

ABBA-dabba-do

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Toronto Sun

It's been about eight months since Mirvish's beloved *Mamma Mia!* ended its run in Toronto.

And some hardcore ABBA fans are enduring some serious pop-disco withdrawal as you read this.

But fear not — there's a new ABBA show in town. *ABBAmania*, a glittery tribute show with a 21-member all-Canadian cast, hits Toronto for the first time this week

at Roy Thomson Hall.

The show's creator, Burlington producer Garry Lichach, insists the production is not a *Mamma Mia!* knockoff.

"Oh no, no, no — this is completely different and anyone who's seen our show and *Mamma Mia!* would agree," Lichach says.

"This is not a play, this is a complete re-creation."

A musician and former booking agent,

Lichach has been in the tribute band business for the past eight years, having put together bar and CNE bandshell shows dedicated to the likes of everyone from Elvis to the Spice Girls.

But to him, this is his most significant work yet — and he's proudly moved beyond the bar scene.

"*ABBAmania* is for theatres

only," Lichach says. "The size of the production — the costumes and cast — it's just too big for a bar. Plus, ABBA doesn't really belong in a bar, anyway."

Lichach is clearly proud of the production and repeatedly boasts about how the cast members not only sound like the real '70s deal but look the part, too.

"I once had an elderly couple approach me after a show and the husband said, 'I haven't seen ABBA since 1974 and they haven't

changed a bit!' " Lichach says with a laugh. "I said, 'Come on, you're putting me on. You know this is a tribute show, right?' He thought it was really ABBA — he had never heard of a tribute band before! He walked away shaking his head, thinking I was the crazy one!"

Although this is its first Toronto stop, *ABBAmania* has been touring the world — everywhere from Malaysia to Vancouver — and even performed twice for the cast of *Mamma Mia!* They perform approximately 200 times each year and sometimes back-to-back (after the Toronto show they're heading straight to Michigan for a gig the next night).

Lichach attributes a classic "big wall of sound" and a touch of nostalgia for the show's popularity.

"No one will ever see ABBA again — shows like this help people go back in time," he says. "People love to hear these unforgettable tunes live."

Lichach says you don't even have to be a die-hard ABBA fan to enjoy the mania.

"Anybody who wants a night of great music should come to the show," he says. "We get husbands who have been dragged there by their wives who end up saying they loved it!"

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ABBAmania

When:

Friday, 8 p.m.

Where:

Roy Thomson Hall,
60 Simcoe St.
416-872-4255,
ticketmaster.ca

