

ABBAsolutely Obsessed

[Emily Taylor](#) claims that she doesn't have an unhealthy addiction to ABBA, she has it all under control, honest. But now they're back

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Who found out that nothing can capture a heart like a melody can? My answer to this question is ABBA and well, whoever it was, I'm a fan. On 27 April they returned. People said I was foolish but I believed in them and after 35 years they have returned to bless us mere mortals with their talents with two new songs. But the truth is ABBA never left us. I mean this quite literally, *ABBA Gold* is enjoying its 834th week in the album charts. It has beaten *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* and is now enjoying second place as a best selling album in the UK, only behind *Queen's Greatest Hits*. ABBA, Queen and The Beatles are simply omnipresent acts. At birth you already know the lyrics to 'Dancing Queen' and 'Bohemian Rhapsody', it's now encoded into our DNA. If I meet anyone who doesn't know a song by these artists then I will take that as evidence for extra-terrestrial life, for only living in another galaxy is a good enough excuse for not knowing who ABBA is.

Despite all this ABBA are still treated mostly like a joke. They're 'guilty pleasure' music and not worthy of serious thought – unlike the 'magnificence' of The Beatles and Queen. Don't get me wrong, I love both The Beatles and Queen. But they are no ABBA. I get it, I'm possessive, it isn't nice. But ABBA deserve so much more respect than they currently get. Maybe it's because of their disco roots, or their Swedishness or their questionable fashion choices, but for what ever reason they've been wrongly maligned. This goes from the very beginning of their career. Despite being the definitive act to come out of Eurovision they were in fact rejected from the competition in 1973 with their Swedish no.1 'Ring Ring', an upbeat little pop gem about a girl waiting at a phone for her lover to call. Maybe this song was just too frivolous for the serious institution that is the Eurovision song contest. So next year they came back with another love song, but this time the woman is comparing her love to the 1815 Battle of Waterloo. It has since been voted the best song in the competition's history.

They were an overnight phenomenon in Europe, but it took them a while to break through in the States. But did you think the feeble United States of America could defeat the beast that are ABBA? No, they soon

surrendered to the might that is ABBA with their little-known hit 'Dancing Queen', which may also just be one of the greatest songs ever created. You may argue that it's overplayed but can a party truly be viewed as a good party if 'Dancing Queen' is not played? The answer is no; it would be a very bad party. From the rolling piano notes and the angelic sounding synth that opens the song, everyone in the room is suddenly on the same page. Then it rockets straight into the chorus 'You can dance, and to this song it's impossible to do anything else. The titular Dancing Queen isn't the singer of the song but someone who the singer has seen on the dance floor, but for four glorious minutes every person listening can become the Dancing Queen, young and sweet, only seventeen. It's the perfect mix of a celebration for the freedom that youth allows and the wistful nostalgia of looking at others having the time of their lives. Just feel the beat from that tambourine.

The complexities and depths of ABBA songs are incredible but in their music it comes across as so effortless. Snobbish fans seem to equate pop music to dumb music but a perfectly fine-tuned pop song is a precise and carefully engineered thing that if done successfully, can capture the attentions of millions of people (without sounding like you're trying). ABBA's sound is something that was built in the studio, to the extent that over the ten years they were together they only toured for a total of three months. Benny and Bjorn were perfectionists in the studio and their sound was nigh impossible to recreate live. Though ABBA's success is very much based on the talents of its members, credit also has to go to the band's sound director Michael B. Tretow who, using a style inspired by Phil Spector's Wall of Sound, created the complex arrangements that made the grandiose and rich sound they're known for. ABBA show that pop music can pack a punch just as much as any rock artist. They conquered the world through their music and also their music videos. Their videos now do seem adorably dated, case in point, check out AnniFrida's costume at the end of the 'Head Over Heels' music video that I can only describe as beautiful golden tinfoil complete with a mullet (oh 80s fashion). But their director used a visual style inspired by the stark stylising of famed film director Ingmar Bergman - this minimalistic approach focusing on the faces of the band members helps to humanise their complex arrangements and emphasise the emotions behind the songs.

Musically they were up to date with the times moving from the groovy disco popular in the 70s to the more synth-laden 80s with ease. But one of the things that makes ABBA so timeless is the emotional heft and vulnerability that lives in their music. They were emotionally raw in a way that few acts have ever been but presented in a pristine pop package. Their lives, and more particularly their relationships, drove the music they created. Despite their music being embraced by the LGBTQ+ community ABBA exist in a space I would label as 'I can't believe they're not gay'. Though they seem to be greatly bemused by their acceptance into the community. Rather they are famously made up of two couples whose love, marriages and break-up are charted through the music they make. Their last album and utter masterpiece, *The Visitors*, was made in the wake of Benny and Frida's separation. It's darker than most of their previous work and lyrically complex - spinning themes of lost love with Cold War isolation and paranoia. Memories, good days, bad days, they would confess all and audiences emphasised with the heartache as well as the joy that the band could truthfully convey.

But now they're back and you'll be dancing once again. But with the new songs there's now a sense of expectation hanging in the air. What on earth will they sound like? An attempt to recapture their old sound or will it be something completely different? All the members still speak of ABBA with fondness and it seems to be a project made out of love not a cash-grab (mostly cause they're rich enough already). But whatever they create they can't tarnish their reputation; they've brought joy to millions over decades whether people would care to admit they like ABBA or not. But without a song or a dance what are we? It almost doesn't matter that they aren't taken seriously. ABBA have no interest in cool; coolness has always contained aloofness and a certain amount of ironic detachment. 'Punks don't care about nothing man!' But you would never catch one in a flared fluorescent jumpsuit. ABBA are so sincere in their sparkly outfits its almost painful and that's why they are so utterly fantastic. In a pop-scene so dominated by image it's good to see sincerity and good-natured music triumph over decades. "You may think that a grown-up woman should never fall so easily" but ABBA are just that good. There will never be another ABBA. Maybe next time you hear an ABBA song listen to the beautiful orchestration or the emotive lyrics.

Or just forget all that and mindlessly dance along; it's what ABBA would have wanted. Well there's nothing more to say, no more ace to play, let the music speak for itself. So thank you ABBA, thanks for all your generous love and thanks for all the fun. **M**



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