

## PLG FINDS 'GOLD' IN ABBA'S VAULT

(Continued from page 8)

music business. Lynstad is involved in environmental issues and now lives in Zurich (where she made a guest appearance at a Roxette show early last year). Ulvaeus and Andersson continue working as songwriters and producers. No reunion of the group is planned.

But PLG in the U.S. has uncovered a "tremendous fan network" for Abba, says Andrew Kronfeld, product manager for the album. "A lot of Abba fans are sending us [memorabilia]," he says.

The company already has held one "Abba Gold" party at a dance club in Chicago—bell-bottoms and blue eyeshadow were optional—and plans similar events in as many as a dozen major U.S. markets to supplement retail promotion efforts.

"Abba Gold" was compiled by Chris Griffin, director of catalog marketing for PolyGram International, who explains that both corporate and creative developments prompted the project. In 1990, PolyGram Music Publishing purchased Sweden's Polar Music, founded by Abba manager Stig Anderson (no relation to group member Benny Andersson). PolyGram thus acquired the rights to the Abba repertoire, both songs and master recordings, says Griffin.

Meanwhile, in recent years, Abba hits like "Dancing Queen," "Waterloo," and "Fernando" have been gaining new exposure through some unlikely avenues. Erasure's tribute EP, "Abba-esque," broke through on the upper half of The Billboard 200 in July 1992 and went to No. 1 in the

U.K. The Australian cover band Björn Again has brought the live Abba experience to a new generation of fans. And even U2 added "Dancing Queen" to shows on last year's Zoo TV tour, including a July 1992 performance of the hit in Stockholm, where the band was joined by Andersson and Ulvaeus.

PolyGram commissioned market research in London to choose the 19 tracks for "Abba Gold," beginning with "Waterloo," the hit that won the Eurovision Song Contest in Brighton, England, in 1974 and subsequently peaked at No. 6 on the Billboard Hot 100 in June of that year. The album includes the 10 top-20 hits that Abba scored in the U.S. between 1974-80. The most popular of those, "Dancing Queen," hit No. 1 in the U.S. in 1977.

The tracks were remastered for CD by Michael B. Tretow, who engineered the original recordings. Music

journalist John Tobler, who was press officer at the 1974 Eurovision Song Contest, was tapped to write liner notes for the collection and a subsequent biography, "Abba Gold: The Complete Story," just published in the U.K.

Market research also helped PolyGram International design the package for "Abba Gold." It decided not to feature a photo of the group on the front of the package because their '70s image, unlike the music, seemed dated to consumers in focus groups, says Griffin.

At its peak, Abba sold more albums in Europe than in the U.S., where the group was better known as a singles act. That may have prompted some initial reservations at retail about the potential for "Abba Gold" in the U.S. However, PLG has been able to capitalize on the continuing appeal of the Abba hits to raise retail enthusiasm for the new album,

says Kronfeld.

The collection arrives in the U.S. a full year after its international release. That delay prevented erosion of overseas sales by the export of less expensive CDs from the U.S., executives say, and also allowed "Abba Gold" to be positioned as a strong gift title during the year's fourth quarter. PLG's Dobbis says he expects "Abba Gold" will see immediate success and will remain a steady catalog seller for retailers.

"With Abba, the timing really is excellent because of the building interest in this music and this era," says Dobbis. "Enough time has passed that it's no longer 'uncool.'"

PolyGram International in London will eagerly watch for the reaction "Abba Gold" gets in the American market. It already has compiled and released a follow-up album outside the U.S., the 20-track collection of "More Abba Gold: More Abba Hits."

## BETWEEN THE BULLETS



by Geoff Mayfield

**FRESH MEAT:** Garth Brooks and Mariah Carey hold on the top two spots on The Billboard 200, but the big news at the top of the chart is the return of **Meat Loaf**. His vaunted seven-times-platinum "Bat Out Of Hell" never ranked higher than No. 14 on the big chart, but his 1993 sequel, "Bat Out Of Hell II: Back Into Hell" roars in at No. 3, and falls fewer than 2,000 units of overtaking Carey at No. 2. The Loaf was definitely the big ticket among music retailers, clocking in at No. 1 for **The Musicland Group, Trans World Music Corp., National Record Mart, Strawberries, Nobody Beats The Wiz**, and other chains.

**OLD MEAT:** Interest in the new title continues to revitalize the original "Bat Out Of Hell," as a 43% gain returns the 1977 opus to the top of the Top Pop Catalog Albums list, ending **Bob Marley & the Wailers'** record-high streak. The late Marley led the chart for 19 consecutive weeks (Billboard, Sept. 4). "Bat Out Of Hell" had not been No. 1 on this list since Feb. 15 of this year.

**YOU CAN CALL HIM Prince** this time, because the new best-of sets chronicle the works he recorded before he changed his name to an unpronounceable symbol. You can also say he's a big seller of hits, as the three-piece "Hits/The B-Sides" debuts at No. 19 on The Billboard 200, while the two abbreviated versions also bow in the top 60. "Hits 1" climbs in at No. 46, while "Hits 2" enters at No. 55. Combined, the three titles total more than 87,000 units. Had a single title sold that many pieces in this chart week it would have bowed at No. 6.

**ROAD WORK:** Some touring artists see sales increases this week, including **Rod Stewart** (13-11), **Robert Plant** (136-127), and **Ottmar Liebert + Luna Negra** (147-139), while **Bette Midler**, who has started her much-publicized extended run at Radio City Music Hall in New York, bullets for a second straight week. Two other touring artists, **Billy Joel** (No. 5) and **Tina Turner** (No. 47), also bullet despite displacement. Backward bullets occur when titles with increases large enough to earn bullets are pushed back by high debuts or are overtaken by albums with even larger sales gains.

**HOT:** **Toni Braxton**, who was introduced last summer by the sizzling "Boomerang" soundtrack, jumps 3-1 on Top R&B Albums while picking up that chart's Greatest Gainer award and, at the same time, moves 18-14 on The Billboard 200 while winning that chart's Greatest Gainer for a second straight week. Pushing Braxton's sales is her multiformat hit "Another Sad Love Song" . . . At the risk of starting a sibling rivalry, note that **Janet Jackson's** latest (No. 7) now ties the number of weeks **Michael Jackson's** "Dangerous" spent in the top 10. We'll add that older brother only stayed there during his first 17 weeks. He didn't log the 18th week until this year's March 6 issue during his celebrated media blitz . . . Next week's key debut: **Nirvana**.

**STAR WARS:** It is still hard to say what effect, if any, the influx of television's late-night talk shows will have on music sales. Toni Braxton did appear Sept. 17 on "The Tonight Show With Jay Leno" but, as noted above, she was already showing momentum. The Sept. 17 "Late Show With David Letterman" may have helped **Stone Temple Pilots** halt a three-week slide (No. 8), but despite same-week visits to "The Arsenio Hall Show" and "The Chevy Chase Show," **Oleta Adams** suffers a modest sales decline (No. 101). **Kris Kross** (No. 35) and **Radiohead** (No. 56) each drop despite Sept. 14 shots on, respectively, "The Tonight Show" and "Late Night With Conan O'Brien."

## KEY RELEASES KICK OFF FOURTH QUARTER

(Continued from page 10)

dio.

Although Natalie Merchant has since left 10,000 Maniacs, the group's appearance on MTV's "Unplugged" will be issued Oct. 26 on Elektra. Among the cuts featured will be a cover of the Patti Smith/Bruce Springsteen composition "Because The Night," which will serve as the first single.

George Clinton and Tevin Campbell are atop the urban heap this month with "Hey Man, Smell My Finger" (Paisley Park/WB, Oct. 12), and "I'm Ready" (Qwest/WB, Oct. 26), respectively. Both artists have collaborated with Prince on several cuts. Clinton also gathered hip-hop top guns Dr. Dre, Ice Cube, and Chuck D. for his album's first single, "Paint The White House Black." Campbell worked under the production guid-

ance of L.A. Reid & Babyface, and Narada Michael Walden.

Also delivering urban sets in October are Teddy Pendergrass, "A Little More Magic" (Elektra, Oct. 5); Ed O.G. & The Bulldogs, "Roxbury 02119" (Chemistry/Mercury, Oct. 5); and Ronny Jordan, "The Quiet Revolution" (4th & B'way, Oct. 19).

Rockers will be offered a varied menu of new releases this month, starting with Jackson Browne's "I'm Alive" (Elektra, Oct. 26), and "Counterparts" by Rush (Atlantic, Oct. 15). Browne has collaborated with Scott Thurston on production, while Peter Collins was at the production helm of the Rush set.

Other rockers on tap this month include Alan Parsons, "Try Anything Once" (Arista, Oct. 26); the Lemonheads, "Come On, Feel The Lemon-

heads (Atlantic, Oct. 5); Mudhoney, "Five Dollar Bob's Mock Cooter Stew" (Reprise/WB, Oct. 26); and Concrete Blonde, "Mexican Moon" (Capitol, Oct. 19).

The Pet Shop Boys end a two-year break from recording on Oct. 5 with "Very." The EMI/ERG collection is preceded by the single, "Can You Forgive Her," which recently topped Billboard's Club Play Chart. The next single is a cover of the Village People evergreen "Go West."

Denizens of the dancefloor will also be served the debut of popular U.K. act D:Ream, "On" (Sire/Giant, Oct. 5).

A glittery array of country superstars are on board for "Common Thread: The Songs Of The Eagles" (Giant, Oct. 12), which will benefit the Walden Woods Project. Among the cuts featured are "Desperado" by Clint Black and "New Kid In Town" by Trisha Yearwood. Other artists include Brooks & Dunn, Tanya Tucker, and Billy Dean.

"No Alternatives" is the much-ballyhooed compilation to benefit the Red Hot Organization, which raises money for AIDS relief and research. The set, due Oct. 26 on Arista, has new material by Soul Asylum, Bob Mould, Matthew Sweet, Soundgarden, and Sonic Youth, among others. The first single is the Goo Goo Dolls' version of the Rolling Stones nugget "Bitch."

*Assistance in preparing this story was provided by Trudi Miller Rosenblum in New York, Carrie Borzillo in Los Angeles, and Peter Cronin in Nashville.*

## EX-POLYGRAM EXEC JOINS TRING INTERNATIONAL

(Continued from page 10)

against MIDEM Organisation in Paris courts, which ruled that Tring had been expelled unlawfully from this year's exhibition (Billboard, July 24).

Morris retired two years ago from his post as VP, general affairs, with PolyGram International, and previously was managing director of both PolyGram U.K. labels Phonogram and Polydor. He was deputy chairman of the British Phonographic Industry from 1983-1985. Since 1991 he has been a director of Andrew Lloyd Webber's Really Useful Holdings.

"I didn't look for this job," says Morris. "[Tring] searched for me, and they were very persistent."

In the late '60s and early '70s, Morris was deputy managing director of the EMI budget subsidiary Music For Pleasure, and played a large part in developing the company.

"I see a lot of parallels between what happened with Music For Pleasure in the early days and Tring now," Morris says. "At that time,

there were people in EMI who were very reluctant to go into the budget market, but afterwards saw the benefit."

Tring International says it has undertaken an audit of all its titles, and has removed "a handful" over which it believes there may be some potential conflict. The company says it buys all its licenses from third parties, and does not license material from major labels.

"I have sufficient confidence in Tring to know that if they fell into the trap where something was other than legitimate, they would remove it," Morris says.

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