

As a follow-up to his *Famous ABBA Fans Talk* chapter, we asked Stany Van Wymeersch who else he talked to for his book *Let's Talk About ABBA*. Here is a transcript from a chat he had with Per Herrey, who secured the second Swedish ESC victory with the Herreys in 1984.

History proved that ABBA may have opened the door for Swedish pop music with their victory in 1974, but it took another decade for Sweden to emerge for the second time as the winner of the *Eurovision Song Contest (ESC)*. In 1984, the lucky guys were the Mormon brothers Herreys (Per, Richard and Louis), who stole the show with Diggi-Loo Diggi-Ley and three pairs of golden boots. We caught up with Per Herrey, who today is a legal advisor at the Swedish Musicians' Union ("I make sure that the musicians get good contracts, that they don't make the same mistakes I made myself."), to talk about ABBA and Herreys' own special anniversaries.

Per Herrey: We are indeed having our own celebration year, with the 30th anniversary of our *ESC* victory. In May, we had a special event in Helsingborg, a whole weekend with a lot of nostalgia and fantastic events. We made a live recording of the event, and, together with some songs that haven't been released previously, this will come out on CD.

How important was winning the *ESC*?

By winning *Melodifestivalen* in Sweden, we became very popular in Scandinavia. Winning the *ESC* increased this popularity, plus we gained some recognition outside of Sweden.

What does Diggi-loo Diggi-ley actually mean?

It really means nothing! After the melody was created, the plan was to take it to four different lyricists with 'Blah, blah, blah' words that didn't mean anything. We were just singing Diggi-loo, Diggi-ley. I never expected that this nonsense chorus would have been kept in the final version of the text that we chose!

With their flashy and polished looks, Herreys were presented as a boy band of the 80s.

We were inspired by The Osmonds and The Jacksons, family groups that we liked. Later, we realized that perhaps we started the 80s boy band phenomenon in Europe.

How important was ABBA's victory for Swedish musicians?

It gave confidence to a lot of other Swedish artists that we too could win. It was a unique moment. For them, it was a door opener, but it wasn't their biggest song. Actually, I think Ring Ring, their entry for *Melodifestivalen* from the previous year, was a much better song. And I remember hearing *People Need Love* in the summer of 1972, another great song. However, *Waterloo* was a stepping stone in creating their catalogue and to achieving big fame all over the world. I'm sure that's the way they see it as well.

Do you remember the day ABBA won the *ESC*?

I was watching TV. I was 16 years old. It was a great, wonderful moment. It was like winning the Olympics! I remember their clothes very well, and the conductor with his Napoleon hat – great moments to watch.

Were you an ABBA fan?

Yes, I was, although ABBA were being ridiculed a lot back then. The political climate in Sweden was very left-wing during that period, and they went through some harsh treatment by the media at the time. You couldn't sing songs like *Money, Money, Money* in public – they were considered terrible and sinful! Looking back, you can now laugh about it all, of course. Also, being a 16/18 year old boy, you were not that popular if you admitted to liking ABBA, but I actually liked them from the beginning. Those who used to make fun of them now realize they had been totally naïve, and their appreciation for ABBA's music has grown. People realize that ABBA was something so unique that it is never going to happen again, the same way that something like The Beatles won't happen again. I admire ABBA very much. I'm so glad for them, that they were inducted into the Swedish Music Hall of Fame last year.

Have you got a favourite ABBA song?

That's very difficult, well, *The Winner Takes It All*, that's just a great song, fantastically built up, the lyrics as well. It's one of their best.

Do you know the ABBA members personally?

Through a mutual friend, my brothers and I met Frida in a hotel in Copenhagen, a few weeks after we had won the *ESC* in Luxembourg. We had dinner together. She was very cordial and encouraging towards us.

In 2007, I met Agnetha at the Musician's Union, where she was the guest of honour. It was great to hear her sing again recently. She has a very rich voice. Her pitch has come down a bit, but there is a new sensitivity in her voice. Her voice is a gift.

I wrote a 'thank you' letter to Benny, after he had made a nice comment about Herreys in the press. This year, the Swedish Musicians' Union, of which I am a member, honoured Rutger Gunnarsson with a special prize for studio musicians. During the same event, ABBA's backing singer, Liz Ahman, received a lifetime achievement award, including for her work with ABBA.



Louis, Per and Richard Herrey.