

SWEDISH MUSICAL CROWN

or ABBA world triumph

The history of ABBA pop group actually means the history of the whole musical world. The guys from Sweden did something like the young boys from Liverpool did who we all know as The Beatles. They both exploded multi-million public in the Old and New World and became the icons. The songs of The Beatles and ABBA are still broadcast by all popular musical channels. They are immediately recognized by veterans and young people who grew up with another music that often has neither melody nor sense. Why do they react in such a way? Most likely it is the genetically inherited sense of the good and positive.

ABBA CRADLE

May women forgive me, but the cradle of a new miracle of the world was male - Bjorn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson. Both Swedes made a living by successfully performing in their bands and sometimes met to discuss possible joint effort as they both composed songs.

They were lucky to meet Stig Andersson, the manager of Hootenanny Singers and the founder of the Polar Music recording company. He saw a major potential in the joint work of Andersson and Ulvaeus and supported their undertakings. Prudent Stig was sure the pair will get famous in the world.

However it was not a pair. When Bjorn and Benny recorded the Lycka album with their own compositions female voices were distinctly heard in the songs. It later turned out they were their girlfriends - Agnetha and Frida. Who were the girls and how did they meet the boys?

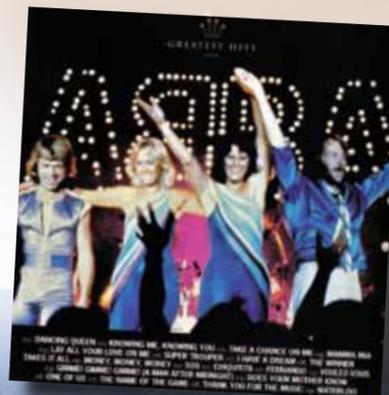
Agnetha Faltskog was the youngest in the group. At the age of 17 she performed a song which became number 1 hit in the popularity rating in Sweden. Many critics thought she was a talented composer. Together with her own songs she liked to record cover versions of foreign hits and sang them at amateur competitions in Sweden. In 1972 she was even awarded the role of Maria Magdalena in the Swedish staging of Jesus Christ Superstar musical.

The career of the second ABBA star, Anni-Frid Lyngstad, was also developing successfully. She has been singing since the age of 13 in various groups performing in the dance style and later switched to a jazz band. In 1969 she won the national contest of talents. Her professional career began after signing a contract with the Swedish branch of the EMI Company in 1967. The same year her singles became to come out however a full album appeared only in 1971.

Both later met the men of their fate - Benny and Bjorn. Frida met Benny Andersson in a TV studio. Several weeks later they met again during a concert tour of southern Sweden. After that Benny engaged Frida and Agnetha as back singers for the Lycka album. That was the beginning of ABBA.

WHY WAS ABBA CALLED ABBA?

Initially when the boys and girls began to perform together their group had no name. How could Agnetha Faltskog, Bjorn Ulvaeus, Benny Andersson, and Anni-Frid (Frida) Lyngstad with



their individual ambitions be united into a common name? They invented it themselves: if you join the first letters of their names you will get ABBA.

Before the pop group emerged the boys and girls were more than just acquaintances. Bjorn and Agnetha were married while Benny and Frida lived together. They decided to get married only in 1978 however later divorced. But so far it was a 2+2 formula.

To be fair it is necessary to say the future brand emerged also due to the effort of Stig Andersson, Hootenanny Singers manager and founder of the Polar Music recording company. He took the four under his wing and began to call them ABBA. Initially it was perceived as a joke because there was a well-known fish processing company of the same name in Sweden.

Agnetha Faltskog later said that to be called A-B-B-A they had to get a permission from that company. It agreed on condition "that we do not let it down." I do not think there were ashamed of us.

Another historic record: for the first time the name ABBA was made public during recording at the Metronome Studio in Stockholm on October 16, 1973. Waterloo was the first Abba-brand single.

Since then ABBA enjoyed super popularity everywhere, except for the United States where they do not like stars from outside America.

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Waterloo was the basis for an unprecedented series of hits that regularly joined the tops of all European radio stations and often were the number 1: Mamma Mia (1976), Fernando (1976), Dancing Queen (1976), Knowing Me, Knowing You (1977), The Name Of The Game (1977), Take A Chance On Me (1978), The Winner Takes It All (1980), and Super Trouper (1980).



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In 1976 ABBA achievements could no longer be ignored by the Swedish leadership. The four were invited to perform before the king of Sweden on the eve of the royal marriage. Then a British tour followed where reserved Britons and ladies specifically were incredibly happy if they managed to get a ticket to the concert. Suffice it to say that 3.5 million applications arrived for 11 thousand seats in the Royal Albert Hall where two concerts were performed. A world tour followed as well as films about the group. In 1979 the Swedes were finally invited to America where they enjoyed great success. And in early 1980s ABBA

began to quickly subside. The last hit was a song with a symbolic name Thank You For The Music recorded in late 1982. On January 1982 (symbolically) ABBA performed its final concert in Stockholm. It was the end of joint creativity and each member had to begin his creative life anew. Why did it happen?

IT IS HARD TO WORK WITH WIVES

I believe ABBA disintegrated also because it is difficult for married couples to work in one group for long. Irritation accumulates between the couples and between two women who have to always stay together. It is fraught with a devastating explosion. There were numerous rumors about relations between Agnetha and Frida.

Frida said in an interview they were no close friends but it did not mean they disliked each other because they communicated and worked together for many years. Sometimes they developed into young and ambitious rivals. There was always competition between them.

- Did you rival Agnetha?
- Always. There should be rivalry.

I mean competition provides energy which you lack otherwise. If women play the leading roles in a group they will inevitably compete.

By that time relations between ABBA men and women reached a critical point. Agnetha and Bjorn divorced in 1979. They had a daughter and a son. Frida and Benny divorced

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three years after marriage - in 1981. When divorced couples work in one group it is always fraught with conflicts. No wonder ABBA collapsed several months after divorces, but the songs survived up to now. Bjorn married another woman in 1981 and Benny Andersson found another wife immediately after divorce. It was another blow that ruined the group.

«MAMMA MIA! MUSICAL RETURNS ABBA TO THE AUDIENCE

In February 2005 the first night of Mamma Mia! in the Swedish language took place in Stockholm. The authors were Benny and Bjorn who despite divorcing their wives remained good friends which is typical of men. The musical began a triumphant tour of the world and a film of the same name came out soon. The same songs featured there which developed practically into folk songs.

Bjorn later said when they first staged the musical in London the songs were associated exclusively with ABBA. Mamma Mia! was not perceived as an independent musical. The situation later changed as pop songs developed into musical compositions.

The Mamma Mia! first night in Sweden was attended

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not only by Bjorn and Benny, but by all ABBA members. The audience was specifically looking forward to see Agnetha Faltskog who usually missed such events. However after the end of the performance neither Agnetha nor Frida came to the stage and did not attend the backstage party to celebrate the performance. It means pain was still strong in female hearts.

AFTERWORD

Soon - in April 2013 - an ABBA museum will open in Stockholm in downtown Jurgorden area.

ABBA is the strongest Swedish brand in the world. We are obliged to give it a place in the country, said director of the new complex Matthias Hansson. He believes the new sight in the city will annually attract hundreds of thousands of tourists. They will see the costumes of the group, the studio, and will try themselves to shoot a musical video. One of the legendary four, Bjorn Ulvaeus gave the following comment:

I always doubted where I shall become a museum exhibit before I die. Both Benny Andersson and me would love it to be something more than just a display. We would love to be a part of unique musical life and industry of Sweden.

Andrei Karavaev,
for Amber Bridge

