



From non-conformist escapist synth pop to bittersweet Italian melancholy and soothing Swedish sentimentality - the songs of Mauro Scocco and Tomas Andersson Wij (by J. Granström)

One of the summer's most anticipated tours was "Tomas Andersson Wij plays with Mauro Scocco", which concluded with a celebrated concert at Stockholm's Mosebacketerrassen on August 15th. Tomas Andersson Wij (TAW) and Mauro Scocco are two of Sweden's most beloved singer/songwriters, and their catalogues include dozens of critically acclaimed and commercially successful albums as well as performances in front of millions of people on Swedish TV. However, Scocco and TAW were not always widely embraced by the Swedish music industry or the general public at the start of their careers in the 1980's and 1990's, respectively. In Scocco's case, he signed his first record deal with his group Ratata - at the time consisting of Heinz Liljedahl, Anders Skog and Johan Kling - through young record executive Klas Lunding in 1981. At that time, Lunding was only 19 years old but had already released multiple albums and singles through his label Stranded Records. However, distribution agreements for Stranded's releases were signed with the politically left-leaning prog movement - not to be confused with today's contemporary progressive rock - requiring signees to commit to promoting a socialist revolution through their musical acts. On the surface, this did not align well with Ratata's influences, which came from the world of fashion and commercials. However, media quickly showed an interest in both the packaging and musical novelty of Ratata as one of the first new Swedish synth pop bands of the 1980's.

Ratata's debut single "För varje dag (For Every Day)" reached #2 on the Swedish sales charts in 1981, which resulted in greater attention for the band as well as their record label Stranded. Both soon gained the attention of record executive Stikkan Andersson at ABBA's record label Polar. The prog- and punk movements wanted to create a clear divide between "the working class proletariat" and "the bourgeoisie establishment" (although the "proletariat" constituted a large part of the record industry establishment at the time), with clear attributes assigned to musical acts which represent either genre. Ideologically, the band members of Ratata did not align with the political right, but the non-political nature of their songs combined with their more polished looks - partially a product of growing up in the affluent Stockholm district Östermalm - may have given some people the impression that they did. As such, Ratata was one of the most non-conformist Swedish bands of the 1980's. Rather than politically confronting the reality they perceived as grey and dull, as the prog- and punk movements aimed to do, Ratata's aspirations were more escapist in nature, allured by the dream of being David Bowie on a space mission or Bryan Ferry in the video for "Avalon". Except for the ABBA records, many releases by Swedish bands in the 1970's and early 1980's had a pretty "shabby sound" (engineering wise) compared with records from the U.K. and the U.S. In order to bring up the production qualities a notch, Ratata's second album "Jackie" was mixed in the legendary AIR Studios - co-formed by the former Beatles producer Sir George Martin - alongside giants like the aforementioned Ferry. The single "Jackie" became one of Ratata's signature songs, and was greatly influenced by Doobie Brothers' 1979 hit "What A Fool Believes".



Ratata with “Rockbjörnen” for “Paradis” “Mellan dröm och verklighet”

“Jackie” also foreshadowed Ratata’s gradual transition from a band into a duo consisting of Scocco and Johan Ekelund, who plays bass and keyboards on the song. The duo got their first “Rockbjörnen”, a prize given by the readers of one of Sweden’s largest newspapers Aftonbladet, in 1985. The success paved the way for the duo’s next album “Sent i September (Late In September)”, which was recorded in one of Polar’s most famous studios. Prior to Ratata’s arrival, English rock band 10cc’s producer Eric Stewart had just been there recording former ABBA member Agneta Fältskog’s album “A för Agneta”. Stewart left behind a number of highly advanced recording equipment, which further helped Ratata refine their synth pop sound and put them at the forefront of their genre. The album got rave reviews by most newspapers, in particular Expressen that referred to the album as “the best Swedish pop music since ABBA”.

“Cinema Paradiso”

In 1987, Ratata released their album “Mellan dröm och verklighet (Between Dream And Reality)”, featuring the stunning opening track “Se på mig nu (Look At Me Now)”. At this time, Scocco’s immense talent as a lyricist was developed further with more advanced writing skills. He had always had the ability to find words that sounded great with the melody, but in the late 80’s this talent had grown into a more mature approach with the use of more sophisticated metaphors and lyrical phrases. Several examples of that can be found in “Se på mig nu”, for example “lyckan är som en dröm vi jagar, fixerade av det som behagar, det finns alltid en ny profet, som ska lära oss sin hemlighet (hunts for bliss like a dream that blinds us, fixated by the things that entice us, every new prophet’s keen to share, the greatest secret that brought them there)*. The album also includes the hit single “Så länge vi har varann (As We Long As We Have One Another)” featuring former ABBA member Anni-Frid Lyngstad. In a Ratata documentary - which is also the primary reference for most of the text you have read so far - that aired on Swedish TV (SVT) in December 2013, Anni-Frid reveals that she thought the video for the song felt a little embarrassing when looking at it decades later while considering the age difference between herself and the members of Ratata. In the video, then 41-year old Lyngstad is wearing a black leather dress while swinging and singing the song with then 25-year old Scocco in front of her. She also admits that she still listens to the song from time and time and that it is still one of the most beautiful songs she’s ever heard. Scocco commented on the beauty of the song with his characteristic self-deprecating humor, stating of himself that “even a blind hen can find a grain”.

Mauro’s songwriting style has been credited with combining the best of Italian melancholy - like a soundtrack to the 1988 Oscar winner “Cinema Paradiso” by Guiseppe Tornatore - with soothing Swedish sentimentality. This combo has won the hearts of a wide cross-section of the Swedish public.

* English lyrics by River Woodland



“Drottningen av Skanstull”



Peter Jöback



Tomas Andersson Wij

Scocco’s solo debut “Sarah”

In 1988 and 1989, Ratata toured extensively and was at the peak of their success. However, after the summer tour in 1988, Scocco releases his first (self-titled) solo album with the hit single “Sarah”, which is one of the most well-known and loved songs in Sweden’s pop music history. The song is an unabatedly romantic love song to “Sarah”, whose true identity was covered in mystery until it was revealed in 2011 to be actress Elin Klinga. Both the song and the album reached #1 on the Swedish sales charts. An English version of the song can be read on the next page.

“Sarah” marked the beginning of the end for Ratata. However, the duo released one more album (“Människor under molnen (People Beneath The Clouds)”) and went on their most successful tour before going separate ways in 1989. The final tour of Ratata would be the last one by Scocco, who's suffering from stage fright, before agreeing to the tour with Tomas Andersson Wij this summer almost exactly 30 years later. Singer/multi-instrumentalist Lovisa Samuelsson joined them on the celebrated tour to 10 venues in Sweden. Pictures from the tour are shown on pages 7-10 of this article.

Since 1991, Scocco has released 11 solo albums, including four #1’s, and written numerous hits for other artists, most notably Lisa Nilsson’s “Himlen runt hörnet” which was also released in English as “Ticket To Heaven”. His most recent single “Drottningen av Skanstull (The Queen Of Skanstull)” was released this summer in anticipation of his next forthcoming solo album. Ekelund has also had a highly successful career as a songwriter and producer since Ratata, working with some of the biggest artists in Sweden. Both Scocco and Eklund has worked with million-selling artist Peter Jöback, who has played the lead role in Andrew Lloyd Webber’s “Phantom of the Opera” on Broadway. Eklund produced the single “En sång om oss (A Song About Us)”, written by Bo Wastesson (music) and Ture Rangström (lyrics), from Jöback’s 1997 album “Personliga val (Personal Choices)”, while Scocco wrote six songs on Jöback’s critically acclaimed 2004 album “Det här är platsen (This Is The Place)” which reached #1 on the Swedish sales charts.

““Det här är platsen” also featured “Jag bär dig”, a version of Peter Gabriel’s “Don’t Give Up” with a Swedish translation by Tomas Andersson Wij (TAW), who has also translated a whole album of songs by Billy Joel for the album “Euforia” by Helen Sjöholm, whose big breakthrough came with the title role in “Kristina från Duvemåla” by the ABBA guys Björn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson. TAW started his career as a journalist from 1990 to 1997, including an interview with Scocco that the interviewee cannot recall, before releasing his debut album “Ebeneser” in 1998. TAW’s solo albums did not initially produce a hit, but through excellent response from critics and extensive touring, his audience gradually grew over the years.

Below you can read an English version of Mauro Scocco's "Sarah" (music and original Swedish lyrics by Mauro Scocco, English translation/adaptation by River Woodland).

All the boys lie sleepless, they feel her in the air
Breathe her kiss on their lips, her perfume is everywhere

They wait for a glimpse of her
Her image clear firm in their dreams
They're the heroes she's the woman, on the big screen

They're calling out her name, there's no reply
The stars sing her name in the sky

She's walking by my house
I cannot help but look her way
She turns around the corner
And then only my thoughts remain

They tell me that she lives on her own
And that it makes her feel so free
But maybe she could change her mind
If she just got to know me

I'm standing by her house and my heart pounds
Then I ring the bell and hope that she's around

Chorus
(Come out tonight) Oh Sarah come out tonight
I'll wait by the station at the old tow river
Sarah, you are more than I can grasp
Put on your jacket, let's make our first walk last

She's the wildest windstorm
She's as warm as a summer night
In her eyes lies a treasure, forever burning bright

There is nothing that I wouldn't do now
To have her beside me
I'd bring her all of the universe
All that's inside me

Chorus

Inga pojkar sover, hon finns i alla rum
I luften dom andas, hennes kyss på deras mun

De smyger runt hennes port
Med hennes bild i fickan
De är hjältarna i filmen, hon är flickan

Dom ropar hennes namn fast ingen hör
Och stjärnorna sjunger i kör

Hon går förbi mitt hus
Jag följer varje steg hon tar
Hon försvinner runt hörnet
Och sen finns bara längtan kvar

Dom säger att hon lever ensam
Och kanske vill hon ha det så
Men om hon lärde känna mig
Skulle det ändra nåt då

Jag står vid hennes port och hjärtat slår
Jag går fram till hennes dörr och ringer på

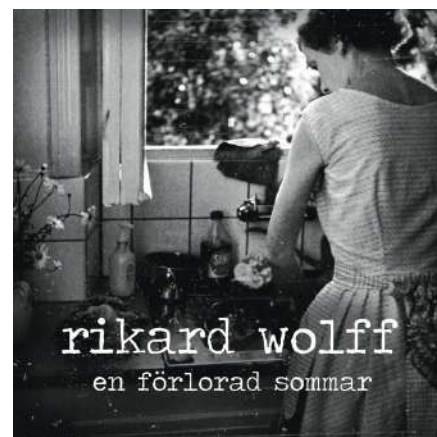
Refräng
(Kom ut ikväll) Oh Sarah, kom ut ikväll
Jag väntar i hörnet, vid 7-Eleven
Sarah, du är mer än jag förstår
Så sätt på dig jackan, så går vi ut och går

Hon är vild som vinden
Hon är varm som en sommarnatt
I hennes ögon glittrar, en outtömlig skatt

Det finns inget jag inte skulle göra
För att ha henne här
Jag tar ner månen och stjärnorna
Jag lovar och svär

Refräng

TAW was first introduced to a broader audience with his cover of Carola's "Evighet" in 2007's Melodifestivalen, a music competition watched by millions of Swedes every year. In TAW's version, Carola's upbeat arrangement is stripped down to guitar and vocals, closer to the core of the existential undertones of the song. TAW would return to Melodifestivalen in 2012, this time as a songwriter for "En förlorad sommar (A Lost Summer)" performed by the late Rikard Wolff. The somber and heartfelt performance by Wolff, combined with his spoken introduction where he shares his intimate reflections on the fleeting Swedish summer as it relates to life itself, provides a stark contrast to most Melodifestivalen songs that are often more lighthearted in tone. English lyrics of "En förlorad sommar", with a translation by River Woodland, can be read below.



"En förlorad sommar"

Within our love, a lost summer that fled
Like a late August, where yellow grass will spread
I pick up, the saucers and tea cups
It's late now, but I'll stay up
If there's something on your mind

Feel the air rising high. See the winds out on the sea.
Hear the heart pound in us tonight.
Within our love, a lost summer we knew
Like a late August, where we can start anew

A trace of autumn. The trees are sighing.
The beach was empty here today.
Time's passing swiftly. How we try to deny it.
Still all that once bloomed will fade away.

Within our, a lost summer we missed
A light in a garden, the wind will soon eclipse
All we've lived though is so distant yet so present
I know that I was absent, forgive me if you can

Feel the air rising high. See the winds out on the sea.
Hear the heart pound in us tonight

Within our love, a lost summer we knew
Like a late August, where we can start anew
Within life, a lost summer we knew
Like a late August, where we can start anew

Vår kärlek är, en förlorad sommar
Ett sent augusti, där gräset snart är gult
Jag tar upp, kopparna och faten
En stund till är jag vaken
Om du vill mig någonting

Se hur luften får höjd, se hur havet blåser upp
Hör hur hjärtat, bultar i oss
Vår kärlek är, en förlorad sommar
Ett sent augusti, där vi kan börja om

En doft av höst har och träden susar
Idag var stranden nästan tom
Vem hjälper oss att glömma tiden som rusar
Och tar med sig allt som stod i blom

Livet är, en förlorad sommar
Ett ljus i en trädgård, som vinden blåser ut
Allt vi upplevt är så nära och långt borta
Jag vet jag kom till korta, forlåt mig än en gång

Se hur luften får höjd, se hur havet blåser upp
Hör hur hjärtat, bultar i oss

Vår kärlek är, en förlorad sommar
Ett sent augusti, där vi får börja om
Livet är, en förlorad sommar
Ett sent augusti, där vi får börja om

TAW's music and Swedish lyrics feature subtle yet powerful snapshots from life in Sweden, both distinctly unique for the culture and the country that a lot of TAW's artistry is dedicated to, but also universal in their underlying existential elements and themes. The songs tell profound stories of the great Swedish loneliness, families torn apart by greed, sad towns with living ghosts glancing through the windows and lives plagued by an endless fight for dignity. But there are also rays of hope, trains that run late but still arrive, angels landing amongst the pigeons on the roof of the banking office and nostalgic memories of the fleeting moments and everlasting scents of the last childhood summer. Above all, a soothing sentimentality, with the past as an ever-present friend but never the only guiding light – “And what I cannot change, I can accept, and what I can accept, has already been changed” as TAW sings on “Tommy And His Mother”.

TAW's stark imagery and soaring melodies evoke images of long-gone times and sentiments – the Walpurgis night fire that is crowned by the flame of a young scout's torch; a flickering memory still burning bright, the shimmering light over the lake at night, a hundred sunsets fading out of sight, shining like a thousand stars in the evening sky, every light year within grasp. It also brings clarity through the static of the diffuse noise that often drown thoughts and feelings that are washed over by the reality and burdens of life, embodied by the lines of sacrifice that run deep on the old one's faces, and the young ones that aged a decade in a single year by the paths they reluctantly ended up walking down upon. TAW's music and lyrics somehow bring all of these images and sentiments closer to the surface, closer to who we really are (or who we wish we could somehow be again), if we are willing to look deeply enough. The warmest summer day can feel as cold as an icicle if you ever had, and lost touch with, the part of you that lets you feel the silent rush under a pitch black winter sky at 3.30 in the afternoon, when a warm light still seemed to linger inside. The seasons of life are ever-changing, and polar nights can swiftly be replaced by midnight suns. TAW's music and lyrics embrace all of these elements, and by doing so, brings us closer to distant dreams and help us disperse the clouds that are covering them – not by grandiose themes and over-blown drama, but by finding the deepest meaning in the most subtle sign. That is where true magic begins, and from that point on, anything is possible, even to convince Mauro Scocco to go on his first extended tour in 30 years, as long as his close friend TAW is joining him.

Pictures from the Tomas Andersson Wij's and Mauro Scocco's summer tour in 2019



Lovisa Samuelsson, Tomas Andersson Wij (TAW) och Mauro Scocco, Warfsholm, Gotland, 7 juli 2019. Foto: Ulf Olofsson



Lovisa, TAW och Mauro, Parksnäcken, Uppsala, 20 juli 2019. Foto: Gunnar R. Johansson



TAW och Mauro, Parksnäcken, Uppsala, 20 juli 2019. Foto: Gunnar R. Johansson



Tomas Andersson Wij och Mauro Scocco, Parksnäcken, Uppsala, 20 juli 2019. Foto: David Elfström Lilja



Mauro Scocco och Tomas Andersson Wij, Parksnäcken, Uppsala, 20 juli 2019. Foto: Gunnar R. Johansson

REFERENCE:

<https://www.gunnar.se/2019/07/22/lite-bilder-frn.html>

Pictures from the Tomas Andersson Wij's and Mauro Scocco's summer tour in 2019



Photos by Ivo Kovic

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Photos by Caroline Grip (Mosebacke, Stockholm)