



Jill Johnson performing with Lionel Richie



Recording with Rascal Flatts



Jill with Tanya Tucker and Mauro Scocco in Nashville

From Stockholm to Nashville - How Country Queen Jill Johnson and Pop King Mauro Scocco got together in Music City (by J. Granstrom)

Jill Johnson is one of Sweden's most celebrated artists. In addition, she has a strong presence in Nashville and has performed or recorded songs with several American artists, songwriters and producers. With one leg in Sweden and one leg in Nashville, she created the highly popular TV series "Jill's veranda (Jill's Porch)", where she invites guest artists from Sweden to sing and play with her, as well as explore the history of country music and encounter social issues in the USA like racism, weapons, homophobia and poverty. Since the show started in 2014, she's been joined by artists such as Titiyo, Veronica Maggio, Jerry Williams, Lisa Nilsson, Mikael Wiehe and most recently Mauro Scocco in March 2020. Scocco explored the history of the civil war and got to meet country artist Tanya Tucker, whom Scocco described as "Keith Richards with lipstick", a meeting that Scocco will never forget. "Jill's veranda" has been awarded with several prizes in Sweden, including "Kristallen (The Crystal)", which is the official Swedish television award. "Jill's veranda" won in the categories "programme of the year" and "reality programme of the year" in Kristallen 2014, when Jill also won the "Female show host of the year" category.

Johnson got her big break through in 1998, when she won Melodifestivalen (the Swedish trials for the Eurovision Song Contest) with the song "Kärleken är (Love Is)", which finished in 10th place in the final competition in Birmingham, England. In 2001, she got a publishing contract in Nashville which consequently resulted in the 2002 release "Good Girl" recorded in Nashville. The album was very well received by the Swedish press and she was described as an artist of international caliber. She would record several more albums in Nashville, including "The Woman I've Become" which peaked at #2 on the Swedish sales charts and was produced by Nathan Chapman, who would go on to produce albums for Taylor Swift and Shania Twain a few years later. In August 2009, she supported American country artist Alan Jackson, when he first toured Scandinavia for exclusive concerts in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. In the autumn of 2011, she was the supporting act for Toby Keith during his European tour. The following year, she participated in the European release of former The Commodores member Lionel Richie's album "Tuskegee (Deluxe Version)", where they recorded "Sail On" together and appeared on the SVT show "Skavlan" in conjunction with Richie's Sweden visit. The song was also included on her compilation album "Duetterna (The Duets)", which was released in the autumn of 2013. The album included two new recordings, including "Come Wake Me Up" with American country band Rascal Flatts, which has had 14 songs hitting #1 on the Billboard Hot Country Songs chart. She also performed in television shows and made guest appearances on Rascal Flatts' concerts in Sweden.



“Längre neråt vägen” by Johnson and Scocco



“Jill's veranda” with Scocco. Recorded in Nashville.



Lovisa Samuelsson, Tomas Andersson Wij and Mauro Scocco after a performance in Uppsala, 07/20/2019. Photo: Gunnar R. Johansson

“Duetterna” also featured the new Scocco song “Längre neråt vägen (Further Down The Road)”, which Johnson and Scocco recorded as a duet. For “Jill’s veranda”, Johnson and Scocco again recorded a duet of a Scocco song, this time “Himlen runt hörnet (Heaven Around The Corner)” which was originally a big hit for Lisa Nilsson in 1992. On the new version, Johnson teamed up Scocco with a bluegrass band in Nashville. After some initial hesitation, Scocco was very pleased with the final result, especially the highly melancholic feeling in the arrangement. Other Scocco performances in the show included Chris Stapleton’s “Whiskey And You” and Ryan Adams’ “Oh My Sweet Carolina”. In the show, Scocco talks about the unifying language of music, which enabled him to find common ground with the local Nashville musicians, despite the immense cultural- and political differences between Sweden and the American Deep South.

Scocco started his career in the synth pop constellation Ratata in the early 1980’s, during a time when the prog– and punk movements wanted to create a clear divide between “the working class proletariat” and the “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 representing 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. During most of Ratata’s existence, the constellation was a duo consisting of Scocco and Johan Ekelund. The duo went separate ways in the late 1980’s, starting with Scocco’s release of “Sarah” - possibly his biggest hit to date and a major reason his self-titled debut album reached #1 on the Swedish sales charts in 1988. The duo released their last album “Människor under molnen (People beneath the clouds)” in 1989, followed by a sold out arena tour around Sweden in 1989/1990. Despite releasing nine top #5 albums in Sweden between 1991-2011, Scocco would not go on tour again for 30 years due to stage fright. The summer of 2019 finally saw Scocco back on tour again, this time together with singer/songwriter Tomas Andersson Wij (TAW) who has been one of Sweden’s most critically acclaimed songwriters during the last 20 years. Together, the duo performed each others songs on a celebrated tour featuring singer/multi-instrumentalist Lovisa Samuelsson. Both TAW and Mauro Scocco have released singles towards upcoming albums during the last year. TAWs recent singles “Jag var ett konstigt barn (I Was A Strange Child)” and “Dit du går (Where You Walk)” are piano-based ballads continuing TAW’s tradition of combining existentialism and soothing Swedish sentimentality in his songwriting. Two of Scocco’s recent releases, “Är Du Lycklig (Are You Happy)?” and “Långt härifrån” have echoes of U2 and Ratata, respectively. From Stockholm to Nashville, Johnson and Scocco have demonstrated that the unifying language of music can bridge immense cultural divides, connecting people with vastly different cultural backgrounds and experiences.