

To narrow down Conchita Wurst (a.k.a. Tom Neuwirth) as the bearded drag queen who won the *Eurovision Song Contest* for Austria exactly forty years after ABBA's victory with Waterloo would be quite unfair. Indeed, since winning the *ESC*, Conchita has established herself on the international scene as a singer with an impressive vocal range, as well as a gay and cultural icon. Both the private person, Tom, and the adopted personality, Conchita, take a strong stance in favour of tolerance and against discrimination. Appearances, gender and ethnicity should not matter when it comes to the dignity and freedom of individuals, she pointed out. They are 'Wurst' [meaningless], as the Austrians would say.

In your opinion, how important was ABBA's 1974 victory in the *Eurovision Song Contest*?

I think it was an extremely important moment for *Eurovision*. It may even have saved this event. It did prove that you can have a huge pop career after winning *Eurovision*.

What do you think was the impact of your own victory on the future of the contest?

For me, it is easier to answer how it impacted my own life. It changed my life completely.

Could you describe the feeling of winning the *ESC*?

Believe it or not, I hardly can remember. It's like you are in a trance or in a dream. I am still not that sure whether I woke up....

At the 60th anniversary concert of *Eurovision* you did a great performance of Waterloo with Dana International. How did you enjoy doing this ABBA homage?

It is probably worldwide the best known *Eurovision* song in its 60 years history. So it was a huge honour to sing exactly this song.

What is your all-time favourite artist from *Eurovision*? And in general?

Well, I have two huge favourites. One is Céline Dion, so I can't answer this question without mentioning her and, in general, Shirley Bassey has been a very important influence. When I was a kid and listened to Goldfinger, I didn't understand a word, but I knew that this was fabulous music.

How do you appreciate the vocals of Agnetha and Frida?

Oh yes, I appreciate them very much, and I think they worked just perfectly together. Agnetha is the light voice, Frida the darker

voice, and it is such a harmony together.

What do you consider ABBA's greatest merit?

They made easy listening pop songs which never became old-fashioned. They are totally timeless.

Have you got a favourite ABBA song, one that you would like to interpret one day?

I love Mamma Mia! This is my number one choice at the karaoke bar (*laughs*).

Have you ever met one of the ABBA members?

Unfortunately, no. But if they read these lines, they probably would like to write a song for me.

In your opinion, why are ABBA so popular within the LGBT (Lesbian/Gay/Bisexual/Transgender) community?

Easy pop which works and fabulous and glamorous dresses. Voilà! And who could resist a song called Dancing Queen?

How important is the image for the success of a pop star, for example, in ABBA's case and in your case?

What you call image is what I call authenticity. If you have got that, people believe in you and your art. This is extremely important.

When did you first realize the 'creation' of Conchita would be a winner?

I am not sure if I realized until now.

What do you think of ABBA's image?

Perfect pop with glamorous, coloured costumes. It's irresistible.

You are a true inspiration to other artists. Could you reveal how your collaborations with Jean-Paul Gaultier and Karl Lagerfeld came about?

My personal educational background is fashion; I am really into fashion a lot. So when both asked me for a collaboration, it was a huge honour for me, and I am so thankful that I could do this. With Jean-Paul Gaultier, I've got a very strong tie as we met even before *Eurovision* 2014.

What is your favourite song on your album *Conchita* and why?

I can't answer it that way, I am so sorry. I could tell you which song is the most personal one, that one song that means a lot to me. That is still difficult as they all mean a lot to me, but *The Other Side Of Me* is something special.

Your biography mentions that you will continue to pursue your goals in three sectors — music, fashion and human dignity. Who are your most important influences in



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these domains? Who do you admire?

Shirley Bassey, Jean Paul Gaultier and Harvey Milk.

What was the impact of your presence/performances at Pride parades, the European Parliament and the United Nations Office in Vienna?

I don't know if there was any impact. I just hope I could help raise awareness.

How do you cope when you are confronted with prejudice or even condemnation by social conservatives?

I prefer to concentrate on positive things. If I kept myself busy with other things, it would ruin my life quality. I am just sad about the fact that there are people who hate other people without any reason.

Many people consider you a role model. What is the most touching story you have heard so far?

First, I have to admit that I don't see myself as a role model because I think that everyone should find his or her way to live, to express, to be who and what you are. However, I know that I have inspired some people. One young Russian teen, who was bullied in his home town by his relatives, went to Austria to ask for asylum. He decided to go to the country where the bearded lady came from. That was very touching.