

Famous ABBA Fans Talk: Andy Scott (Sweet)

By Stany Van Wymeersch

If you want to talk about glam rock, you have to talk about Sweet – the group that sold more than 55 million records and notched up 34 worldwide hits from 1968 onwards (Poppa Joe, Ballroom Blitz, Fox On The Run, Love Is Like Oxygen, to name but a few).

In 2014, if you talk about Sweet, you should also talk about ABBA. Original Sweet member Andy Scott recently produced and recorded Does Your Mother Know with Suzi Quatro (*see last issue for the interview with Suzi*). His guitar sounds as glam as ever on this fantastic cover. I was able to chat about ABBA and Sweet with a very talkative and frank Andy, before one of his live concerts in Germany.

In the early Seventies, Sweet rocketed to stardom with hits written by Chinn & Chapman. How was Sweet's musical direction decided, from bubblegum pop to hard rock?

The original band was modelled after The Who. Musically, we were a cross between Deep Purple and Black Sabbath. When we played our Chinn & Chapman hits live on *Top Of The Pops*, we had to re-record the backing tracks for the show, and we always played harder and louder than on the single version. We noticed that the people who came to see us at our concerts were not only interested in the hits, but they also knew the B-sides and the album tracks that were hard rock-oriented. This way, we gradually moved away from the Chinnichap pop towards heavy metal and gained a reputation as a great live band. All instruments were played by session musicians on our first album because we just sang.

What do you consider your most accomplished album?

Sweet Fanny Adams was groundbreaking and is considered a milestone. This one and the next, *Desolation Boulevard*, still hold to this day. It's amazing to hear how integrated those songs were, with a production to rival the best in rock.

These albums influenced a lot of hard rock artists that would break through after Sweet's success.

True. Many groups, like Def Leppard and KISS, claim to have been influenced by Sweet. Groups like Saxon and Mötley Crüe have covered our songs. At one point, I was even approached to produce the first KISS album. That deal didn't go through in the end, unfortunately..., especially financially (chuckles). It's not only about the music, you know!

How did you get the idea to cover an ABBA song?

There was a local pub band that I befriended. They played well-known covers. I sometimes helped them out with the arrangements. The group was called Paddy Goes To Hollyhead and intended as a pun of Frankie Goes To Hollywood. One night, I watched them play Does Your Mother Know. When they came to the middle section, I couldn't help but notice they were just chunking some chords. I offered to

help them out with arranging the song and ended up playing the song live with them. When Suzi contacted me and asked me to help her out because she had been asked to record an ABBA song, I immediately came up with Does Your Mother Know.

How much fun was it to work with Suzi Quatro on this track?

Suzi is great to work with. I have worked with her on several occasions. She has no ego in the sense that she eagerly accepts remarks about how to sing certain parts of a song, where others would say, "Don't tell *me* how to sing!"

How did you decide on the exact sound and arrangement for Does Your Mother Know?

One thing that was important for me was to keep the original underlying synth sound. I gave some homework to the sound engineer. He had to do some research to find out about the composition of that particular sound that consisted of three elements: a note, a knock noise and a wave. Suzi remarked that the riff in Does Your Mother Know is a Sweet riff but, of course, it's not; it's an ABBA riff, but I understand what she means.

Was ABBA appreciated amongst (hard) rockers during their heyday?

I saw them when they won the *ESC*. I knew for sure that they were going to win by a great length. The song was great, and it laid the foundation for everything that was to come. I used to watch the contest, especially since the UK had some very successful entries and winners with the likes of Cliff Richard and Sandie Shaw. They had good songs. Nowadays, a song like Waterloo wouldn't have a chance of winning, since the contest has become politically influenced and the Balkan states always vote for each other. How many memorable songs of the last twenty years can you name? One only remembers the extreme acts with transvestites and transsexuals. There still are good songs competing, no doubt, but they haven't got a chance of winning.

What is the greatest merit of ABBA's music?

Their music is subliminal, it has neo-classical lifts. Benny is clearly influenced by classical music. Just listen to the intro of S.O.S. to understand.

So you consider yourself an ABBA fan?

Yes, but I have to be completely honest with you. The three biggest groups in the world are The Beatles, Queen and ABBA. In recent years, it seems that the last two groups have overshadowed The Beatles. In my opinion, they should not be on the front end all the time. Especially since their musicals came out, this shift has happened. I saw *We Will Rock You* and kind of liked it. I haven't seen the musical *Mamma Mia!* or the film. What bothers me is the idea of James Bond singing..., but I have been told the film is brilliant, so I will check it out at some stage.

Do you think there is an 'ABBA overdose' in the music world right now?

The songs are great, but after hearing them more than a hundred times, something changes. They become part of a general soundscape. It's like the noise of a Harley

Davidson, after hearing it several times, you don't notice it anymore (laughs)!

Have you got a favourite ABBA song?

There are half a dozen songs that are so familiar that I wouldn't choose those. I wouldn't choose Mamma Mia. I am more interested in the less obvious ones that stand a bit more by the side. I think The Name Of The Game is a great song, it's a very unusual sounding song.

Did you ever see ABBA perform live?

No, I never saw them live, but I would have loved to. I've heard that they were great live, but they didn't do many tours and when the moment was there and we got offered tickets to see ABBA, we were probably touring with Sweet in America, and when they were in America we were in England. Not very likely that we would have flown over just to see them (laughs), and in the early 80s the momentum had gone.

Now ABBA is finally releasing a complete live album.

That would be interesting to hear. ABBA are from the analogue era, meaning that everything they did was completely live. Sweet are still doing this today. Concerts today are more often stage shows, with big screens and all that, and live singing means mostly that the (ambience) mike is auto-tuned. I know that many of today's great rock bands like Coldplay use tapes during their concerts. ABBA needed something like twelve people on stage to recreate their sound from the records. In the 70s, it was very difficult to add a pre-recorded section to the live set, to synchronise it perfectly within the live sound. We've only tried it a few times, with a 'bomb' sound and I can assure you it is not easy. However, I must admit we had a roadie who was a great bass player and during one song his playing took over while I was handling some stage acrobatics while singing.

Like most successful bands from the Seventies, Sweet is still touring these days. Are you still having fun?

The greatest advantage of getting older is that I only do the things I really want to do. Since the Nineties, the group has been stable. I don't have to do it, but I still enjoy playing live. And everything we do is *really live*.

Do you understand why ABBA are not interested in a reunion tour?

I can understand that they think, "Been there, done that, and now it's all over". But remember that some people in the business don't have the choice. At the same time, as an artist, it is very difficult to just walk away and decide, "I'm never going to do it again". My motto is 'live and let live'. I'm just hoping that I know when the time has come for me to stop (laughs).

Is it a question of always moving on as a person, as an artist?

I can imagine, especially for the girls in ABBA, that they must have had enough of hearing their own songs. I never listen to the Sweet songs myself but, since we have

a catalogue of two hundred songs, I recommend to some of the younger members of the band that they check out our existing recordings, when it's decided to add certain songs to our live set list, for example.

How important was image for Sweet?

We were involved in every aspect, including the image of the band. I remember in particular an early Harlequin outfit for a *Top Of The Pops* performance. The left side of my pants was red, as was the right side of my jacket. But truly, it was Marc Bolan who started the whole glam rock trend. We met him at the *Bravo Otto Awards* show in Germany in 1972. We had come out as the third most popular act of the year, and he had some first. When we saw him, we noticed that he had silvery shining stars under his eyes and that he was wearing women's make-up. Then we thought, "Okay, this is it! Where do we go from here?" After that, it became a sort of competition between all the glam rock acts when performing on *Top Of The Pops*. Marc Bolan went completely over the top, wearing boas and so on. By the time ABBA came with their glam-inspired look, Sweet was already moving away from glam; our clothes were black leather clad.

Who was responsible for the glam look of Sweet?

I bought my first wide flares in Kensington Road in London. Later, all outfits for Sweet were custom-made, many by Julian, a very arty guy with a small moustache and a goatee. He always looked like he was in higher spirits, but he probably was just very into his art (laughs). His and his girlfriend's workshop was in a basement in Kensington. They made clothes for all the glam rock artists. They had to be careful to distinguish between all of their clients - Sweet, Slade, T-Rex..., and so the clothes were carefully hung for each artist.

Did you appreciate ABBA's glam rock period and the accompanying look?

I thought that they looked more experienced than to wear the clothes that were being picked out for them. They looked professional, but they clearly already had a musical history and knew exactly what they were doing.