

## ***“What’s the name of the game?” ABBA, Northernness and Pop Culture***

19-20th March 2026, Université de Lorraine, Nancy

### **Abstracts (in order of appearance)**

**Henrik Smith-Sivertsen, Royal Danish Library, Copenhagen**

***“Pretty much the title, I guess, ‘Waterloo’” – the phonetic musicality of ABBA’s lyrics (keynote address)***

Immediately after ABBA won the Eurovision Song Contest April 6 1974, Anni-Frid Lyngstad was asked about the reasons why “Waterloo” emerged as the winning song. Her answer was, “Pretty much the title, I guess, ‘Waterloo’”. In the following sequence, the lyricist behind the song, Polar owner and music publisher Stig “Stikkan” Anderson, explained how he came up with the title after deliberately searching for a term known and understood all over the world, reflecting the fact that the Eurovision audience was linguistically diverse.

In this paper, the focus will be on an analysis of all titles and lyrics to ABBA’s singles co-written by Anderson (most A-sides from 1973-1977). The main thesis is that these lyrics are primarily characterized by their phonetic qualities, serving a predominantly musical function. This is attributed to a deliberate strategy rooted in Stikkan Anderson's song translation background and ABBA’s strong roots in a pan-European schlager tradition in general. Through examples, it will be demonstrated how both Anderson and fellow lyricists from late 1950’s extensively employed what I coin as *phonogramological translation*; phonetic translation of central words, highlighting that the musical function of the song lyrics is equally important to their semantic meaning, especially when performed in foreign languages.

Being by far the most productive Scandinavian song translator during the 1960’s, Stikkan Anderson developed an almost scientific approach to song writing, and when he and ABBA turned the process upside down by focusing on Anglophone songs for an international market, his insights were a crucial part of the ingredients. Consequently, it follows that ABBA’s success was partly due to an awareness that English is a foreign language for the majority of the world's population and the sound of the words most important.

**Henrik Smith-Sivertsen** is a senior researcher at the Royal Danish Library, responsible for the popular music archives. He did his PhD on popular music translation and cover theory and has primarily worked with Scandinavian popular music history from a wide range of perspectives, including value, technology, music industry and musical versioning practices. His publications include studies of the Anglophone pop revolution in the early 1960's, music industry history, music radio history and the digital music revolution. Since 2012 he has specialized in digital music heritage.

Smith-Sivertsen is an expert on ABBA's fundamental influence on Scandinavian popular music history. In both his dissertation and elsewhere, Smith-Sivertsen demonstrates how ABBA's manager, Stikkan Anderson, was central to the positioning of Sweden in first Scandinavian and later international popular music industry, how ABBA in many aspects was the rooted in a European schlager tradition, focused on translation of songs into regional languages, and not least how Anderson's/ABBA's focus on music lyrics as sound was instrumental to their international success.

**Martin Knust, Linnæus University, Växjö**

### ***How to Write an ABBA Song: Influences, Models and Swedishness***

Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus, who have written all ABBA songs together, have given hints about their musical points of departure when creating a new ABBA song. Their collaborative work process resulted in a division of labor which they maintained in other artistic projects outside ABBA. In my paper, I will present extracts and statements from two public interviews in connection with the awarding of their honorary doctorates in 2008 and 2015 and a third one from 2018 that I have edited recently. In them, they disclose many details about their working routines and the models they chose for their songs. After winning the ESC in 1974, their artistic output slowed down considerably due to their ambition to release only perfectly produced music. Both mention certain pop songs that triggered their own artistic creations. But the perhaps most profound source of inspiration that both mention in their interviews is the least known abroad: Swedish folk music. Björn Ulvaeus demonstrates in his interview from 2018, how a melody that resembles a Swedish *schottis* – a traditional dance – became the germinating element for the creation of “The Winner Takes It All” in a process that took a long time. Besides this, Ulvaeus and Andersson reveal a wide range of Continental European genres and Swedish art music as their sources of inspiration. Ulvaeus ascribes it to this European background of

their songs that ABBA was received as ‘exotic’ in the UK and the U.S. which, according to him, led to the extraordinary lifting of their international career.

Knust, Martin (ed.). *Pop Music Made in Småland: Music Production and Entrepreneurship in Sweden*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2025 (<https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-3-031-66363-5>).

**Martin Knust** studied musicology, theology, and philosophy at the University of Greifswald, Humboldt University Berlin, and Technical University Dresden. He completed his Magister Artium in 2000 and received his Dr. phil. in 2006.

Since 2007, he has held various appointments and lectureships at the University of Greifswald, the Technical University Berlin, Örebro University, and the Royal College of Music in Stockholm. From 2008 to 2012, he was a postdoctoral research fellow at Stockholm University. Since 2013, he has been Senior Lecturer in musicology at Linnaeus University, where he was promoted to Associate Professor in 2020. He is a member of the Linnaeus University Centre for Intermedial and Multimodal Studies (LNUC IMS), serves on the board of the research school *The Future of Democracy* (FUDEM), and leads a three-year research project (2023–2025) on digital music production funded by the Family Kamprad Foundation.

Research specializations include opera and music theatre after 1800 (historical performance practice of speech, song and gestures), north European music after 1800 (reception and cultural transfer processes between the North and continental Europe), Swedish pop and music in audiovisual political journalism (their production and aesthetics).

**Ville Vokkolainen, University of Eastern Finland, Kuopio**

***Inside the Musical Form: Reframing Contemporary Music Analysis through ABBA’s Sonic Constructions***

This presentation examines tracking (instrumental composition beneath vocals) and toplining (lyric and vocal melody writing) techniques in selected ABBA songs. It demonstrates how music analysis can identify key compositional strategies, offering insights into ABBA’s output and its relevance to contemporary analytical frameworks.

This presentation explores three compositional aspects of ABBA’s output. First, it analyses the precision of melodic construction and its interaction with musical metre. Second, it examines how orchestration shapes the development of musical tracks. Third, it identifies formal

juxtapositions between melodic lines and lyrical content. Through selected analytical examples, the presentation addresses challenges in current methodologies of formal functions when applied to ABBA's highly refined compositional practices.

This presentation further highlights how techniques influenced by the Beatles evolve through ABBA and reappear in contemporary Swedish productions, including Taylor Swift's *The Life of a Showgirl*. It uses these techniques to emphasize the value of direct tracking and toplining-based analysis in understanding present-day popular music composition. In doing so, it demonstrates how ABBA's members have shaped the development of contemporary compositional practices.

**Ville Vokkolainen** is an interdisciplinary composer trained in jazz, classical, and various world music traditions. His creative output includes nearly 50 classical works for solo, chamber, and orchestral settings. He has released approximately 140 albums as a bandleader and produced a wide range of drawings, paintings, and other forms of visual art.

Vokkolainen is currently pursuing a PhD at the University of Eastern Finland, with a dissertation entitled "Form in Contemporary Popular Music". The research includes a corpus of all Billboard Hot 100 number-one songs from 2010 to the present. Its aim is to introduce an analytical methodology that identifies musical form separately in tracks (instrumentation, beats, and chord cycles), toplines (vocal melodies), and lyrics. These elements are then integrated and paired with existing methodologies focused on identifying musical form through formal functions.

**Giuseppe Pantano, Université de Lorraine, Roma Tre University**

***The Piper and Its Enchanting Tune: Intermediality and Transmediality in ABBA's The Piper (1980)***

Nurtured and inspired by the rigid Swedish winters (Sander, 2001) and the rich Scandinavian folk-music tradition, ABBA's music has, on the one hand, served as a role model for subsequent Swedish artists, and, on the other, offered a lighter, vocal-centred pop-rock alternative to the dominant Anglo-American tradition (Johansson, 2010). Apart from being internationally celebrated for lyrics on themes such as nostalgia (*Slipping Through My Fingers*, 1981), youthful romance (*Our Last Summer*, 1980), fragility of relationships (*S.O.S.*, 1975; *The Name of the Game*, 1977), and separation (*The Winner Takes It All*, 1980), the group's repertoire also

engaged broader cultural, literary, and historical themes (Axworthy, 2022). Historical references include *Waterloo* (1974), reimagining Napoleon's defeat as a metaphor for surrender in love, and *Fernando* (1976), alluding to the Mexican Revolution of 1910. Likewise, *Cassandra* (1982) draws from Homer's *Iliad*, reviving the silenced prophetess. Within this trajectory, the present contribution focuses on *The Piper* (1980), from the album *Super Trouper*. Its lyrics draw on the legend of the Pied Piper of Hamelin, a potent symbol of collective submission through the manipulative power of music (Kertz-Welzel, 2005). The theme resonates with *Musische Erziehung* ("artistic-aesthetic education"), appropriated in Nazi pedagogy as a means of ideological control (Adorno, 1956). Co-written by Björn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson, the song depicts the rise of a charismatic dictator, with female vocal harmonies evoking the sound of a mass procession reminiscent of Nazi rallies (Paphides, 2002). Musically, the piece employs medieval timbres of flute and violin, destabilising dissonances, and the Latin phrase *sub luna saltamus* ("we dance in the moonlight"), situating it within a tradition of art and music that draws upon the symbolic and cultural legacy of the Latin language (Anderson, 1990). By combining historical allusion, mythological archetype, dystopian imagination, and musical ambiguity, *The Piper* emerges as one of ABBA's most conceptually complex works, offering fertile ground for investigating the articulation between lyrics and music as well as the song's transmedial ramifications into mythological, dystopian, and political inquiry.

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**Giuseppe Pantano** is a PhD candidate, tenured music teacher, and singer-songwriter pursuing a joint PhD between Université de Lorraine and Roma Tre University in English Studies and Educational Sciences, under the supervision of Prof. Jean-Philippe Heberlé and Prof. Amalia Lavinia Rizzo. His research investigates the articulation between words and music in the Anglophone singer-songwriter repertoire, from John Dowland to Kate Bush, integrating literary analysis, intermedial theory, musicology, and pedagogy.

At Roma Tre, he recently conducted a quasi-experimental study (October–December 2025) on inclusive music–language learning through Circle Singing, and is currently disseminating the results through international conferences and peer-reviewed publications. A visiting researcher at Sophia University in Tokyo from March to May 2026, he also explores the musical dimension of Haruki Murakami’s narratives and their intermedial and transmedial connections to Anglophone music.

He has delivered guest lectures at Augsburg University and recently presented “From Song to Novel: The Beatles and Murakami’s Norwegian Wood” at IAFOR MediAsia 2025. His work has appeared in *Miranda*, and an article is forthcoming in the April 2026 issue of *Angles*.

## **Stéphane Sawas, INALCO, Paris**

### ***Des îles grecques au désert australien : nouveaux ancrages territoriaux des chansons d’ABBA au cinéma***

Dès les années 1970, le phénomène ABBA a partie liée avec la création audiovisuelle, notamment à travers les clips ou encore le docu-fiction *ABBA: The Movie* (L. Hallström, 1978), qui contribuent au rayonnement international du groupe et à l’association de phrases musicales à certains plans et cadrages récurrents. Cette contribution se propose d’étudier l’utilisation de la musique d’ABBA dans cinq fictions cinématographiques qui, en l’absence du groupe à l’écran, ancrent les chansons sous des latitudes inhabituelles (campagne géorgienne, désert australien, îles grecques), souvent de manière durable : *Muriel’s Wedding* (P.J. Hogan, 1994), *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* (S. Elliott, 1994), *Mamma Mia!* (P. Lloyd, 1998) et son *prequel Mamma Mia! Here We Go Again* (O. Parker, 2018), *Et puis nous danserons* (L. Akin, 2019) témoignent chacun de l’identité transnationale de cette musique tout

en en rappelant sous forme de clins d'œil l'origine suédoise. Ces longs métrages, qui relèvent de genres différents (comédie dramatique, road movie, film musical, drame), font circuler les chansons dans l'espace et dans le temps, seules ou associées à celles d'autres artistes : d'une génération à l'autre, les protagonistes les écoutent, les reprennent en play-back ou les réinterprètent eux-mêmes (Haworth 2017) en redistribuant les parties entre voix masculines et féminines ; ils en reprennent les chorégraphies ou dansent plus librement (Richards 2020). En écho au statut pourtant ambivalent d'ABBA comme figure d'émancipation féminine et icône LGBT, ces films qui, à l'exception du dernier, sont des *feel good movies*, soulignent la dimension cathartique des chansons vers une libération des carcans sociaux ou institutionnels (Fitzgerald & Williams 2013) tout en conférant une place de choix au rêve et à la fantaisie. Ludique, l'approche des cinéastes instaure ainsi une complicité avec les spectateurs, en particulier quand elle croise des références à la haute culture (Andersen, Tchaïkovski) et à la culture populaire (Village People, Robyn, danses traditionnelles du Caucase), qu'elles soient nordiques ou méridionales, occidentales ou orientales.

L. Fitzgerald & M. Williams (dir.), *Mamma Mia! The Movie. Exploring a Cultural Phenomenon*, Londres, Bloomsbury, 2013.

C. Haworth, « Star Quality? Song, Celebrity and the Jukebox Musical in *Mamma Mia!* », in K.J. Donnelly & B. Carroll (dir.), *Contemporary Musical Film*, Edimbourg, Edinburgh University Press, 2017, p. 107-122.

S. Richards, « *And Then We Danced: Queer Sounds and Movements* », *Senses of Cinema*, n° 94, 2020.

**Stéphane Sawas** est Professeur des universités à l'INALCO (Paris) où il enseigne la littérature grecque moderne, l'histoire du cinéma et de la musique en Grèce et en Europe. Il dirige le Centre d'Etude et de Recherche sur les Littératures et les Oralités du Monde (CERLOM, EA4124), coordonne à l'INALCO le parcours Arts du monde en licence et en Master et anime au Musée du Quai Branly le séminaire doctoral Musique et identités. Il est aussi chargé de cours à l'École Normale Supérieure. Ses travaux portent en particulier sur les relations entre création littéraire, musicale et audiovisuelle en Grèce et en Europe aux XX<sup>e</sup> et XXI<sup>e</sup> siècles. Il a reçu en 2013 la Médaille d'Or de la Société Grecque des Traducteurs Littéraires.

Parmi ses récentes publications, mentionnons : « Narrative Efficiency and the Constraints of the Short Form in *Les Engagés* », in S. Wells-Lassagne & al. (dir.), *Brevity and the Short Form in Serial Television*, Edimbourg, Edinburgh University Press, 2024, p. 134-144 ; « Dalida (1933-1987) : construction et évolution d'un répertoire méditerranéen », *Babel. Littératures*

*plurielles*, n° 49, 2024, p. 137-153 ; « Μεταφράζοντας τον Θεοτόκη στα γαλλικά στον 20ό και τον 21ο αιώνα », *Πόρφυρας*, n° 185-186, 2025, p. 440-451.

**Jan-Olof Gullö, Royal College of Music, Stockholm; Thomas Floren, Dalarna University, Falun; Bo Westman, Royal College of Music, Stockholm**  
***Transforming Failure into Fame: ABBA 1973-1974***

ABBA's victory with "Waterloo" at the Eurovision Song Contest marked a pivotal milestone in their career. After a less successful debut in 1973 with "Ring Ring," the group rebranded as ABBA and focused on creating a memorable Eurovision entry in 1974. They experimented with several songs before choosing "Waterloo," a catchy, rock-influenced track referencing Napoleon's defeat. With flamboyant costumes and energetic performances, "Waterloo" won and propelled ABBA to international fame. This study examines the period from the release of "Ring Ring" in 1973 to their Eurovision victory in 1974, highlighting the musical changes made following their initial setback. It draws on media reports, anecdotal accounts, and notably, interviews and discussions with key figures including members of ABBA. The findings suggest that the 1973 defeat acted as a significant catalyst for their subsequent success. A key factor was the collaboration between songwriters and producers Björn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson, along with audio engineer Michael B. Tretow. Inspired by Phil Spector's "Wall of Sound," Tretow, for instance, recorded the backing track twice and manipulated tape speeds to craft a richer, more orchestral sound. At the time, Ulvaeus and Andersson had already worked successfully together for several years as in-house producers at Polar Music under Stig "Stikkan" Andersson. They had taken over from the previous producer, Bengt Bernhag, who had died suddenly in 1971. The findings show that ABBA's unexpected failure in 1973, while disappointing, ultimately motivated their success. This aligns with the project's theme, "Great dragons only take off against the wind," illustrating how setbacks can lead to major achievements in the music industry. Furthermore, the findings highlight how ABBA's history—including the individual achievements of its members and Ulvaeus and Andersson's experience as music producers shaped their songwriting and production skills, significantly contributing to their later triumphs.

**Jan-Olof Gullö** is a Professor of Music Production at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, Sweden. He has a professional background as a record producer, television producer, and

musician. For the past twenty-five years, he has primarily worked as a researcher and educator in higher education. Additionally, Jan-Olof Gullö is an affiliated Professor of Music Education at Linnaeus University.

**Thomas Florén** is a Senior Lecturer in Sound and Music Production at the Department of Culture and Society at Dalarna University, where he also serves as Vice-Dean. His research primarily focuses on the sociology of music and music production in higher education. Thomas Florén is also Chair of MIRAC - the Music-focused Interdisciplinary Research & Analysis Center.

**Bo Westman** is a Senior Lecturer and Head of the Academy of Folk Music, Jazz, and Music and Media Production at the Royal College of Music in Stockholm, Sweden. He has had an extensive career as a musician, including performing in all Stockholm productions of musicals by Björn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson-Chess, Kristina från Duvemåla, and *Mamma Mia!*.

**Lars Kaijser, Stockholm University**

***Shaping History Through Exhibitions. On the changing biography of ABBA at ABBA The Museum***

In 2013, ABBA The Museum opened in Stockholm. Under the title *Walk in, Dance Out*, the museum depicts important events and happenings in ABBA's history. The museum is produced in close relation to the four ABBA members. It is interactive, with built-up interiors and plenty of objects from the different stages of their career. When the museum opened, ABBA was more of a historical phenomenon. During the last decade, a couple of events have meant that the group could once again be considered active. To begin with, the group released a new album ABBA Voyage in 2021. In addition, in 2022, the – in terms of visitor numbers – very successful concert experience ABBA Voyage opened in London where the audience gets to experience a concert with ABBA performed by a live orchestra and the ABBA members themselves as four avatars. These and further events have been displayed at the museum as new exhibitions have been added and changed.

This paper examines to what extent and if so, how the changed exhibitions affect the image of ABBA that the museum conveys. The starting point is an annual documentation made of the museum since it started. Through photographs and notes, I have observed what changes have

been added and what has disappeared. My paper draws attention to how the story of ABBA is exhibited. Where and when is the starting-point for ABBA? Is there an end? How is the group's work contextualized in history and contemporary times? In other words, what kind of biography will the visitors encounter at the museum.

**Lars Kaijser** is Professor and Director of Ethnology at Stockholm University. Kaijser works in an ethnographic tradition and has in his research been interested in cultural perspectives on small scale entrepreneurial business, cultural heritage, popular music, guided tours and the human relationship to nature. A recurring focus has been on intermediaries and the cultural implications of their activities, be it the distribution of everyday goods, interpretations of popular music history or knowledge about nature and environmental problems. In the field of popular music, Kaijser has studied Beatles tourism in Liverpool and elsewhere, concert organizers in small town contexts, contemporary Swedish music of the seventies and sing-along events.

**Shanika Ranasinghe, independent researcher, London**

***'You Owe Me One?': the gift-debt and tensions created by ABBA's '35-year gap'***

Do a band owe their fans anything other than their music? This paper explores this question by applying gift exchange literature, participant-observation fieldwork, and ethnographic data, to the case study of ABBA fandom.

In 2017, ABBA began secretly recording new songs together for the first time since 1982. During this 35-year absence from music-making and public performance (referred to by some long-term ABBA fans as "the 35-year gap"), ABBA nevertheless maintained both a hugely passionate fanbase, as well as a continual presence in the core repertoire of modern Anglophone pop music. When ABBA finally announced in April 2018 that they had recorded 'two new songs', one might have expected all ABBA fans and listeners to be jubilant; however, this was not the case. A very small but vocal minority of ABBA's core fandom (defined as those who are or were card-carrying members of the Official International ABBA Fan Club) felt either rather angry or conflicted. Despite their loyalty towards ABBA during and beyond the 35-year gap, some of these fans feel frustrated by the behaviour of the ABBA members, their management, and their record label. A few core fans felt abandoned by ABBA during the 35-

year gap, whilst other core fans feel that ABBA prioritise the wider, more populist fanbase over their core fans.

This paper uncovers how ABBA's unforeseen 35-year gap created tensions and, ultimately, a 'gift-debt' between ABBA and their core fandom – one that, I argue, can never be fully redressed, despite the best intentions of both sides.

**Shanika Ranasinghe** was recently awarded her PhD in ethnomusicology from the Department of Music at Royal Holloway, University of London (UK). Her thesis constituted a ten-year ethnography of ABBA fandom, occupying the liminal space between ethnomusicology, fan studies, and popular music studies. Having embedded herself in many different ABBA fan spaces, Shanika works alongside/with both long-term and younger ABBA lovers, as well as so-called 'super-fans' and more 'generic' listeners, to try and understand ABBA's widespread appeal. She recently published a book chapter (September 2025) with Bloomsbury Academic on nostalgia and favourite ABBA songs, following an article for *The Conversation* (September 2021) about ABBA's comeback. Shanika has featured on Swedish, British, and Antipodean radio and TV, discussing ABBA fandom, and even did a bit of singing for Swedish national evening news!

**Michael Rauhut, University of Agder, Faculty of Fine Arts, Department of Popular Music, Kristiansand**

*“Thank You for the Music”*: *The East German Response to ABBA at the Crossroads of Politics and Fan Culture*

Popular music from the West was charged with multiple meanings in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the socialist part of Germany. In official discourse, it was schematically divided into politically valuable or negative. Anything that was critical of capitalism or fulfilled the vague cultural-political demand for “clean entertainment” was considered to be worthwhile. Lyrics that were critical of society and could also be associated with the GDR were assessed negatively, as were images and styles that were labeled “decadent” or “provocative.” Such music and its creators did not receive any airplay. However, the evaluation of Western music in everyday use was completely different. Listeners welcomed it as a symbol of freedom and the measure of all things. ABBA was one of those Western imports that were equally applauded by both politicians and fans. Their songs were broadcast, the

group appeared on a TV show, and as early as 1975, the state-owned record company produced an album under license. A few months after its release, “ABBA – The Movie” hit East German cinemas. ABBA was presented as a band that offered sophisticated, scandal-free family entertainment and took a critical stance toward the mechanisms of the music business. For their fans, ABBA was an integral part of their everyday lives and an expression of their longing for freedom. They organized themselves in fan clubs, formed (illegal) networks, and commented on their favorite band’s appearance in the GDR media with an abundance of letters to the editor.

The paper discusses the perception of ABBA in East Germany from two different perspectives: it examines the official image of ABBA in the context of political relations between the GDR and Sweden and explores the identity-forming effect of the music within the fan community. It contributes to the discourse on meaning production through popular music.

**Michael Rauhut** (PhD), studied musicology at Humboldt University in Berlin and was a founding member of the Center for Popular Music Research. Since 2008, he has been a professor of popular music at the University of Agder in Kristiansand, Norway. Rauhut has written extensively on the history of popular music in the GDR. His publications include seven monographs, the most recent being *Silly’s Februar* (33 1/3 Europe series), New York: Bloomsbury Academic, t.b.p. in May 2026. Alongside academic activities, Rauhut works as a radio journalist and filmmaker.

**Gittit Pearlmutter, independent researcher**

***From Romantic Heartbreak to Social Alienation: Portishead’s Reinterpretation of ABBA’s “S.O.S.”***

This paper examines Portishead’s cover of ABBA’s “S.O.S.,” exploring how forty years after its 1975 release, the trip-hop ensemble transforms the original’s romantic heartbreak into a haunting portrayal of social alienation. The analysis employs three distinct approaches:

Traditional music theory: ABBA’s harmonic progression emphasizes the parallel major, cushioning the heartbreak and presenting it as a tolerable experience. Portishead’s version stagnates in minor tonality, creating a fundamentally different atmosphere of inescapable despair.

Production-based analysis: Following Simon Zagorski-Thomas (2014, 2017), I shall discuss briefly elements of the recording process which contribute to the stark difference. ABBA's traditional recording approach prioritizes audience connection through familiar compositional and performance conventions. Portishead's approach is characterized by *opaque mediation* rather than *transparent mediation* of technology (Brøvig-Hanssen, 2013). Thus, they disrupt these conventions, impeding listeners' recognition of traditional song structures and creating intentional alienation.

Ecological approach to music perception (Clarke, 2005): ABBA employs a theatrical, performance-oriented aesthetic, while Portishead's digitally-driven language foregrounds technological sonority and affordances as subject matter.

The paper argues that Portishead's version reveals a compelling irony: alienation is musically portrayed through the very technological means responsible for contemporary social disconnection. Their experimental production techniques simultaneously create and lament the estrangement they depict. Contextualizing this within broader social frameworks, the analysis examines the song's inclusion in Ben Wheatley's dystopian film *High-Rise* (2015) and its release as tribute to MP Jo Cox following her assassination during the Brexit campaign—cultural moments that mark its transformation from personal heartbreak to political statement.

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### **Discography**

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- Portishead. 2016. "SOS" YouTube video, 3:29. Uploaded June 22, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WVe-9VWlcCo>. Accessed October 1, 2025.

## **Videography**

Wheatley, Ben, dir. 2015. *High-Rise*. Screenplay by Amy Jump. UK: Recorded Picture Company, Film4, and BFI.

**Gittit Pearlmutter** is an independent researcher engaged with contemporary sound design technologies both in the academic sphere and in the recording studio. In her doctoral research, she explored the term *DAW-based songwriting* to describe the use of technological affordances to disrupt narrative mechanisms in music. Combining theoretical discourse from her academic studies in London and in Israel with practical experience as a musician and recording producer, she developed an analytical perspective that acknowledges technology as a key creative factor in both the making of popular music and the undermining of its traditions. In addition to her scholarly research, she frequently collaborates with bands and performing artists, and teaches courses in sound editing, popular music analysis, and music production at several academic institutions.

## **Rose Barrett, University of Lorraine**

### ***Gimme Gimme Gimme My Life Now: ABBA and Nationalteatern's paradoxical poetic relationship***

This paper focuses on the avant-garde theater collective turned rock band Nationalteatern, whose main period of musical production (1974–1980) runs almost exactly parallel to ABBA's years of major international success following their Eurovision victory. Nationalteatern's theater productions laid the foundations for a Marxist, socially critical songwriting narrative, usually related from the perspectives of marginalized and working-class characters. Although ABBA, as the commercial disco-schlager poster child of Swedish cultural exportation, might appear to represent the musical and poetic opposite of this artistic and political ideology, many of their songs resonate strongly with Nationalteatern's recurring themes of alienation, commodification, and the experience of living between illusion and disillusion, fantasy and reality, while continually expressing the dream of a better life. These thematic overlaps raise questions about the relationship between text, music, and ideology in the groups' artistic identities, as well as the role of individual creative personalities behind their songs. In the case of Nationalteatern, the conceptual approach to the albums *Barn av vår tid* and *Rovarkungens ö*

owes much to songwriter Ulf Dageby's recurring narratives, characters, and influences, especially Bob Dylan.

Despite their artistic differences, both groups poetically tap into a distinctly postmodern zeitgeist centered on the spectacle, whether expressed – ironically – from within the mainstream or from the more explicitly critical standpoint of the margins of society.

**Rose Barrett** went from a musical career specializing in early music and historical performance practice to a Master's in language and translation studies before beginning her PhD at the Université de Lorraine. Her dissertation focuses on the connected processes of original creation and translingual adaptation in the narratives and artistic identities of European singer-songwriters. Other research interests include 70s progressive rock and the broader relationships between artistic identity, cultural identity, and sound.

## **Sverker Hyltén-Cavallius, National Collections of Music, Theatre and Dance, Stockholm**

### **“Cut out Stikkan!” – ABBA as the commercial Other of Swedish Progg**

In my 1999 interview with Leif Nylén, drummer and lyricist with politically progressive rock band of the 1970s *Gunder Hägg / Blå Tåget*, he reminisced about how he and the band together had watched the Eurovision Song Contest in Brighton 1974 on TV and scoffed at ABBA for their meaningless music and ridiculous performance. Some 25 years later he could see that they were not that bad. In this paper I will discuss ABBA's prominent role as a constitutive outside the politically progressive music movement (*progg*). With examples ranging from the progg movement's iconography to music and interview material, I will show how ABBA (including manager Stikkan Andersson) and their music was established as a key symbol of crass commercialism, inauthenticity, superficiality and mass consumption. I will argue that the progg movement, in light of its numerous internal conflicts regarding everything from aesthetics to ideology, depended on ABBA as a consolidating external other from which they could distance themselves. Today, the movement's criticism of ABBA has in turn become an integral part of a Swedish ABBA narrative, establishing ABBA as the 1970s Left's cultural pariah that ultimately has come to win everyone's respect. In the long run it seems, the relation between the progg movement and ABBA has been reciprocal.

**Sverker Hyltén-Cavallius** is an associate professor of Ethnology at Stockholm university and works as research archivist specialized in popular music and research coordinator at the Centre for Swedish folk music and jazz research (Svenskt visarkiv) of the National Collections of Music, Theatre and Dance, Stockholm. His research has focused on popular music, ageing and cultural memory, popular historiographies, digital folklore and narratology. He has published in e.g. *Popular music*, *Ethnologia Scandinavica* and *Western folklore*, his most recent edited volume being *Creative Shifts: Cultural Flows in 1960s and 1970s Sweden* (Hyltén-Cavallius ed., 2023).

**Barbara Barreiro Leon, University of Aberdeen; Lisa Brunzell, Independent, Shane Strachan, University of Aberdeen**

**Roundtable: *ABBA in Practice: Tribute, Photography, and Intergenerational Memory in the UK***

ABBA's 1974 win at the Eurovision Song Contest in Brighton marked a turning point, not only for Sweden's global pop trajectory but also for the identity of Eurovision itself. The legacy of that moment continues to resonate strongly in the UK today, whether through immersive experiences such as *ABBA Voyage* or the *Mamma Mia!* phenomenon at London's O2, underscoring ABBA's enduring place within Britain's cultural memory.

This roundtable takes inspiration from Lisa Brunzell's book *Let the World Adore You*, shortlisted for the Rencontres d'Arles Photo-Text Book Award 2025, which captures the lives of Britain's ABBA tribute artists. The discussion will bring together photographer Lisa Brunzell and poet Dr. Shane Strachan, whose poems accompany the photographs, in conversation with Dr. Barreiro Leon. Combining critical analysis, artistic dialogue, and a live performance by Dr. Strachan, the session will explore themes of simulacra, performance, identity, and the cultural legacy of ABBA in the UK as an intergenerational cultural practice. The conversation will highlight the creative lives of tribute bands and emphasize the interdisciplinary interplay between photography, writing, performance, and academic research, fostering a dynamic and participatory dialogue around memory, fandom, and cultural representation.

**Dr Barbara Barreiro Leon** – Lecturer in Film & Visual Culture in the University of Aberdeen, works on representations of cultural identities through popular culture images in media and visual culture. She has published and participated in academic journals and conferences and is

currently working on a monograph where she will discuss identities in popular culture and media such as music videos and the Eurovision Song Contest. Due to this, she has made appearances in international media, featuring in interviews with the BBC or The Guardian and reviews of the Eurovision Song Contest in both newspapers and TV.

**Lisa Brunzell** graduated with an MA in Documentary Photography from South Wales University in 2017. She now lives and works in Gothenburg, Sweden. *Let the World Adore You*, her debut photo-book published in February 2025, was shortlisted for the Rencontres d'Arles Photo-Text Book Award.

**Dr Shane Strachan**'s debut poetry collection DWAMS (Tapsalteerie) was nominated for Best Poetry Book at the 2024 Saltire Awards (Scotland's National Book Awards). He was the 2022-23 Scots Scribever (National Library of Scotland) for which he was awarded Scots Champion at the 2023 Scots Language Awards. He has performed his work on BBC Radio 4 and displayed his spoken-word film and exhibition 'The Bill Gibb Line' in Aberdeen Art Gallery across 2020-21 before further commissions for V&A Dundee; this will culminate in the publication of *Refashioning Bill Gibb for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Bloomsbury Academic) in January 2026, which Strachan has co-edited. He holds a PhD in Creative Writing from the University of Aberdeen where he now lectures.