intimate setting, and a chance to catch up with old friends and to make some new ones, too. As always, Gary Collins organised a quiz with some mind-boggling questions, assisted by the lovely Ursula Esser. Jack Lovejoy was the lucky winner. He took home the *ABBA Vinyl Collection*, signed by all four members. The evening was more relaxed than usual but, of course, we had to conserve our energy for two more ABBA parties that weekend...

The Big Day

The celebrations resumed on Saturday morning at the ABBA Museum, where the immensely talented ABBA Choir welcomed us with rousing renditions of ABBA favourites. In the Glashuset, in use for the first time, Ingmarie, curator of the museum, and our own Helga welcomed everyone to the ABBA Weekend. A photographic exhibition by Michael Svensson opened that day, and Michael was there to explain the stories behind the photos. In one of them, ABBA even posed in the kitchen of a Chinese restaurant.

After that, there was time to visit the museum itself. If you have the chance, book the audio guide, too. Hearing Agnetha, Björn, Benny and Frida tell their own stories adds an extra dimension to this amazing exhibition. Jane Dickman, who had

entered a competition in the Fan Club magazine, won the opportunity to be the first one to enter the new attraction - the 3D presentation of The Fifth Member. This particular attraction has undergone a makeover with lifelike images of the four members, based on the looks of the silicone dolls. Onno Conde Nieto won the chance to actually sing in the Polar Studio. Lucky guys!

Interview With...

Before the weekend, Fan Club members were invited to send in questions to be used in an interview with Mia Segolsson (Polar Music) and Görel Hanser. This promised to provide us with some interesting insights into the ABBA family, and indeed it did; it was incredibly interesting. However, no-one could have expected what was to happen next... Görel pretended to call Benny on his mobile but, instead, enter Benny Andersson, stage left! What a surprise! There was rapturous applause... The adjacent restaurant was empty within seconds.

Benny asked Helga and Anita to come up to the stage and gave them a well deserved thank you for all the work they have done over the past thirty years to keep the ABBA community together and for keeping ABBA's legacy so much alive. He also answered some questions from fans and then sat down at the piano to lead us into Thank You For The Music. All the fans sang their hearts out to thank Benny for his music and for making this the highlight of a very special day.

Update: ABBA – The Complete Recording Sessions

After Benny, Görel, Ingmarie and Mia had left the stage, Carl Magnus Palm was up next to talk about his new book. He had a very tough act to follow but coped well. The extensively updated *ABBA – The Complete Recording Sessions* promises to be another highlight for ABBA devotees later this year. In his presentation, he shared some of his research into ABBA's work in the recording studio. All the ABBA members are co-operating, and he has access to never-released tapes. This will be the closest that ABBA fans will be able to get to the real thing.

The day at the Museum ended with a group photo of all the fans who had travelled from all over the world to be in Stockholm. We all left with a fantastic goody bag which contained two CDs – *Kristina at Carnegie Hall* and *BAO's Story Of A Heart* - and some items from the Museum shop, including a poster. We were so happy!

ABBA Disco

Across the street from the museum is Skansen, and it was there in the Sollden restaurant that the ABBA disco was held that evening. The restaurant is right next to the



Official International ABBA FAN CLUB

30 YEARS CELEBRATION



Allsång På Skansen open-air stage. With a breathtaking view of the beautiful Stockholm by night, we practised our dance moves that even Frida herself would have admired. We all know how she loves to dance... and so do the fans - what a party!

Boat Tour

Some fans did not get much of a lie-in the following morning; a boat was waiting to take them across Stockholm's waterways. As soon as the boat had left the quay, our tour guide, Elisabeth, began her interesting commentary. Highlights were the house where Stig used to live, Benny's Mono Music office and the Opera House where Dancing Queen premiered.

Mamma Mia! The Party

The special weekend ended with a bang. *Mamma Mia! The Party* is more than just a dinner cabaret. It is a musical spectacle on its own, during which delicious Greek food is served. For all the international fans, there were some lines in English to help us understand the story. A lovely surprise was that some lesser-known favourites (to non-ABBA fans, of course) were integrated into the story, such as I've Been Waiting For You and If It Wasn't For The Nights. Mercedsz Csampai sang a heart-wrenching rendition of The Winner Takes It All that left many fans teary-eyed. The show evolved into what would be ABBA Disco Volume 2. What a party!

Thank You, Helga and Anita!

As always, this weekend was an absolute success - a roller coaster ride of emotions. The International ABBA Fan Club is so much more than a fan club; it is a *friends* club. It has been for 30 years. Nowadays, with the internet and Facebook groups, it is easy to find people who share similar interests, but that was not the case when it all started in 1986. At that time, ABBA's popularity was at a low point. Helga and Anita reached out and got in touch with ABBA fans from around the world. Even if you have never visited the ABBA gatherings, I hope by reading the magazines you get the feeling you are connecting with fans from other countries.

I have a group of friends that I see only once a year but, when we meet, it feels like it was only yesterday that we last saw each other. These are people I would never have met if it had not been for Helga and Anita and their fan club. So many familiar faces from Roosendaal made the trip to Stockholm in April. It tells us that we do not mind where we are, as long as our friends are with us. The Way Old Friends Do is truly the Fan Club's natural anthem. Every year, the International ABBA Fan Club thanks ABBA for the music but, from the bottom of my heart, I now say thank you, Helga and Anita, for giving your love and friendship to us.

TEXT: FRANKLIN VAN LIEMPT

INTERVIEW

Pop Talk: Görel Hanser

Görel Hanser was one of the VIP guests during the ABBA Weekend, and she went on stage together with Mia for the Pop Talk at ABBA The Museum. Here some of the questions answered that day – and a few more exclusively for this magazine.

If you could relive one episode of the ABBA years, which one would you choose?

The day when Dancing Queen entered the American *Billboard* charts at No. 1 in 1977 became, of course, a special memory. We celebrated in the office with champagne all day!

At the start of your career, when Stig Anderson hired you, was it your dream to work in the music business?

Actually, it wasn't Stikkan who hired me but his wife Gudrun. Stikkan used to say that if he had been around when I was hired, he would have been rather doubtful because I was a shy girl from the country. Gudrun was very important to all of us at Polar. I think without Gudrun, Stikkan would have had some problems with his staff (*laughs*). She was like a mother to all of us. But I come, more or less, from the same part of Sweden as Stikkan... - so that was good for me. During the first years working for Stikkan and Gudrun, I planned on going to Switzerland to learn more languages, in particular English, Spanish and German and then become a teacher of history, English and Swedish literature. But that never happened...

What is the most important 'lesson' Stig Anderson taught you? In other words, what guidance did he give you that was important for your professional career?

I had a very good education from Stikkan. He was a school teacher to start with. He was very good at teaching, also business matters. I'm very grateful for what I've learned from him and Gudrun, for what they gave me. And I'm happy I never moved to Switzerland...

In your opinion, how important was Stig Anderson for ABBA's success?

He was very important, especially at the beginning. Björn and Benny and the group would still have been successful, but maybe it would have taken a little longer.

Has the music business changed a lot over the last 10 years? If so, in what way?

Yes, it has! The social media, and everything has gone digital. I still feel analogue today, but my professional world is digital...

During the 'silent' years, in the second half of the '80s, did you also think the ABBA period could be over forever?

Yes, and I am happy I was wrong!



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In your opinion, what is the reason that ABBA is still such a phenomenon?
The good songs, the melodies, the girls singing, the whole production - quality from the inside out.

What is the most satisfying aspect of working with Björn, Benny, Agnetha and Frida?

It is working with people who respect what other people are doing. They are involved in the work I am doing, and we work together as a team.

What are your three favourite songs by ABBA or songs composed by Benny and Björn?

Three of my favourite songs are The Winner Takes It All, Dancing Queen and Knowing Me, Knowing You.

You are the only person who was celebrated - twice - by ABBA with a special birthday song. What do you remember from the performance of Sång till Görel?

It's such a long time ago! But I remember it was on a boat, and suddenly someone said, "You have to stand over here," and then ABBA and Stikkan started to sing. I didn't understand anything, but it was magic. I recall just dancing around. And the one thing that really struck me - I couldn't quite understand how they could have arranged this - without me (*laughs*)! I do play the record from time to time to encourage myself...

What do you remember about Med En Enkel Tulipen, performed in 1999?

Could you describe the atmosphere when ABBA performed it and how it actually sounded?

It was a wonderful surprise, and I had no idea this was going to happen. I felt proud, moved and very, very happy. There were happy smiles all around the room.

For someone who is so very close to ABBA, how special was it for you when all four members reunited on stage at *Mamma Mia! The Party* in January?

It was a magic moment for me as well. I felt happy for all the fans who had been dreaming about this for so many years.

Do you think there is still some chance that ABBA will perform again?

I think you know the answer to that (*laughs*). I believe it's better to leave it as it is. We remember them on stage in those days... and I'm too old to go on tour again (*laughs*).

You have always supported the Official Fan Club, but how important would you say has the support of the fans been for the continuing success of ABBA?

Yes, to have loyal and devoted fans is rather important.

What are your and ABBA's feelings about the Official Fan Club that has been existing for 30 years by now?

I believe we all feel it is fantastic to have had this fan club for so many years. It makes my ABBA-life so much easier. Many thanks to Helga and Anita - and to all the fans!

TEXT: STANY VAN WYMEERSCH



OPA!
To all ABBA-fans that came
to MAMMA MIA! THE PARTY
the 24th of April.
Thank you for being such
lovely guests at Nikos Taverna.
Hope to see you here many times!
/ Nikos and my staff

INTERVIEW

Pop Talk: Mia Segolsson

In 1989, a young woman called Mia started work as a receptionist at PolyGram. Being an eager and quick learner, she soon moved up in the Swedish music industry. Today, she is the general manager of Polar Music, and hence the right person to tell us what might be in store regarding future ABBA releases.

When did ABBA enter your life?

When I was six years old and they won the *Eurovision Song Contest* with Waterloo.

What was your first project with the ABBA catalogue?

It was the 2CD set, *The Definitive Collection*, in 2001.

How important is it for Universal to have 'new' ABBA releases such as 'Live At Wembley Arena'?

To be able to release such an album was, of course, fantastic since there had been no new releases for a long time. ABBA have a great catalogue, and to add this live album to it was, naturally, brilliant for Polar Music.

Is the input of fans or ABBA experts taken into consideration when new material is released?

Absolutely. It's not always possible to release everything from the 'wish lists' I receive due to license problems or because the ABBA members feel they can't approve of something, but I really appreciate the input nevertheless.

What new releases are in the pipeline?

My plan is to get some great releases out for the *Arrival* 40th anniversary this autumn. We will celebrate this occasion together with ABBA The Museum, and Polar Music will provide news as soon as we are able to.

Will more live material see the light of day?

I really hope so. It all depends on whether the material we have is good enough for such a release.

Will some alternate mixes be released in connection with the updated version of Carl Magnus Palm's *The Complete Recording Sessions*, like what happened with the box set *Thank You For The Music* in 1994?

No, I'm afraid not.

How hard is it to convince the ABBA members to release songs from the vaults?

I have only managed to convince them twice, with the demo medley *From A Twinkling Star To A Passing Angel*, and with *ABBA Live At Wembley Arena*. The ABBA members are very clear that everything that should be released already has been. But, you never know (*laughs*)!

How has the music business changed in the last ten years, and what might be the implications of these changes when it comes to future ABBA releases?

Well, the sales of physical releases, such as CDs, are definitely declining which, of course, will have an impact. However, ABBA will always be available on digital platforms at least.

What is your favourite ABBA song and album? Would you please explain your choices?

The Winner Takes It All will always be a favourite of mine; it moves me every time I listen to it. As far as an album is concerned, I'd say *Arrival*. It brings back so many happy memories from when I first got the album, and it is still great today.

What is, in your opinion, ABBA's greatest contribution to music?

It's that they still inspire so many musicians, from all music genres, all over the globe. They are massive; it's impossible to understand how big they really are. They touch so many people's lives with their music. Their legacy will live on forever.

TEXT: STANY VAN WYMEERSCH



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