

# The Coast

By SAMUEL GRAHAM & SAM SUTHERLAND

■ NOUS VOULONS—No one in these parts had any idea what an ABBA concert would be like, which is hardly a surprise when you consider that the Swedish quartet had never toured North America before they began a series of 18 Canadian and U.S. dates on September 13 in Edmonton, Alberta. Near-perfection might not have been a bad place to begin one's expectations, given their glamorous good looks and brilliantly-conceived records; but happily, based on gigs last week in Seattle and Anaheim, ABBA's show is not plastic perfection, and that has to be good news. It is obviously well-rehearsed, and expertly performed—and basically wholesome, which should satisfy audiences that quite literally range in age from six to 60—but it isn't pristine. These people aren't the Boone family, they are a rocking band, and after hearing those two concerts our only regret is that it took them so long to finally get here.

ABBA's show is full of hits (they've got enough of 'em, after all), but it isn't limited to a perfunctory procession of singles. In fact, some of the earliest hits are absent entirely, in favor of a healthy offering of album material, including most of "The Album" and "Voulez-Vous." A 13-piece band—including, of course, Bjorn, Benny, Agnetha and Frida themselves—plays with surprising power and volume; but although they're loud, they're also clear, which does justice to the signature vocal sound. And again, they're able to strike a marvelous balance between hip and square—when, in Seattle, a large kiddie chorus came out to join them on "I Have a Dream," what could have been a cloyingly precious move was merely charming, as intended.

Despite a lot of dire predictions about the current concert scene, the ABBA tour is doing very well, in some part due to the group's choosing to play small and medium-sized venues and scheduling no more than one performance per town, even New York and L.A. Whether or not it will establish them as major stars in this country—a status long since achieved in the rest of the world—remains to be seen. One thing is certain, though: anyone who's been waiting five years to see ABBA will be well satisfied.

NOTES AND COMMENT—"The Midnight Special's" commitment to an all-disco format was remarkably short-lived, or so it seems; this Friday's (28) show will feature the Cars, M, Suicide, Lene Lovich, Iggy Pop and the Records. Not much disco there, that's for sure . . . Brooklyn Dreams will portray Dion and the Belmonts in the film "Hollywood Knights," due out at Easter time; the Casablanca trio also wrote the title track . . . Along those same lines, Leif Garrett has bought the film rights to the life of Danny "Little Red" Lopez, the featherweight boxing champ who has successfully defended his title seven times, all by knock-outs. It will be a CBS-TV movie in the U.S. eventually. And if you expect us to make some crack about Leif being a real featherweight himself, forget it . . . Weirdest moment of the last several weeks: the Persuasions, opening at the Greek Theater for Joni Mitchell, managed to throw in versions of the Cal Worthington car commercial and the Lowenbrau beer jingle during their sets (if the concessions people at the Greek don't sell Lowenbrau, they probably weren't too thrilled at the prospect of a free plug for another brand). The really strange part was the placement of the commercials: right between "Tom Dooley" and "The Lord's Prayer." You figure it out.

UNDER THE INFLUENCE—Speaking of both weirdness and Pat Metheny, a conversation with the guitarist during his visit here for the Greek Theatre dates with Mitchell yielded some surprising twists. Apart from confirming that the next Pat Metheny Group longplayer, "American Garage," is indeed arriving shortly, the ECM artist filled us in on his first visit to Japan as part of a package of touring label artists.

"It was sort of 'Young Americans on display,'" he said in summary, adding that while listeners there are indeed attentive and well-informed with respect to foreign artists, their reverence sometimes approaches the bizarre. "Over here, if you tell someone they sound just like another player, they'll be quick to say, 'No, I'm working on my own style.' Over there, musicians don't see that as an insult at all. I even got to meet the Japanese Pat Metheny."

Let anyone think he's jumping to conclusions, Metheny notes his eastern counterpart not only plumbs the guitarist's style on exactly the same instruments, he's backed by a keyboard player adept at blending acoustic piano and Oberheim synthesizer (not unlike the Metheny Group's Lyle Mays), while the rhythm section models its coupling of fretless bass and kit equally carefully.

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## Lou Levy Returns with Valando Corp.

By STEVEN BLAUNER

■ NEW YORK — Lured by the "excitement and challenge" of the music business, Lou Levy, founder of Leeds Music, which became MCA's music publishing division, is back in action with the Tommy Valando Music Publishing Corporation.

"Nobody's writing the good songs anymore—or at least going out and finding them," says Levy. But following a brief hiatus, Levy is confident that he can discover the songs that "will stick around and turn platinum."

Levy will be second in command at the Valando organization, which has both a BMI and ASCAP wing, Fiddleback and Revelation Music, respectively.

The Valando group has published many of the stage's greatest successes including "Fiddler On The Roof," "Zorba," "Cabaret" and the recent "Sweeney Todd" and "I'm Getting My Act Together." Stephen Sondheim, Kander and Ebb and Alan Jay Lerner are contemporary representatives of the company's illustrious roster.

For a man who started in the industry managing the Andrews Sisters and promoting Sammy Cahn and Steve Lawrence, Levy continues to exhibit a level of energy that puts to shame the efforts of many publishing company neophytes.

Levy repeatedly stresses the importance of "good songs," and it is perhaps his singular devotion to finding this material that has made him an enduring and extraordinary member of the music community.

"I have a lot of respect for Tommy Valando, and it's exciting and very complimentary being asked to join the company. I think with my Tin Pan Alley background and the Valando group's expertise in show business, very

good things can happen, and we can make a lot of money."

With the Leeds Music Group, Levy published hits including "Let It Be Me," "Lover Man," "You Always Hurt The One You Love," "I'll Remember April," "Strangers In The Night" and "I Want To Hold Your Hand." Equally impressive is Levy's ability to spot administrative and creative talent. Sal Chiantia, Al Gallico, Howard Richmond and Billy Meshel were among his employees. Levy had a hand in discovering or negotiating record contracts for Bobby Darin, Les Paul, the Jackson Five and ABBA.

Levy is clearly stimulated by the prospect of working in a new area, music for the stage: "I'm looking for the new Cole Porter and Noel Coward, the songwriters who can produce the classics, the songs that will endure."

Levy has a reverence for the "good songs" beyond a nostalgia for Tin Pan Alley: "A good song doesn't need 24-tracks to make a great record. You take 'I Will Survive' (the Gloria Gaynor hit, which Levy does not hold), you could strip that song down to a simple ballad and it would still be great."

Levy has an unfailing eye and ear. Tin Pan Alley songs are obviously important to him, but he quickly points out that "all the boogie-woogie, Calypso and bossa nova tunes, Antonio Carlos Jobim's stuff, was mine." Levy also published the first 12 songs in Bob Dylan's catalogue.

Levy is not content with resting on his laurels, and is somewhat bashful about reciting his accomplishments, preferring to deal with present and future projects, including bringing stage successes to the screen.

## Arista Inks D.L. Byron



Arista Records president Clive Davis has announced that the label has signed rock singer-composer D. L. Byron to a long-term contract. He is currently recording his debut album in New York City with producer Jimmy Iovine, to be released early in 1980. Shown at the Byron signing are (from left): John Small, manager; Joseph Serling, attorney; Bob Feiden, vice president, east coast A&R, Arista Records; D. L. Byron; Clive Davis, president, Arista; Judy Berger, Attorney.