SCAND 399: ‘Mamma Mia,’ (Queer) I Go Again!

Of all the musical groups that have gone on to attract large gay followings, the status of Abba – the Swedish super group from the 70s – as international gay icons is unrivalled. While it may seem unlikely that a band consisting of two heterosexual couples could go on to achieve deistic status in gay culture, Abba’s consistently strong presence in the world’s LGBTQIA communities cannot be ignored.

The objective of this course is two-fold: firstly, to introduce a phenomenon, which until the 90s was largely hidden from mainstream society, and secondly to explore ways in which queer fans understand, identify with, and relate to the visual, aural, and performative aspects of Abba in ways that differ from mainstream interpretations.

Before one can understand Abba’s status in gay culture, one must first, of course, understand the group and their music within the social, cultural, political, and historical contexts in which the group members lived, created, and performed. Consequently, this course also traces the development of the band starting from the early days in Sweden in the 1960s before the formation of Abba, to their breakthrough at the Eurovision Song Contest in 1974; from Abba-mania in Europe and Australia, to the unofficial dissolution of the group in the 1980s; from the gay-led Abba revival in the 1990s, to the internationally-acclaimed ‘Mamma Mia!’ phenomenon of the 2000s. While Abba’s place in the world of gay iconography will take centre stage in the course, ‘Mamma Mia’ (Queer) I Go Again will also critically examine the group as artists, innovators, and public personalities in their own right.

Integral concepts such as camp, kitsch, sentimentality, and diva worship will be explored in this course as will musical genres with which Abba and gay culture are intrinsically linked such as schlager, disco, and musical theatre. Queer-friendly song contests with which Abba is also closely associated such as Melodifestivalen (the Swedish precursor to the Eurovision Song Contest) and the Eurovision Song Contest will also be examined.

Listening, watching (feature films, TV clips, and documentaries), interpreting, and discussing will provide a deeper, broader, and more personal understanding of the band’s enduring appeal to queer and straight audiences alike.

Spring Term 2019 (May 6-June 12)
Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, 10:00-11:50am
Location: HC (Humanities Centre) 2 38
Instructor: Dr. John Eason (easoniii@ualberta.ca)
Taught in English. Open to all students. No required textbook. No prerequisites.