

## ABBA's Back On Broadway, Again

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Mamma mia! Two former members of the Swedish pop group, ABBA, are bringing another performance to Broadway. Songwriters Benny Andersson and Bjorn Ulvaeus are adapting their Swedish musical, *Kristina*, for two performances next week at New York's Carnegie Hall. Andersson and Ulvaeus tell host Scott Simon why they wanted to translate the production into English and how they separate themselves from ABBA fame.

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(Soundbite of song, "Dancing Queen")

SCOTT SIMON, host:

You can dance, you can jive, but you can't see ABBA on a reunion tour. The Swedish pop group broke up more than a quarter century ago. Their worldwide fame has never stopped growing, thanks in part to the musical "Mamma Mia," based on the band's hits, including "Take a Chance On Me" and - come on, you're beginning to sing it already, aren't you?

(Soundbite of song, "Dancing Queen")

ABBA (Band): (Singing) You can dance, you can jive, having the time of your life, see that girl, watch that scene, dig in the dancing queen.

SIMON: "Dancing Queen," in fact nearly all of ABBA's great hits were written by Benny Andersson and Bjorn Ulvaeus. Now they're back in New York City with another musical. This one is called "Kristina." It's the first time the popular Swedish performance has been translated into English. It will run at Carnegie Hall for just two nights next week.

Mr. Andersson and Mr. Ulvaeus joined us from the rehearsal studio in the Carnegie Hall, where they're gearing up for their debut. Gentlemen, thanks very much for being with us.

Mr. BENNY ANDERSSON (ABBA): Pleasure to be here.

Mr. BJORN ULVAEUS (ABBA): Hi.

SIMON: Mr. Andersson, what's "Kristina" about?

Mr. ANDERSSON: It's an epic novel written in around the 1950's by the author Vilhelm Moberg(ph). And it's a story about how 25 percent of the Swedish population moved to America. And it's concentrated on one specific family where Kristina is the wife of her husband Kaloskar(ph) and their struggle to get a better life on this side of the ocean.

SIMON: So Mr. Ulvaeus, I can see why you'd want to bring a show like this to America.

Mr. ULVAEUS: Yeah. It's very much an American saga and it's always been a dream with us, ever since we wrote it, to be able to present it like this to an American audience. And there couldn't be a better place to do that than at Carnegie Hall.

SIMON: We'll explain, based on what we've heard, the music from "Kristina," it's not pop powered like it is in "Mamma Mia," a little more operatic.

Mr. ANDERSSON: Yeah. And that's the reason that we choose Carnegie Hall to present it because it is a symphonical piece, there's very little dialogue, but the narrator who fills in, so the audience will be able to follow what's going on.

SIMON: Let's listen a bit to the piece, "You Have to Be There."

(Soundbite of song, "You Have to Be There")

Ms. HELEN SJOHOLM (Actor): (Singing) You have to be there, you have to, you have to (unintelligible)the world is dragging down, I reach for your hand.

Mr. ANDERSSON: She's a very religious woman, Kristina. And she's all of a sudden, she is not sure whether he exists or not. And it means a lot to her. And it means a lot to the whole story, actually.

SIMON: And who do we hear singing?

Mr. ANDERSSON: Her name is Helen Sjöholm. She did "Kristina" in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and at (unintelligible) opera as

well in Sweden between 1990 and '95. She's also on the original record. So the first thing we did, actually, before we decided the dates at Carnegie Hall, we asked her if she was available and if she wanted to do this because we were so sure of Helen, that she could pull this off. So she is with us now here.

SIMON: And I gather, actually, you wrote "Kristina" before "Mamma Mia."

Mr. ANDERSSON: Yeah.

Mr. ULVAEUS: Well, how you look at it because the first song in "Mamma Mia," one of the first songs that we wrote for "Mamma Mia" was 35 years ago. That's (unintelligible).

(Soundbite of song, "Waterloo")

Mr. ULVAEUS: But you're right, you can say that "Mamma Mia" was compiled after we had - had written "Kristina."

SIMON: Is it true that an American consortium offered a billion dollars to bring ABBA back together? Mr. Andersson?

Mr. ANDERSSON: Actually, that's what we were told by our agent, but I don't think we saw the money on the table, really.

SIMON: So is that why you said no?

Mr. ANDERSSON: We said no because I think it's good that the people out there remember us as we were when they listen to the music rather than one of those groups that came back because of the money.

SIMON: Mr. Ulvaeus, when people talk about ABBA, do you separate that from yourselves somehow?

Mr. ULVAEUS: Ah, yes, absolutely. I'm sort of aware of the phenomenon, the fact that we're still around so very much after all these years. But it's very, very difficult, you know, to understand why - why us.

SIMON: So speaking analytically, because the two of you say you can kind of step back from ABBA, what made this Swedish music group still today one of the most popular music ensembles in the world, in history?

Mr. ANDERSSON: I don't know. Maybe - maybe the fact that we're not Anglo-Saxon, that we come from a little country up north and that it has influences from - from other styles of music than it would have if we were born here in the U.S. or in England.

(Soundbite of song, "Take a Chance On Me")

ABBA(BAND): (Singing) If you change your mind, I'm the first in line, honey I'm still free, take a chance on me, if you need me, let me know, gonna be around, if you've got no place to go, if you're feeling down.

Mr. ANDERSSON: I don't know what it is. If we knew what it was, and anybody knew what it was, it wouldn't be so difficult.

SIMON: Gentlemen, wonderful talking to you. Good Luck.

Mr. ANDERSSON: Thank you very much.

Mr. ULVAEUS: Thank you.

SIMON: Benny Andersson and Bjorn Ulvaeus. They're in New York preparing for the U.S. debut of their new musical, "Kristina." It opens next week at Carnegie Hall for a couple of performances. Thanks very much, gentlemen.

Mr. ANDERSSON: Bye.

Mr. ULVAEUS: Bye.

(Soundbite of song, "Take a Chance On Me")

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