



ABBA: 'Heart-stoppingly gorgeous music.'

The Fab Four

Sod Ikea, they're still **Sweden's finest export.**



DURING A documentary featured on one of the two DVDs that stand alongside the nine CDs (all eight albums and one rarities disc) which form this collection, ABBA's Björn Ulvaeus explains that there is little point an album track existing if it could not also be a single. Accidentally, perhaps, he has tapped into ABBA's genius.

Their extraordinary singles are part of our cultural fabric. As is known, some of these chart the rise and fall of two relationships (the sheer joy of *I Do, I Do, I Do, I Do, I Do* to the bleakness of *One Of Us*), ensuring that almost their entire canon is coated in Scandinavian melancholy. And all this from a band singing and writing in their second language.

IT IS THE art of despair (*Super Trouper* speaks of being "part of a success that never ends" but also asks "How can anyone be so lonely?"), and there are fewer smiles than *Joy Division*. But 2.05 minutes into the oft-mocked *Fernando* are five seconds of the most heart-stoppingly gorgeous music you will ever hear.

The singles guarantee immortality, the videos (all here) remind us that ABBA's fevered sexual undertow came from the raven-haired Anni-Frid Lyngstad, but the real revelation, hitherto lost in too-easily-assumed slapdash history, is that Ulvaeus is correct. Almost everything sounds like a single, yet ABBA were an albums band. Another *Town* *Another Train* and *Disillusion* from the 1973 debut *Ring Ring* suggest they always were.

Eight years later, their final album, *The Visitors*, included the unyieldingly bleak *When All Is Said And Done* and *Like An Angel Passing Through My Room* ("In the twilight hour, I am alone"). By then, they were getting really good at it. Astounding. JOHN AIZLEWOOD

DOWNLOAD: *When All Is Said And Done* → *Fernando* → *Under Attack* → *Super Trouper* → *Waterloo*

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