

1975, the year that re-established ABBA's status as a worldwide hit group, was also the year of Pussycat and their country-pop sound. Their song Mississippi became a Number 1 hit all over the world, with more successful singles (such as Smile and Broken Souvenirs) in the years that followed. I met front woman Toni Willé at Yesterdayland, an open-air festival in Belgium that celebrates the golden oldies. She patiently took the time to answer some questions for our Famous ABBA Fans gallery, after a fantastic concert with a rejuvenated Pussycat.

Almost as catchy a name as ABBA, who came up with the band name Pussycat?

The name was invented by our record company (EMI) because they thought we sounded like the female Cats, a Dutch male band.

How would you describe the typical Pussycat sound? Would you agree that a great part of the success of the band was its unique crossover between country and pop?

I do agree with that, however, the close harmonies and the sound of our voices together were important as well.

Mississippi was one of the biggest successes of the Seventies, with staggering sales figures of five million copies. Looking back, can you understand why this song had such an impact?

We've been thinking about it a lot, but we can't explain it. I must say, it is an easy song to listen to, and maybe the steel guitar intro was part of the success.

How important were its lyrics?

The lyrics were important as they breathe a sense of feeling homesick, nostalgia, and I'm always touched by those kind of lyrics.

Was it hard to find the right follow-up single?

It wasn't that hard because we had already recorded Georgie, but I don't think anyone can predict 100% which song will be a hit record.

Even so, could you attempt to define what makes a true hit?

A song that is easy to listen to and that immediately touches your heart. However, sometimes songs are played so many times that you start liking them in the end [smiles]. Most of the time, we were able to say what we thought would be potential singles but always in cooperation with people from the record company.

Who are your musical heroes, in country music or other genres?

My favourite singer is Gladys Knight, of course, the Eagles in country music, and I love listening to ABBA.

How much do you appreciate ABBA's music?

[with firm conviction] On a level from 1 to 10 - 10!

In your opinion, what is the secret of ABBA's continuing success?

Four attractive people, great songs and great vocalists!

What do you think of the production of the ABBA records?

An example for a lot of artists coming from Sweden.

How much do you like the harmonies of ABBA and, in particular, the voices of Agnetha and Frida?

I love both voices, but I prefer Agnetha's voice, so clear, she sounds like an angel to me.

Are you familiar with the post-ABBA solo projects? Did you appreciate these as well?

Yes, I know them and I liked them but not as much as the ABBA music.

When Pussycat was at its peak, what were, for you, the most enjoyable experiences?

Touring, recording, meeting interesting people, for example ABBA [smiles].

What do you remember about meeting ABBA?

First time we met them was at a TV show in Munich, Disco 77. I remember the guys were very friendly, the girls kept mostly to themselves.

What was, for you, the reverse side of being part of a very successful hit group?

When we look back at those days, the pressure from record company and management was heavy. Besides, I was afraid of flying which didn't make it very easy. After ten years, we decided to stop. Performing a lot was becoming too hard for one of my sisters. We'd been singing together for 25 years then, and every one of us wanted to try something new.

Over the years, you have won many country awards. Have you ever considered recording in the home of country, Nashville?

I was asked a couple of months ago to record some songs by songwriters based in Nashville, but I had already decided some years ago that my recording career was over. I think it's time for a new generation.

Which Pussycat song would be your personal choice?

One in particular, I'll Be Your Woman.

And which is your favourite ABBA song?

The Winner Takes It All. Firstly, it's a great song, but it also reflected my situation. I, too, was in the band with my husband [guitarist Lou Willé], and we also went through a divorce [sighs].

A lot of the music from the Seventies is still very popular. What do you personally think of the quality of the Top 40 music from that era compared to today's hit music?

The biggest difference I think is that styles and genres have disappeared. There is no more roots music like country, soul, R&B, blues, etc. in the charts, which I think is a pity.

