

"Of course! Of course I liked them!" Liz Mitchell exclaimed with enthusiasm, when I asked her whether she liked ABBA's music and wanted to join our Famous ABBA Fans Gallery.

We all know the legendary Boney M. lead singer, from megahits such as Daddy Cool, Rivers Of Babylon and Ma Baker. Worldwide, Boney M. has sold over 150 million records, from Australia to China, and was also the first Western pop group to perform in the former Soviet Union.

Jamaican-born Liz Mitchell continues the Boney M. legacy by performing the group's legendary pop tunes live, with a fine new backing group. As a performer, she still has that strong and recognisable voice, demonstrating that the sound of Boney M. was largely hers. Perhaps what impressed the most about her in those days was her very successful a capella-style singing on songs such as I'm Born Again and Malaika.

Both Boney M. and ABBA were so big in the 70s, could one say there was a kind of healthy competition between the two groups in the hit parades?

I always hear this word, the 'competition' word. And I'm thinking, I don't know if we were in competition! For me, ABBA were just so unique and special. They were going a good three years before Boney M. came along. I remember that, when they won the *Eurovision Song Contest*, I had just left the Les Humphries Singers and I didn't have any future plans on how exactly to pursue my career. I was a member of a group called Malcolm's Locks, and we were not really that successful.

When Frank Farian released a single called Do You Wanna Bump, he needed a group of performers to promote the song, just as a one-off for a TV show. Frank had got to know of my work and he contacted me, asking if I would like to join Boney M. as their lead singer. I remember thinking, Oh, this man is really cool, but never thought that we would actually make records to compete chart-wise with a group such as ABBA. Looking back, I think that is probably what it was, just that we were constantly in the charts together, and the fans were buying our records and theirs.

The appeal was indeed worldwide.

What is interesting is what I learnt when I travelled to foreign countries – for example, Far East countries such as India. That's a good example I can use. People would say to me that there are only three significant pop acts in the



Liz Mitchell in 2014 © Stany Van Wijmeersch

world: ABBA, Boney M. and ... Michael Jackson. That's what I always used to hear. So I would not say it was a competition. I would say that the music kind of 'walked together', so to speak.

One of the big moments for both fans of ABBA and Boney M. was when you did the television show in Leysin, Switzerland. Do you remember that well?

Yes, absolutely – for the BBC.

It was a huge show for those days.

Indeed, it was a massive show. The BBC called it *Snowtime Special*, I remember that (smiles). It was so exciting. It was a huge show, and I enjoyed it very much. The professional contacts were great. The producer of the show, Michael Hurl, even attended my wedding! For him and his Director, the show seemed to be a very important BBC production.

Do you have any particular memories of getting to know ABBA, talking to them?

You know how it is with artists on the road. We are always nice to one another, polite and everything, but we don't always have a lot of time to spend with each other. But I do remember that, on that particular evening in Leysin, my sister and I spent some time with Björn. We talked together and, you know, I think that some people misunderstood our conversation. People were looking for something more, but we were just having a good time. And that was it, we never saw each other much again. I bumped into Björn every now and again on flights, going back to



artists are not connecting with the world, with the people, in the way that we did.

There is another parallel with ABBA. Would you agree that the studio work was the most important part and that for that reason you didn't need to go on the road that much?

Yes, we didn't do too much touring. This was something I was recently trying to explain, when talking to Dieter Meier and my husband [Thomas Pemberton]. To make a record that people are going to hear and be able

to treasure is a piece of art, that you should spend time on carving. It doesn't mean you're going to carve the life out of it - just the opposite; you're going to carve life into it (laughs). Do you know what I mean? Nowadays, a lot of productions are done really quickly without the same kind of meditation.

The role of your producer, Frank Farian, the fifth member of Boney M., was vital during the whole creative process.

He liked to meditate on what we did, that was the key. When we made a song, we would demo the song, there was meditation, real thinking and concentration. It was not just like, 'Oh, this is great, and off you go!' No, we meditated on it, we were contemplating if it was *this* that we wanted to hear. We also considered if it was *this* we would want to hear if we were purchasing the record. So each song was given the care to become alive in the hearts of people. Whether we knew what we were doing or not is not the point; the point is that's what we did.

And it was very successful. You touched people's hearts.

Yes, indeed.

Are you still in contact with Frank Farian?

No, I am not in contact much nowadays, because he moved to the USA, and he has got another life now (smiles).

Are you still making new recordings?

Not as much as I would like to, really. I hope to do some recording soon, so we'll see what happens (laughs).

And what about live performances?

Oh yes - I'm still performing all the time!

England and so forth, but I wouldn't exactly say that we were friends or such. It would have been nice... but it was not the case.

Have you got a favourite ABBA song?

Dancing Queen, I think. I don't know why. I just think it has that freedom feel. It frees you!

And a favourite Boney M. song?

I don't have a favourite.

You like them all?

It's not that I necessarily like them all, it is the fact that it is my work and I'd rather not make that choice! It's much easier for me to choose a favourite song from another artist than to choose one of my own (laughs).

How different is the music business today in comparison to the 70s?

I think the difference is that artists today are not selling in the same quantity as ABBA and Boney M. did. Even though Michael Jackson was a huge artist, the quantity of his record sales in Europe was not as massive as that of ABBA and Boney M. I specifically say *massive* because that was the scale; we were selling millions of records. Our gold discs were not for a couple of thousand copies, they were based on millions of copies! Nowadays, a gold disc is maybe given for 25.000 copies sold. That means that, in comparison, the music is not penetrating the masses as we did. That's where I notice the difference. For what reason it's not penetrating, I don't know. Is it because it's not what people want to hear? I'm not sure. But the contemporary