

Mobile Management: Business & Your Bottom Line

# DJ TIMES

MARCH 1994

THE INT

LINE FOR THE PROFESSIONAL MOBILE & CLUB DJ

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**Whoomp,**  
There It Is!  
Tag Team's  
DJ Tips

**Ace of Base**  
perfect popsters

**Enter The Tunnel**  
NYC's Best New Club

**Mood II Swing**  
Classic Remixers

**Lisa Lisa**  
A Diva's Rebirth

**PLUS:**

KMFDM

Clinton  
Daniel

The Veldt

Tucson's  
Desert DJs

US3



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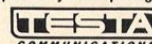
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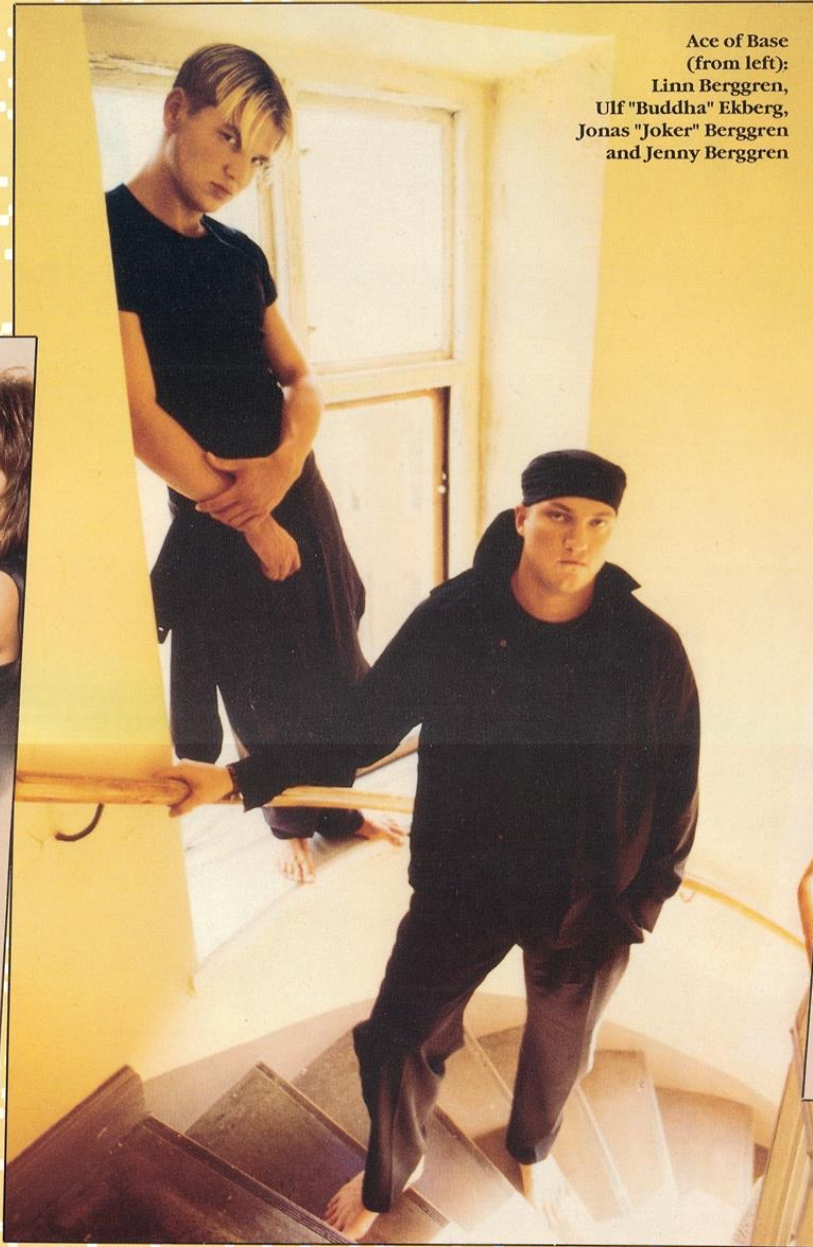
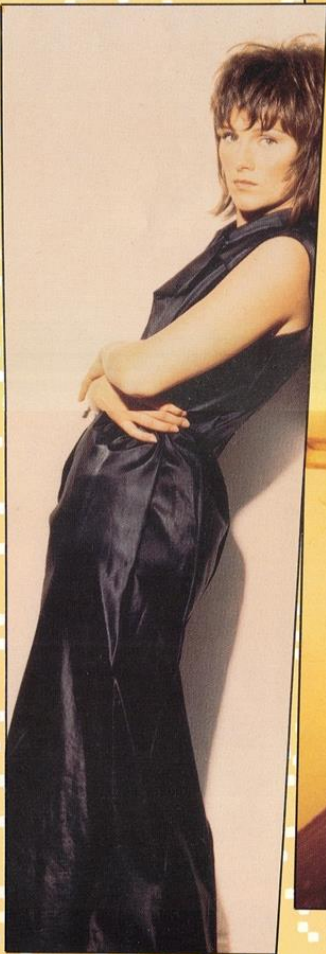
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March 1994

# PERFECT POPSTERS

Ace of Base  
(from left):  
Linn Berggren,  
Ulf "Buddha" Ekberg,  
Jonas "Joker" Berggren  
and Jenny Berggren



by  
Stephanie  
Shepherd

Sweden's Ace of Base  
Looks to Find Stateside Gold  
First Mined by Abba

Like Abba and Roxette before them, the Swedish import Ace of Base has found an appreciative audience here in the United States. With a captivating hook and a reggae-tinged melody, the group's single, "All That She Wants," has soared into the U.S. Top 10 like it has in almost every country in which it has been released.

Arista Records has been quick to follow up with an album entitled *The Sign*, which includes a second, equally hooky single of the same name. Due to their overwhelming popularity, the demands on the band made it difficult to find time for an interview, but they sandwiched in a phone interview from Miami where they were performing at Arista's national convention this past December.

The task of conversation fell to Ulf Ekberg, better known as Buddha, a nickname his classmates pinned on him in grade school. Buddha, a former audio engineer at one of Sweden's top studios, provides the technical expertise for the group. He gained access to music through computers, a skill he developed when his father bought him his first Commodore 20. Rather than get into programming, he favored learning the synthesizer and copying the sounds of his favorite German band, Kraftwerk.

However, life was not so linear for Buddha. As an adolescent he says he became caught up with gangs and drugs, an experience from which he is still recovering. As he explains it, it's easy to see how a person with his disposition might fall into this lifestyle. "I'm a man who has a lot of energy all the time," he states. "When I was young, I felt I couldn't show people my capabilities. I knew I could be a good leader so I became involved with gangs. This was the way to show people I was something. To prove that you are tough, everybody used drugs. I woke up after a while, but I was lucky. More than half of my old friends from that crowd are dead today."

In contrast, the other members of the band come from a tight-knit Christian family. Jonas "Joker" Berggren and his sisters Linn and Jenny come from a traditional background. Prior to joining the band as singers, the girls had been studying to be educators; Joker's expertise lies in international politics. Joker has trained as a musician and has a particular affinity for the guitar.

"We are a good complement to each other," affirms Buddha. "We each have different skills. I learned from the beginning on computers, while Joker played instruments. In the early '80s, I listened to a lot of German music that is the foundation of today's modern sounds and Joker was more into good singers, harmonies and melodies."

Both Joker and Buddha had been in a number of different bands, but it

wasn't until they shared a rehearsal space that they began to team up and work together. Buddha had progressed from playing rough music like Front 242 and Ministry to the acid techno wave that became popular in the mid-'80s. Joker's band was more into disco and a lighter, softer sound. It was when they agreed to produce a reggae group together that the Ace of Base sound began to evolve.

Listening to the wonderful integra-

tion of catchy pop hooks and reggae-flavored riffs, one might think Ace of Base had cultivated a life-long love of reggae. But Buddha suggests the opposite is true. "When I was a kid, I actually hated reggae music," he admits. "I could tolerate ska, but not reggae. I always listened to more rough electronic music. European music is highly produced, very far from the earthy quality of reggae. But then Joker and I agreed to produce

these two black guys, one from Jamaica and one from Gambia. They taught us to appreciate reggae. We experienced the feeling of it. After that, we decided to do our own version of reggae, taking away everything that we didn't like and adding a much harder rhythm. So our sound is very natural. It's the sound we like. It wasn't actually planned, like, 'If we do this, we will sell a lot of records.' It was luck and what felt right."

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When they formed the band, Buddha and Joker found the name they had chosen was already trademarked by several other bands. "I came up with Ace of Base," acknowledges Buddha. "I wanted Joker and I to have a production name. Plus [the letter] 'A' is good on a list. But really, our studio is in a basement and we are the ace in our studio. And we are four people, like the four aces in a deck of cards."

Their story of getting a deal is proof that hard work, dedication and talent will prevail in the end if you persevere. "When we built our studio, I quit my job," recalls Buddha. "Jonathan was in college and he went to half-time. I rented out my apartment and lived in the studio for a year and a half. There was no shower and it was a 20-minute walk to Joker's parents — which is particularly challenging during the cold Scandinavian winters. I had a microwave to cook my meals. It was a luxury to eat pizza. During that time we demoed about 40 songs. We tested a couple of them on the dancefloors in Gothenburg, a town of about 700,000 people where we live, second in size to Stockholm. Many great DJs come from this town. We

have two who were world champions and three who were European champions. One of the biggest DJs thought our tape was fantastic and told us we had to play a gig at his club. We did

two nights there and it was a huge success. After that we had many offers for shows and the radio began playing our music.

"So we went to Stockholm and pre-

sented our ideas to the nine biggest record labels," continues Buddha. "Everyone was interested, but they all said you have to do more of this and take away some of that. We wanted to do our own style. So we sent our demo tape to Mega Records in Denmark, who we admired because they had music that inspired us like The KLF, Rozalla and The Shamen. So they called us back saying they loved it and not to sign with anyone else. That was in the summer of 1991.

"The first song we recorded for them was 'Wheel of Fortune,'" he continues. "We released it in Sweden in February, 1992, and nothing happened. Maybe we sold 500. Then when it came out in Denmark in May it went straight into the Top 10. It was a big hit and went gold. Because of this we recorded an album and released another single 'All That She Wants.' Both the album and the new single went to No. 1 in Denmark; but again, in Sweden, it was big in the clubs, but generated few sales. In Norway, we went double platinum and the single 'All That She Wants' was No. 1. In Germany, we sold 2 million singles and 1.5 million LPs. In Israel, we had five No. 1 hits, and in England we

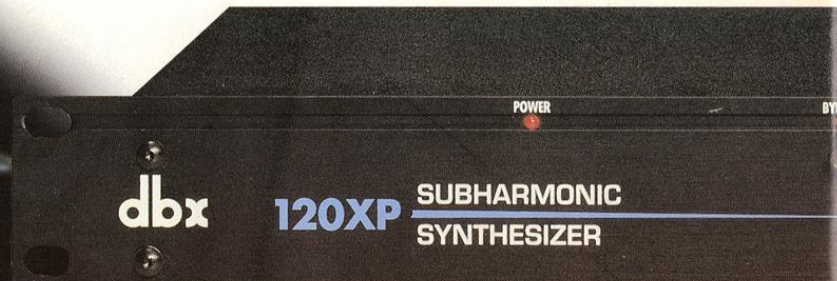


Before attaining success in the United States, Ace of Base's "All That She Wants" topped charts in nearly every European country.

# We've Hit

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were No. 1 for three weeks. Finally, after all this, the single reached No. 1 in Sweden."

As bizarre as this chain of events may seem, according to Buddha this is normal. "In Sweden, when you sing in English, you're a traitor," he explains. "The biggest national artists sing in the native language. Roxette didn't break in Sweden until they were No. 1 in the United States. Abba was never big in Sweden. They're only now being recognized after 10 or 15 hits. There is a lot of jealousy in Sweden. You can't show that you are something. If you buy a nice car, someone will take a key and scratch it."

Being on promotional tours constantly since 1992, Ace of Base have never really had the time to prepare a proper live show. But they seem to do just fine being themselves. Their setup includes two keyboards, a live drummer, two dancers that sing along as a choir and the girls who sing live. One of the things Buddha finds that really makes a difference is a good light show.

"We have been playing two different kinds of venues, the club scene and the arena scene," he elaborates.

"With an arena that seats 20,000 it's no problem to have the lights, but often the shows are in the daytime. And clubs are usually too small to use all the lights on stage. It's always a compromise. Some of the German

on the other side of the house and she keeps going from boy to boy. She's searching for someone to be happy with and she can't find it. In the video, one day she wakes up and feels like she can't go on with this. She re-

"In Sweden, when you sing in English, you're a traitor. The biggest national artists sing in the native language. Abba was never big in Sweden."

- Ulf "Buddha" Ekgerg

clubs hold 5,000 people and then there is space for the whole light show. No lights is like having a movie without sound. Lighting creates the feeling on stage."

Next time you hum the melody to "All That She Wants," think about what the lyrics are trying to convey. "It's about a natural Swedish girl who thinks her neighbors' grass is greener," offers Buddha. "She thinks luck is

alizes how unhappy she is and in the video there is a happy ending. It's a simple song and I think that is one of the keys to the success of Ace of Base. We do songs that ordinary people can understand. We are on the same level that they are."

Most of the tunes on *The Sign* are idealistic. The title track paints a utopian vision of the world the way Ace of Base would like it to be. "Waiting

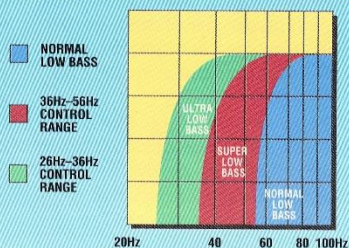
For Magic" is based on the Snow White fairy tale. It's a fantasy song that allows some distance from reality. When questioned why the music is so happy and up, Buddha replied that despite all the problems he has encountered, a negative attitude never helps anyone.

"When you find out the true meaning of life, you never want to be where you once were," philosophizes Buddha, referring to his past troubles with gangs and drugs. "It's just luck that we are here in this world, so why not do something good about it. I want to share my happiness with other people. I don't think we can solve the world's problems by just thinking negative... everything is so bad, boring... I give up. My philosophy is to think positive, that I can do something. I can never give up. That's the only way to change things in a good way... not by shooting down people. The whole world is thinking so negative at the moment with the bad economic times. It's sort of like the 1930s. When we turn on the TV we see all these problems, so why do we have to sing about it. People need something positive with all this sadness everywhere."

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