



THE NAME OF THE GAME: ABBA'S BENNY ANDERSSON

In October, 1964, two months before his 18th birthday, Benny Andersson joined the Swedish pop band, The Hep Stars--later known as "the Swedish



Benny Andersson

Beatles"--as their keyboardist. Four and a half decades later the music of Benny Andersson and his writing partner of 45 years, Bjorn Ulvaeus, is played as much, if not more, than the tunes of Lennon and McCartney. Benny and Bjorn, as they used to be

known, were the BB's of ABBA, and its spinoff of almost two decades later, the musical 'Mamma Mia.' ABBA are cited by Wikipedia as the number four best-selling music artists of all time, while the musical is cited by the same source as having been seen by 42 million people worldwide and grossing more than \$2-billion. The film version, released in 2008, is reported to be the highest grossing movie musical of all time. 'Popular' doesn't even begin to describe it.

To racing professionals, and a lesser degree the racing public, in Britain and Europe, Benny Andersson is not just a superstar songwriter and performer--he's also an enthusiastic horse owner and breeder, having always had a horse or two with trainer John Dunlop for the last 15 years, beginning with Mondschein ('Moonlight' in German--named, like all Benny's horses--after a song, something musical, in this case Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata, or someone or something Swedish), a Rainbow Quest filly bought by Andersson as a yearling. She is now the dam of Beatrice Aurore (the title of a Swedish tune from the early 1900's), a homebred daughter of Danehill Dancer who won the Group 3 Prix Chloe in France for Andersson and Dunlop this summer, and nearly became Benny's first Group 1 winner as an owner and breeder last Sunday in Rome, when she ran a bang-up second in the G1 Premio Lydia Tesio. Andersson had also achieved some unwanted notoriety when he topped the 2008 Tattersalls' October Yearling Sale by paying 650,000 guineas for a grey Montjeu colt--now plying his trade as Berling--he is a 4-year-old of 2011 who has won four races, including the 13 1/2 furlong Listed Chester S. in August.

Largely unremarked by the outside world, though, Benny has been a racehorse owner and breeder in Sweden for 30 years. And therein lies a story...

Oppenheim cont.

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10/22 - **CANDYMAN E** claimed his fourth straight win in the \$150K Frank J. De Francis Dash



10/22 - **SWEET LUCA** won her first stakes, the \$125K Sun Power S. The 2YO is 2 for 4.



10/23 - **NORTHERN CANDYRIDE** won his third straight in the To Much Coffee S.

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Oppenheim cont.

We interviewed Benny Andersson on a Saturday afternoon in late August when the weather was gorgeous, about 75 degrees, clear blue skies and sunny, when Stockholm was showing itself off at its most stunning. When I say 'we' I do not mean that in the sense of the editorial 'we,' meaning 'me'--in this case, there really was a 'we.' My collaborator in the trip and interview was my wife Lou Radford, now an acupuncturist, but in her previous working life an actual, serious journalist--a television foreign news editor. It was a very successful collaboration, too. Besides taking all the photos, Lou definitely asked some of the best questions. Benny thought so, too.

The interview took place in Benny's own Rival Hotel, located in the now-trendy Sodermalm district of Stockholm, just south of Gamla Stan (Old Town, and, by the way, that means old, like some of it 14th-century old), then we accompanied Benny for an outing to Taby racecourse where he had two fancied runners--both finished second, of course).

Benny tells us becoming a hotelier wasn't exactly his idea. "A friend of mine owned a travel agency and wanted to retire. He decided owning a hotel would be a good pension plan and persuaded me to come in as an investor. Then he got a big investor, so I could be just a minor partner. But, unfortunately, my friend died and the other investor's money dried up, so it ended up being my project. But I quite enjoy it, and I have a brilliant GM, Caroline Ericsson. It is all her doing, really."

This is worth talking about, because for many travelers the Rival Hotel could be their first impression of Stockholm. If it is--and this is very much the department of my co-conspirator, Lou, who is very good in matters of taste, especially combined with practicality--they are sure to be impressed. The building began life as one of a string of cinemas which opened in Stockholm during the Art Deco/Nouveau era of the 1930's--there was the Rival, the Rivoli, etc. But, besides preserving the original features such as the cinema theatre and the bar, the restoration of those plus the enhancements in the same style are faultless. The hotel is 99 rooms, featuring underfloor heating in the bathrooms, leather-wrapped handrails down the staircases, free movies on DVD you can check out for your room, a Teddy which greets you in every room ("never taken," says Benny proudly), a great restaurant, of course, and, especially on a gorgeous August day, outside balconies where you can sit outside across from a local park.

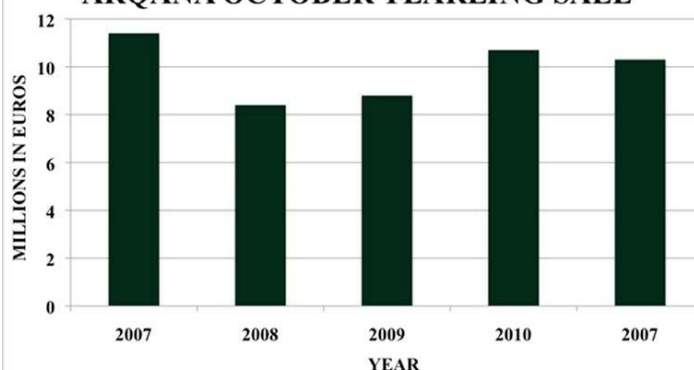
All horses in *TDN* Headline News and *TDN* American edition are bred in North America, unless otherwise indicated

Weekly Sales Ticker

by Bill Oppenheim

"Arqana's October Yearling Sale, which finished nearly level in gross and average with last year, concluded the North American and European sales season, except for a few stragglers. Our totals say that 7,104 yearlings sold, from 10,667 catalogued, which is almost exactly two out of three -- 66.6%. The collective gross was just under \$500-million, up nine percent from last year, with the average up 14%, though seven percent fewer were catalogued (four percent fewer sold). The combined gross is still down almost \$300-million from 2007."
-- Bill Oppenheim

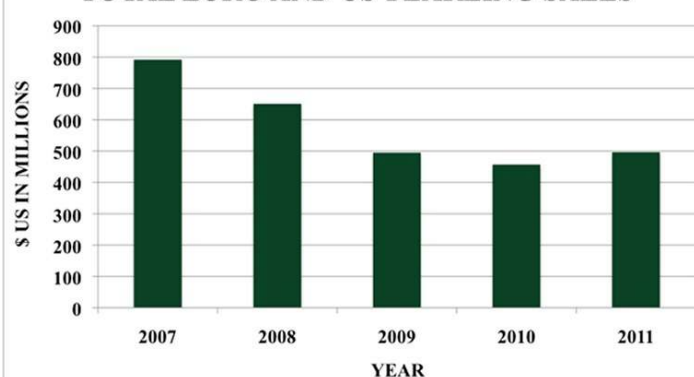
ARQANA OCTOBER YEARLING SALE



ARQANA OCTOBER YEARLING SALE

YEAR	CAT	RING	SOLD	%W/D	%S/R	%S/C	GROSS	AVG
2011	583	551	375	5.5%	68.1%	64.3%	€ 10,327,000	€ 27,539
2010	548	525	384	4.2%	73.1%	70.1%	€ 10,665,000	€ 27,773
2009	515	481	342	6.6%	71.1%	66.4%	€ 8,775,500	€ 25,659
2008	532	503	358	5.5%	71.2%	67.3%	€ 8,381,500	€ 23,412
2007	524	507	395	3.2%	77.9%	75.4%	€ 11,403,000	€ 28,868

TOTAL EURO AND US YEARLING SALES



TOTAL USA & EUROPEAN SALES AS OF OCT 23, 2011

YEAR	CAT	RING	SOLD	%W/D	%S/R	%S/C	GROSS	AVG
2011	10,667	9,306	7,104	12.8%	76.3%	66.6%	\$496,261,112	\$69,857
2010	11,523	10,116	7,429	12.2%	73.4%	64.5%	\$456,877,842	\$61,499
2009	12,359	10,668	7,818	13.7%	73.3%	63.3%	\$494,988,779	\$63,314
2008	13,540	11,830	8,539	12.6%	72.2%	63.1%	\$650,969,873	\$76,235
2007	13,713	12,212	9,323	10.9%	76.3%	68.0%	\$791,968,188	\$84,948

Data compiled by Brianne Stanley

Lou was very complimentary about the fake window-boxes, which she thought were the best she'd ever seen, but Benny isn't so keen on those; "they're not real." I've been fortunate enough to be in and out of Stockholm a few times in the last 15 years, and stayed in quite a few hotels; but, as Lou says, Benny's Rival Hotel really does rival just



Bill & Lou Oppenheim

about any place, anywhere in the world, and the way the Sodermalm district is upgrading itself--well, it's the place to stay if you're going to be in Stockholm, and we would say that no matter who owns it. The prices are quite reasonable too--ask them to ask Benny or Caroline if you can get the *TDN* Horseman's Discount.

One other observation from the weekend we were staying there. You know how Swedish (and many Central European) hotels have a big breakfast buffet? Well, they do, and they're fantastic. But we noticed the morning we were at breakfast there were quite a few people with-- well, very elaborate tattoos; I mean, more people in the room had them than didn't. Turns out they were all in town for the 15th Stockholm Ink Bash being held nearby. Tattooists and devotees from 20 countries because, as one (non-decorated) native informed us, Stockholm has the highest percentage of tattoos per thousand of any big city on the planet. Lou wanted to go along and check it out, but I demurred. It did make for an unusually colorful breakfast smorgasbord, though.

DOWN THE RABBIT-HOLE

ABBA was the super-group of the 1970's, succeeding the Beatles. The foursome had met and become two couples during 1969 and 1970, and by 1972 Benny and Anni-Frid ('Frida'), and Bjorn and Agnetha were on their way. The real breakthrough came when they won the 1974 Eurovision Song Contest with "Waterloo"--for the next few years it was hit after hit: "Dancing Queen," "SOS", "Mamma Mia", "Fernando," "Knowing Me, Knowing You," "Take a Chance on Me" and "The Winner Takes It All", among many others. Following a revival inspired in the mid-1990's by the Australian films "Muriel's Wedding" and "Priscilla, Queen of the Desert" and the appearance of the musical "Mamma Mia," recent estimates are that ABBA records, tapes, and CD's have sold over 370 million copies. By the end of the decade, though, the cracks were starting to appear.

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Bjorn Ulvaeus and Agnetha Faltskog split up in 1979, followed by Benny and Anni-Frid Lyngstad early in 1981. Though they continued to sing together, ABBA was essentially over around 1982. The following year Benny and Bjorn collaborated with Tim Rice--Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical partner--in a musical, "Chess," about a Russian chess player who defected to the West. It was the first of three musicals which Benny has co-written, and also provided the 'nom du course' (Chess Racing) and the checkered colors ("yes, I wanted those for my racehorses", he recalls) in which his horses, including Beatrice Aurore and Berling, usually run.

How did he come to be involved in horses? By 1981, Benny met, and subsequently, married Mona Norklit, who worked as a producer for Swedish television. Ms. Norklit had previously been married to, and had a son, Johan, with the vet and horse breeder Berndt Stromberg, who subsequently himself married the former event rider and now horse trainer, Caroline Stromberg. "I was going to be Johan's stepfather, but I wanted there to be a good way for me to maintain contact with his real father, Berndt," recalled Benny. "So I decided to have a horse in training with the Strombergs. It could be fun, and a good way for the families to stay in contact with each other."

Benny, Berndt, and Caroline went off to Doncaster, and came back with a gelding called Secret Army, by a son of Track Spare named Record Run.

Oppenheim cont.

Trained by Caroline Stromberg, he became Benny Andersson's first winner as an owner in 1982. Their association has endured now for nearly 30 years: Caroline Stromberg was Benny's only trainer in Sweden until 2009, when she handed the license over to her and Berndt's daughter, Jessica, who came back from a stint at Coolmore one year with Irishman Pdraig Long (now a fluent speaker of Swedish), in tow.

Benny found it interesting, intriguing. He read. He talked to people. He took private riding lessons for two years, to at least learn to be comfortable being around horses. "I wanted to at least look like I was okay being around them when we were getting our picture taken in the winner's circle," he said. "Little did I know then it is as much a matter of IF you get your picture taken as when!"

His first good horse was Davinski, who was fifth in the Swedish Derby and won the Swedish St. Leger in 1988. Davinski was bred by Benny's Chess Racing, out of a mare of the Strombergs', Miss Davina. Benny sent her to England to be bred to Niniski, who stood at Lanwades for fellow Swede, Kirsten Rausing, and the result was Davinski.

Since his first good horse--in fact, a Classic winner--was a homebred, Benny was quite happy to mix breeding them with buying at the sales. At Tattersalls' 1988 December Sale he spent 82,000 guineas, through his long-time agent, Major Johnnie Lewis of the BBA, to buy the then-3-year-old filly Red Guitars, by Nijinsky, trained by Henry Cecil for Stavros Niarchos, and rated 100 in Timeform's Racehorses of 1988. She raced as a 4-year-old for Andersson, winning once, in Sweden, before going to stud. Her first five foals were all winners, but none were black-type caliber or particularly close.

One of Red Guitar's daughters, by Elmaamul, was named Prariens Drottning, a name Benny took from his musical "Kristina," about a Swedish family which comes to Minnesota during the late 19th century. 'Prariens Drottning' translates to 'Queen of the Prairie,' which was the make of the stove Kristina had in the story. Anyway, Prariens Drottning was a winner at two in Denmark, in 1997.

Benny had also helped finance the import of a couple of stallions to Sweden, first a horse by Restless Wind bred by Bunker Hunt, named Billion; then the unbeaten Champion 2-Year-Old of 1989, Be My Chief, by Chief's Crown, also trained by Henry Cecil. Four of Prariens Drottning's first five foals were by Be My Chief, which did not work out too well; the one that wasn't, the 2003 colt (now gelding) Django (named after jazz guitarist Django Reinhardt), was by the top German sire Acatanenango, and won the G3 Swedish Open Championship. His 3-year-old (of 2011) three-quarter sister, Jive, is by Acatanenango's son, Sabiango (he is also a half-brother to the top German racehorse and South African sire, Silvano), and she won the 2011 Swedish Oaks. Jive will eventually join Benny's small but now quite select broodmare band--as a Swedish Classic winner, she's entitled to.

Benny had his first runner in Britain in 1995, and his first winner outside Scandinavia, with John Dunlop, in 1996. This marked the year Benny stepped up his investment. He bought a Rainbow Quest filly for 80,000gns at the 1996 December Yearling sale; this was Mondschein, who won the Listed Prix Belle le Nuit in France and has gone on to produce three black-type winners for Andersson. Her first foal to live, Sibelius (by Night Shift), won the Danish Derby and St. Leger in 2004, as well as the Listed Dansk Jockey Club Cup. Her next foal, Vigelegere (from the Swahili), by Be My Chief, won the Copenhagen Golden Mile and has joined her dam at Caroline Green's Templeton Stud, which will also be the eventual intended destination of Mondschein's third black-type winner, the current 3-year-old filly Beatrice Aurore, by Danehill Dancer--as noted, a Group 3 winner and very nearly a Group 1 winner this year. Benny had thought, in 1996, that it might be a good idea to own a Rainbow Quest mare, and he's certainly been right about that. She's been a terrific producer for him.

Around the same time he bought Mondschein, Benny acquired a Green Desert filly, called Green Charter, who was out of By Charter, a full sister to Zinaad, by Shirley Heights out of Time Charter. By Charter went on to produce three black-type winners herself, including First Charter and Anton Chekhov, as well as Sharp Terms, herself the dam of this year's G2 Queen Mary and Lowther winner, Best Terms, but unfortunately Green Charter didn't really uphold the family tradition. She started out well enough: her first foal, a Hector Protector filly called Safe Trip, won a nursery at Brighton at two in 2001, then placed in two black-type races in Scandinavia.

Meanwhile, no doubt emboldened by Mondschein's success, Benny bought five yearling colts at the 1998 and 1999 Houghton (now October 1) Sales at Tattersalls, averaging around 130,000gns for colts by Affirmed, El Gran Senor, Machiavellian, Rainbow Quest, and Nashwan. Three of them, plus Safe Trip, were winners under John Dunlop's tutelage in 2000-01, but none other than her panned out to be black-type horses.

Benny was busy with other projects, too, such as the debut of the musical "Mamma Mia" in 1999, and the formation of his Benny Andersson Orchestra, a 16-piece folk and dance band which is still going strong and packing them in every time they come out to perform. He didn't buy another yearling at Tattersalls until 2008, sending trainer Dunlop Green Charter's next five foals. Three of them did place, but Benny did not in fact have a winner in Britain or France between 2001 and 2008. By 2007, when the then 2-year-old Perks (by Selkirk, who also stood at fellow Swede Kirsten Rausing's Lanwades Stud), came into the yard, Dunlop must have been muttering to himself.



Bill & Benny at Taby

Perks rather saved the day, though Benny had, in one of those ironies understood so well by veteran breeders, given up and sold the mare in 2006, the year before Perks went into training. Perks won three races as a 3-year-old in 2008, placed in listed races in Britain at three and four, earning *Timeform* year-end ratings of 116 and 113, respectively, and transferred to Jessica Long in Sweden, won a listed race at Taby, in Stockholm, in 2010.

After Perks's success, Benny had one more go at the yearling sales. He splashed out over 1-million gns at the 2008-09 Tattersalls October 1 sales, most of that when topping the 2008 sale by paying 650,000gns for a grey Montjeu colt out of the Danehill mare Danaskaya, who he named Berling, after the famous Swedish novel, Gosta Berling's Saga. While he's unlikely to earn Benny his first trip to the Arc as an owner--the race he, like most European owners, would most like to win--Berling has become the second black-type winner bought by Benny at auction (the first was Mondschein, in 1998), winning, as noted above, a listed race at Chester in August.

When we met Benny in late August, we asked him if he was considering coming to the yearling sales at Newmarket this year. "No more sales," laughed Benny. "Almost all the good horses I've had have been homebreds. I'm sticking with homebreds."

It's not hard to understand why. Though he followed the time-honored path of finding a broodmare by buying a yearling filly at auction who turned out to be good--and a good producer--Benny has bred six Scandinavian Classic or black-type winners from four mares, over a twenty-year period, plus this year's Group 3 winner and Group 1-placed Beatrice Aurore. Right now, he has just two mares, both at Templeton Stud in Berkshire: Mondschein, currently in foal to Rock of Gibraltar, and her stakes-winning daughter by Be My Chief, Vigelegere, who is in foal to another Kirsten Rausing stallion, Archipenko. Mondschein has a yearling colt of 2011 by Dansili, while Vigelegere has a 2-year-old by Marju with Jessica Long, a yearling filly by Excellent Art also pointed in that direction, and a foal by High Chaparral. Eventually, Beatrice Aurore will succeed her dam (Mondschein will be 17 next year), and Jive--Red Guitars' granddaughter--should have earned her place at stud, too. "That's enough," says Benny.

"One thing I have definitely learned about them, they're wonderful animals--not the smartest, but wonderful--but it's an expensive hobby. Three or four mares, and what they produce--that will be enough."

Chess Racing and the Benny Andersson stable can look forward to the return of Beatrice Aurore and Berling for the Dunlop stable in 2012, plus there will be Jive, maybe Perks, and one or two others could develop. Like anybody who has been around the game for thirty years, learned, and paid attention, Benny is ever hopeful, but realistic. "It's a great challenge, and good fun, though at times (for years, sometimes, in my case) it can be very frustrating. I have enjoyed very much the reading and studying, and my hands-on experiences.

If you are in this business, you must devote yourself to the horses; it is similar to the devotion to music. I am proud to be the breeder of a few good horses, and I hope to breed a few more, maybe one good enough for the Arc."

Our thanks to Grant Harris and the team at Weatherby's for providing data on Benny Andersson and Chess Racing's record in the U.K., Ireland, and France and to Bjorn Eklund of the Swedish Jockey Club for similar information for Scandinavia.



WHAT IS OPPENHEIM ON ABOUT NOW?

Whether it's sales, racing or breeding...read the latest musings from **Bill Oppenheim!**

You can find all of Oppenheim's columns in the [TDN Archive](#).

HORSE	Year Raced	Sire	Dam	Acquired	Trainer	Best Performances
DAVINSKY	1988	Niniski	Miss Davina	Homebred	C. Stromberg	1st Swedish St. Leger
MONDSCHHEIN	1998	Rainbow Quest	River Spey	Tatts Ylg Sale	J. Dunlop	1st Prix Belle de Nuit (FR)
SIBELIUS	2004	Night Shift	Mondschein	Homebred	C. Stromberg	1st Danish Derby, Dansk JC Cup
VIGELEGERE	2005	Be My Chief	Mondschein	Homebred	C. Stromberg	1st Copenhagen Golden Mile
PERKS	2010	Selkirk	Green Charter	Homebred	J. Long	1st Songline Classic
DJANGO	2010	Acatenango	Praiens Drottning	Homebred	J. Long	1st G3 Scandinavian Open Ch,
JIVE	2011	Sabiango	Praiens Drottning	Homebred	J. Long	1st Swedish Oaks
BEATRICE AURORE	2011	Danehill Dancer	Mondschein	Homebred	J. Dunlop	1st G3 Prix Chloe, 2nd G1 Lydia Tesio
BERLING	2011	Montjeu	Danaskaya	Tatts Ylg Sale	J. Dunlop	1st Chester S.

AN AFTERNOON WITH BENNY AND BILL

By Lou Radford (Oppenheim)

Did Bill mention that when we arrived at Stockholm's Arlanda airport, we were greeted by the Swedish Royal Family? And tennis legend Bjorn Borg? Yes! Well, sort of. You know how the stress of air travel anywhere in the world these days is compounded with the misery of a long walk along interminable boring glass corridors? Well, not so at Arlanda's Terminal 5, where visitors are greeted by huge photos of the nation's stars, living and dead--the corridors are one long Hall of Fame. "Welcome to my home town!" say the greats of Sweden...a thoughtful Alfred Nobel...a sultry Greta Garbo...gosh, there's Stieg Larsson; I was just reading "Girl With The Dragon Tattoo" on the plane...then there THEY are...ABBA in their heyday, festooned in white, frothy with feathers, bright eyed and with pearly smiling teeth. What will he look like now, I wondered, looking at the photo of a young, cheeky Benny Andersson?

Well, he wasn't wearing bellbottoms anymore, that's for sure. A quiet, ordinary-looking man sat in reception and greeted Bill and me with that polite reserve so typical of Swedes. Then there was that big smile and "let's-talk-horses" enthusiasm. This was a side of Benny Andersson I'd never expected. He was so excited to sit down with Bill and talk not just about his own horses, but about the whole racing business. His knowledge of pedigrees was astounding; clearly, music was not his only enthusiasm.

One of my abiding memories of Bill's interview with Benny was the sudden interruption of a loud high-whining machine starting up just below the sunlit balcony where we were all sipping our lattes. Seeking a useful task to oust me from the role of trophy wife, I got up and looked over into the street below. Ha! Just as I expected--a leaf-blower, one of my pet aversions. There was a single car parked right outside the entrance of the Rival Hotel (how inconsiderate) and a hotel minion wasn't landing it with a ticket. No, he was using the offending leaf-blower to clear the minimal detritus from around the...OMIGOD WHAT A BEAUTIFUL CAR! The tirade of abuse which I was about to hurl, in frosty British understatement of course, ("I say, can you keep the noise down please, there's a VERY important interview taking place up here!") stuck in my throat as I gazed on a dark blue Porsche--a top-of-the-range Panamera Turbo, no less. I guessed it could only belong to one person. And sure enough, when Benny was driving us to the races (with me in the front seat, of course) and I gazed at the soft, white leather interior with beige suede trim, I resented the heap of metal and the noisy leaf-blower a whole lot less. I assured Benny that in no way did I covet the dream car, as there was no space for my three border collie dogs. I lied with ease! Benny loves the car too, but only for driving people (dignitaries like Bill and I?) to the races. The rest of the time he drives round in an everyday Toyota IQ, a good economical "green" car which he uses as much as possible. Nice one, Benny.

But if Benny has some of the trappings of great wealth, it has not come about without hard work and tremendous self-discipline. It's never been the pursuit of money which is his driving force. If it were, I doubt he'd be in the horse business! He's in music, he said, because "This kind of job is never boring. It's a joyful experience. But you still have to work really, really hard." He told me he starts work in his studio at 10 a.m. every day of the week, finishing at 5 p.m., minimum, with much longer hours coming up to the recording stage. Now, a 7-hour working day isn't really long by some people's standards, but I suspect he lives and breathes his work every waking moment, in fact. In the few hours we were with him, it was clear he never does anything by halves, and is a total perfectionist. Like Bill, he seems to have a passion for statistics, and one he worked out was amazing--he reckons his annual output of music over 40 years is just 25 minutes! But, he said, that's only counting what he's recorded. "I grew up with the record business," he said. "If it isn't recorded music, it just doesn't exist for me." Interestingly, Benny always writes the music before the lyrics, always has and always will, he says. I think that's pretty unusual, but I'm not sure. Elton John always wrote the music after Bernie Taupin had done with the lyrics, says Benny, so there are no rules.

We talked quite a bit about ABBA on the way to Taby racecourse...about how successful the group was in Europe, but how it took 18 months after the Eurovision win into break into the U.K. and the USA musical psyches and become really internationally recognised. Why? Because, as Benny rightly pointed out, most Eurovision hits are "one-hit wonders." (Apart from Celine Dion, the only other real post-Eurovision success story.) "Basically, the contest was a nice TV show with a lot of rubbish in it!" he said. So what, in his view, were the magic ingredients which shot a band from a relatively obscure country like Sweden (a lot of people outside Europe wouldn't even know where Sweden is on the map) to the pinnacle of international success? And this is where it got really interesting.

Key to the international success was writing the lyrics in English, as that is, and always was, the language of rock and pop. But Benny paid huge tribute to the exceptional voices of Agnetha and Anni-Frid, and although he admitted their blonde and brunette beauty was no disadvantage, he said it was their voices which conveyed the underlying strand of melancholy at the core of ABBA's songs, such as "The Day Before You Came" which Benny says is laden with it. Laden with melancholy? ABBA? Bill sat up from his snooze in the back seat at this point. After all, every kid we know under 10 still bops away to ABBA tunes, with squeals of delight, so where do melancholy and ABBA fit together? Well, it's fascinating really. The Swedish "melankoli" translates directly to the English "melancholy" but, according to Benny, without any of the negative associations of depression and misery. He said it is hard to pin it down, but it comes, "from living half the year in darkness. Between November and May, it's dark really early, obviously more so further north where there is no sun in the winter months. The forests are dark, the days are dark. Sure, it's bright and sunny in the summer, but in winter, from Vladivostok to, well, all round here, it's known as "the melancholy belt"--often referred to as "the vodka belt!" And this brings something special to Swedish music, and it's in their (Agnetha's and Anni-Frid's) voices. You'd never get that in a voice from sunny Italy! Just think of Ingmar Bergman films--there's Swedish melancholy for you. It is hard to pin down. It's a product of who we are and where we come from, but no, it's certainly not negative. It's often heavily disguised in my music, but it's always there." I sort of intuited this whole melancholy thing, living as I do in "the whisky belt" of Scotland and sharing some distant but deep Scandinavian roots, but to our Wichita lineman in the back seat, it was a revelation! But think about it: Wichita is 37 (degrees) North, Aberfeldy (Scotland, where we live) 57 (degrees) North, and Stockholm 58 (degrees) North. To put it into a North American context, roughly the same as Juneau, Alaska. Fascinating stuff...well, I thought so anyway.

Back to Taby. There's Benny on the bleachers; he's got two runners today. Is he nervous? "No, not nervous," he said. "It's just like before you go on stage, you just feel tension. You know everything is usually okay, but what about this time? You just never know!" Both horses came second in their races. But Benny has had some good runners, and plenty of winners, so I asked him how it feels to win a horse race, when you've already achieved so much on stage and with record sales? "Oh, that's different from everything else!" he said. (Benny is very animated talking about winning.) "It's fantastic. You're so happy for everyone who has been involved for so long, doing all the jobs you don't actually do yourself...the grooms, trainers, lads, lasses --everyone in the team wins, and you share that feeling, when everything is going well!"

I had to ask one last question, a bit banal but I asked it anyway. "Benny, would you rather come off stage after a great concert, or win a top horse race?" "Let's change the question," says Benny. "Would I like to win the Arc? YES! More than anything!"

Suffice it to say I can't think of a nicer person to win the Arc...and with a home-bred. Good luck, Benny!