

**QUOTE: “Beethoven 'was' the pop writer for the classical era. ABBA were influenced by this. It’s in every song they ever wrote.”**

Undoubtedly, Suzi Quatro broke down the barriers for many female rock stars with her tough leather-clad look and catchy pop/rock tunes during the glam rock years of the early 70s. A big ABBA fan herself, Suzi enthusiastically accepted the offer to join our Famous ABBA Fans Gallery. With her fantastic cover of Does Your Mother Know that she recently recorded, she certainly deserves her place in the ABBA annals. I met Suzi at the Stag Studios in Essex (“It’s a nice little studio. On my new box set there is the track Desperado with Jeff Beck, and I recorded the piano and the vocals here”), where she rehearsed for her upcoming BBC radio show in celebration of her 50 years in the music business.

**At what time did ABBA enter your life and did you become a fan?**

I worked with ABBA way back when Ring Ring was a single. We did a TV show together in Belgium and lots of TV after that. We ran into each other quite a bit. Their style wasn't exactly finalised yet. I didn't actually become a fan until Waterloo. I thought they were fab and turned the *Eurovision Song Contest* on its head.

**What are your memories of meeting the ABBA members?**

Nice people - very normal.

**In your opinion what is the greatest merit of ABBA's music?**

The simplicity.

**Why are ABBA still so successful today?**

Good songs, good melodies, good song structure. It all stands the test of time. A good song is a good song.

**Do you agree that ABBA successfully took on different musical styles?**

No. I would say that they were and are a 'pop' band, which I consider to be a compliment.

**During the recent RTL *ABBA Tribute Show* you demonstrated the similarities between Beethoven and ABBA on the piano. How classical is ABBA and how pop is Beethoven?**

It’s an even trade-off, as I said on the show. Beethoven 'was' the pop writer for the classical era. ABBA were influenced by this. It’s in every song they ever wrote. I know because I also studied classical piano, and Beethoven was my favourite, too.

**How important were the input of Frida and Agnetha for Abba's success?**

I think they were important, first of all visually. Even though they were both pretty,

they weren't like Marilyn Monroe. Not these unobtainable beauties - they were obtainable beauties. You were comfortable with looking at them. They complemented each other and their voices were vibrant together. They made a great double tracking sound. Very good!

**How do you appreciate them as solo singers?**

I like their separate voices but I think they really commanded their own when they sang together. That creates a certain sound that is hard to beat.

**How familiar are you with their pre and post Abba career?**

Sure. They are both artists in their own right but, even so, I like what they do together. It *creates* something.

**Do you think ABBA were underestimated by the rock critics in the 70s?**

Of course. It was popular not to like them. They weren't 'cool'. I think whatever pop group you are talking about, they are met with the same prejudices. Rock critics say 'Ho, ho, we're not pop!' But at the end of the day, when one of those rock critics is in a club and the ABBA song comes up, they will be singing like the rest of us. It's all bullsh\*\*. My dad always said, "There's only two kinds of music, good and bad!" Pop-wise it doesn't get any better than ABBA. Maybe they had a hard time, but who cares.

**Times have changed. These days ABBA get 4-5 star reviews for their albums.**

Because it's time. Now those rock critics can look back at pop and say, "You know what. That was good!" It's the test of time.

**How important was ABBA's image for their success?**

They were just good looking enough, not unobtainable. The looks were important, and the balance was perfect.

**Could you compare this with the importance of the image for your own success?** Yes again. I was accessible, cute. Not gorgeous. Not big busted. A little tough, but feminine. It worked!

**You were ground breaking as the first female rock star. How aware are you of the fact that you are a role model for many female musicians?**

Of course. I get told this all the time by just about every woman in the industry. I got a lot of respect from my colleagues. However, I did not have a role model. I had to make it up as I went along; somebody had to kick the door down, and it turned out to be me, just by being me. I did not and would not change. I had to make it on my own terms.

**Which female rocker gave you the biggest compliment?**

Oh geez. I guess Joan Jett gave me my biggest compliment. In 1977-1978, we happened to be in Japan at the same time, not playing together though. Joan Jett used to go from her show, get in the cab and quickly get to mine and stand at the side of the stage and watch me from beginning to end. She didn't take her eyes off me. That's a compliment! I also remember Tina Weymouth, she came up to me and I just made a little musician's joke, and she took me seriously and said (*imitates low voice*), "Don't you know how important you are?"

**How did the duet with Andy Scott for the ABBA Tribute Show come about?**

They asked if I wanted to contribute. I am a big fan so I said yes. I had worked with Andy before. He produced my *Back To The Drive* album, and we are very close friends. Does Your Mother Know was his suggestion and perfect for me.

**How was it to work with him on this track?**

Great. He had his vision, he had it all in his head, and then he showed it to me. He did turn it into a rock track. Andy put on the beat as I walked into the studio. It sounded perfect, and I put on my bass. Then I started to sing, and I was so surprised because it sounded like it was my song! At first, I did honestly think, 'Can I do an ABBA song?' because I'm not a pop artist, I'm rock. But all of a sudden it was a rock song. I guess it's just the way I approached it. I *attacked* it more. As soon as I put on my bass, it turned into a rock song, that's the truth.

**For your cover version of Does Your Mother Know you didn't change the man/woman viewpoint. Unlike most artists, you consistently keep the original lyrics when you cover another artist's song.**

I know. I always do.

**Is this on purpose?**

Yes. In other words, I take the lyric for what it is. Years ago, I did it on my first album *I Wanna Be Your Man*, and I thought, "Yeah, I wanna be your strength, I wanna be your rock that you hold on to. So yes, why not I wanna be your man." I'm really an androgynous person anyway. I'm a tomboy, but also feminine. I'm a bit of everything. I don't need to change. I always make a joke I don't do gender, but I actually don't!

**Did you get a lot of responses to this attitude?**

It's just me. People have always mentioned it. It is part of my appeal. It is part of why I became known. I am androgynous. I never went up there thinking I'm a girl, I'm gonna show you that I can play bass. That's not in me. In the same way if there's a lyric, you sing the lyric like that.

**Many of your fans must connect with this.**

The fans totally connect with it, since day one. They tell me so.

**Will you play Does Your Mother Know live during your concert tour?**

I don't know...we might. I never thought about it. We could add it as an encore. I do have enough of my own hits, but it's not a bad idea. It's on the box set *The Girl From Detroit City*, celebrating my 50 years in Rock and Roll. My rule is I could play anything on stage that I recorded. I just got my first copy and it's fantastic.

**Was the title on purpose changed to Does Your Mama Know?**

(*surprised*) I don't know! I didn't see it. Maybe your mama doesn't like it (*laughs*). Does your mama know - maybe it's because I'm American, and I say mama! Or maybe they wanted to make it a bit more rock!

**Is Does Your Mother Know also your favourite ABBA song?**

It was the perfect one for me to cover, but my absolute fave is The Winner Takes It

All.

**How difficult is it to cover an ABBA song?**

Not difficult at all. You just need to take the song and put your own stamp on it. But I must say, I was surprised that I was able to put such a strong stamp on one of their songs.

**What is your favourite ABBA period?**

I like it when the two couples were breaking up. It gave it a new 'serious and heartfelt' dimension. It got serious.

**You have an impressive career yourself. What do you consider its highlights so far?**

All of it! This year I celebrate fifty years in the business. I have sold 55 million records and, in fact, until ABBA, I beat the Beatles in record sales in Australia! Then, they beat me ...

**You were also very successful in several television and theatre productions.**

I appeared for three years on (the TV series) *Happy Days*, alongside The Fonz (Henry Winkler). I have done West End musicals and have written a musical. I have written my autobiography and have done a one woman show based around this, I have had my own television talk show and have been on BBC Radio 2 since 1999 with my own show. Also, going to Broadway with my one woman show, *Unzipped*, based on my autobiography of the same title, was a highlight. In 2015, I am releasing a poetry book. I could never pick just one highlight.

**If you had to make a choice as to which Suzi Quatro hit is the closest to your heart, which would it be?**

Difficult. Can The Can was the first one and therefore important; then there were Devil Gate Drive, just a great single that captured that live feel, which is hard to do and 'If You Can't Give Me Love' was a wonderful song. Perhaps Chinn and Chapman is best and, more up to date, there is the new single from the 4-CD box set with the same name, The Girl From Detroit City, which was released this year in September, to celebrate this special 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

**When you write a song, what comes first - the music or the lyric?**

Very often I get a title, it is usually a phrase or a title. It suggests a rhythm, it suggests which instrument you should start it on. It's all in the title. Mama's Boy can only be like 'rum rum' (*imitates drum sound*). Sometimes it's one line and you think, 'Oh, this is a good line for a song'. The occasions on which the music comes first are less.

**So after you have found a title, you compose the music and the rest of the lyric.**

Yeah, you sit down at whatever instrument you think you're gonna do it on. If it's going to be a rock number I try it first on guitar, although I'm limited on guitar. I was not a guitar player turned to bass. I was always a bass player. If the song is going to be a bit more complicated, I compose it on my piano. I've written a few on drums, I've written a few on bass. But mainly the piano is my instrument to write. I'm a schooled pianist. So it's my orchestra. No matter what I want to do, I can find the chords there.

**Who do you consider to be your major musical influences?**

Elvis Presley was a huge influence. Otis Redding, Billie Holiday believe it or not, Canned Heat and Motown music for my bass playing. Who else? Jackson Browne, Bob Dylan. I have a lot of people I really like and that I have taken a bit from. In my *Unzipped* show I have seven Elvis epiphanies that are part of my story. One of them happened in 1974. I was in Memphis, on tour, and Elvis had heard my version of All Shook Up. When I was in my hotel, I was contacted by his people, and then I got a phone call (*imitates Elvis' deep voice*), "Hi, this is Elvis! I think you made the best cover version of All shook up! I want you to come over to Graceland," and I answered, "Sorry, I've got no time. I'm busy!" Why did I turn him down? I thought it was too early, I'd only had three or four hits, and didn't feel up to meeting him!

**Could you describe the working process with Mike Chapman, with whom you have created so many great records?**

We get along great. We both respect each other and still work together today. Mike never brought me a song that wasn't written for me. He always picks the best of my own compositions and gets great vocals from me every time. He is a special, talented man.

**How do you appreciate the album Mike Chapman has produced for ABBA's Agnetha, *Wrap Your Arms Around Me*?**

Fantastic! If anyone can get the best out of her, Mike's your man!

**Your biggest US hit was your duet with Chris Norman. What is the story behind the song *Stumblin' In*?**

We were at an awards ceremony in Cologne. I was also recording *If You Knew Suzi* at the same time. All of us went to an after-hours party, and there was a band. I dragged Chris up, reluctantly, to jam. Mike Chapman was there, too. He loved the sound and the look, and the idea came...The song was written that night. We put the demo down in the studio the next day. The rest is history...

**It must have been a great feeling when you hit the Top 10 in the US.**

We had always nudged the charts before that. They were just not Top 10, but the records were in the charts. The albums always did very well, we toured every single year. We played Madison Square Garden five times! But when I finally got a number 4, a million seller, that was great. Sure, sure! Finally! And it was not even what I normally do, that was so crazy. But it's a great song; it touches people's heart.

**I certainly love it! You've been living in Britain all these years. Do you still feel American or do you prefer the British way?**

I'm American. I will always be American. That won't change. I'm always an American in London. I go back about two, three times a year.

**How did you avoid the traps of success when you were young and successful?**

I was raised by a father who was professional. For me, I was a professional. I wasn't like, "Yeah, let's be famous! And Sex, drugs and rock and roll!" That's not how I treated it. This is my job. I want to do my job as good as I can. It means being sober, being straight, it means running to keep your energy level. It means being a professional rock and roller.

**It seems you always had a clear goal. You've also said that all successful**

**artists have this focus.**

Yes, absolutely. Otherwise they are in the 27th club, aren't they? You have to be focused. If you are here for the long haul, you have to take care of yourself. And I'm here for the long haul.

**Do you recognize it in people when you meet them?**

Yes, immediately.

**How different is it being a pop star today compared to the 70s/80s?**

Rock star. Thank you. I've never been a pop star, and they are two different things (*smiles*).

**Has the music business changed a lot?**

I come from the era where you learnt your craft from every gig that God sent you. It hasn't changed for the better. I think people need to go back to the grass roots to be playing live gigs, because that's what it's all about. It would be nice to become organic again, it's become too much of a slick X-factor. It's not what it used to be.

**Is it more difficult for young people?**

I don't even know if it's more difficult, it's not as lasting. One minute you hear someone, the next minute you don't remember who they were.

**What are your plans for the future?**

Keep working, keep enjoying this God-given long career. I love what I do and feel very blessed in my chosen profession.