

For her first solo project after ABBA, *Wrap Your Arms Around Me*, Agnetha was supported by a very famous backing group, the Mike Chapman/Nicky Chinn hit group, Smokie. Today, in 2015, Smokie celebrates its very own 40th anniversary with a brand new compilation CD and DVD package, *Gold*, including their hits such as Living Next Door To Alice, Lay Back In The Arms of Someone and Oh Carol. It also seems to be the perfect time to step back and highlight the 'Agnetha episode' of Smokie, with bassist Terry Uttley - the only remaining member of the original line-up. Terry was happy to answer the questions I put to him.

Do you remember how you were first contacted to participate on Agnetha's album?

By 1983, Smokie were working again with our initial producer at RAK records, Mickie Most. Mickie had arranged that we would provide backing vocals for a number of artists, including folk singer Donovan, the group Heavy Metal Kids and football star Kevin Keegan. In that same context, he and producer Mike Chapman asked us to fly to Stockholm to sing on Agnetha's album.

At the time, Smokie was also nearing the end in its original line-up, if I'm correct.

It was, in fact, on our flight out to Stockholm to record the videos with Agnetha in May 1983 when Chris Norman directly told me that he didn't want to be in Smokie anymore. After the success of his duet with Suzi Quatro, 'Stumblin' In', it had already become clear that Chris was heading for a solo career. There were no arguments about the matter; it seemed like a natural end for us. We weren't doing much as Smokie at the time anyway. After the recording of the videos for Agnetha, we only did one more tour, in Eastern Europe."

How was it to work with Mike Chapman as a producer?

He was very professional, and he respected the specific Smokie sound, just as he did with the other artists he produced. He could also be a very humorous guy. Many times, there was a lot of laughter during recording sessions. I fondly remember one time in Los Angeles. Alan Silson and I had just bought a pair of new guitars. We had spent a crazy afternoon on Sunset Boulevard and had been drinking a few beers before returning to the studio where Mike asked me to do an overdub on the song It's Your Life. Our fits of laughter were unstoppable, and we had to

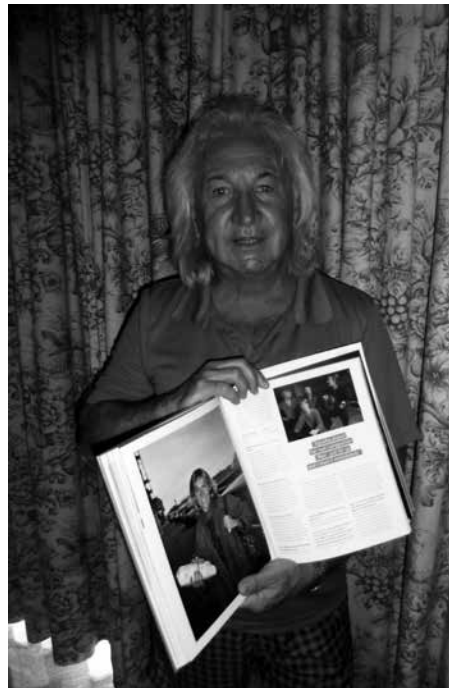
leave the studio and run around the building a few times to calm down!

Apparently, Mike Chapman also wanted the typical Smokie harmony sound on Agnetha's album. What is the secret of this sound?

It came very naturally. In fact, it originated in the school playground! We were friends at school and we were imitating well-known songs from the likes of The Beatles. When we sang, we improvised and tried to sing in harmony, with each of us subsequently singing second and third harmonies. We soon found out it sounded special.

What do you remember of the recording sessions for Agnetha's album?

Recording with Agnetha turned out to be one of the best experiences I've ever had. It felt absolutely surreal to be singing in the same studio next to this beautiful and incredibly sexy woman! But, most importantly, she is an incredibly talented singer. We really enjoyed our time with her. Agnetha's voice is absolutely as pure as anyone can hear on her recordings, but to experience her singing directly in front of me was a completely joyous event.



Were you happy with your contribution on Agnetha's album, and how did you like the final result?

Absolutely! We were delighted to have been invited to do backing vocals on Agnetha's album with Mike Chapman. As far as liking the album, I play it regularly in my car, even nowadays. I just love the whole album, especially Once Burned, Twice Shy.

Is that your favourite song on the album?

Yes, and also Stand By My Side, because they both have that genuine Smokie sound. I am also very fond of the title song, Wrap Your Arms Around Me. Initially, Smokie were not supposed to feature on that track, but I liked the song so much that I pleaded with Mike Chapman to include us on it as well - hence the humming you can hear from us, which was my idea (*Terry then illustrates this by humming the melody*).

What has ABBA's music meant to you?

Upon first hearing, ABBA made nice, inoffensive music but with good, strong melodies. It is music that appeals to all audiences. The same could be said of the Smokie songs.

Did you ever meet ABBA during their heyday?

Around 1976 and 1977, we spent an awful lot of time promoting our records on radio and television. We regularly flew to countries such as Germany, Austria and Switzerland. I remember very well coming across ABBA, bumping into them at airports and in television and radio stations. I found the four of them to be warm and down-to-earth people. They were quite happy to sit in the public waiting areas at airports instead of hiding away in the VIP lounge, which they certainly could have chosen to do if they had wanted.

What is your favourite ABBA song, and for what reason?

How can you ever pick a favourite ABBA song? They were all so fantastically crafted. It's one of those rare occasions in music where you never skip a track by a band – sub-standard tracks just don't exist on any ABBA album!