

Kristina från Duvemåla

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Kristina från Duvemåla ("*Kristina from Duvemåla*") is a Swedish musical written by former ABBA members Björn Ulvaeus (lyrics) and Benny Andersson (music), based on a series of four novels by Swedish author Vilhelm Moberg detailing a family's poverty-driven migration from Sweden to America in the mid-19th century: *The Emigrants*, *Unto a Good Land*, *The Settlers*, and *The Last Letter Home*.

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History

The show premiered at the Malmö Opera and Music Theatre in Malmö, Sweden, on October 7th, 1995 and received a rapturous welcome. The audience gave it a 10-minute standing ovation, while the critics unanimously praised it ^[1]. Martin Nystrom of *Dagens Nyheter* wrote that Andersson and Ulvaeus "created a great Swedish musical that thematically touches on the great questions of our time" and compared Andersson's musicality with that of Schubert; while *Svenska Dagbladet's* Carl-Gunnar Ahlen concluded that Bjorn Ulvaeus "succeeded in presenting the drama without getting bogged down, despite its almost Wagnerian length" ^[2].

On October 12, 1996, the 90-minute (of nearly four-hour score) concert version with the original cast was presented, in Swedish, in Minneapolis, Minnesota as an opening event of Plymouth Music Series 1996-1997 season in Orchestra Hall; and next day in Chisago Lakes High School in Lindstrom, Minnesota – area where much of the events in Moberg's books took place and where the statue of the books' two main characters stand on the Main Street of the town. The American premiere received a glowing review from *Minneapolis Star and Tribune* : "I have seen the future of the music theater, and its name is Kristina...Engaging, emotionally charged – and at times haunting – piece of work capable of enchanting US viewers even when performed in a cut-down, concert version and in a tongue foreign to the audience"; while Helen Sjöholm who performed the role of Kristina was described as "extraordinary" ^[3].

Time magazine wrote that "the show has Swedes, Americans, Indians; a sacrificial whore and the death of a child; and – in case you think it sounds too solemn for your tastes – a bilingual fart joke... and it's one of the most ambitious swatches of musical theater (39 songs!) since Gershwin's 1935 "Porgy and Bess," with one of the most serious, lyrically seductive scores since Rodgers and Hammerstein were creating their midcentury, midcult epics" ^[4].

Subsequently, the musical was staged at Gothenburg Opera and then premiered at the Stockholm's Cirkus that was specially renovated for it. This production won four 1998 Guldmasken Theatre Awards (Swedish equivalent of Tony Award). Counting all three runs, which were almost continuous, interrupted only by summer vacations and hiatuses due to the production's physical moving, *Kristina från Duvemåla* ran for nearly four years (more than 650 performances in total), making it the second longest running musical in Swedish history. In 2001, a touring concert staging was presented featuring most of the original performers recreating their previous roles. All three original Swedish productions were directed by Lars Rudolfsson with set design by Tony Award-winner Robin Wagner and musical direction by Anders Eljas.

The Original Cast triple CD set was released in 1996 and peaked at No.2 on the Swedish album chart, remaining on it for a total of 74 weeks and winning 1996 Swedish Grammis Award as the Best Album. For a number of years, a song from the musical "Guldet blev till sand" (The gold turned into sand) performed by Peter Jöback held the distinction of having spent the longest amount of time on the national Swedish radio chart Svensktoppen.

The show has been translated into English by Björn Ulvaeus and the famed *Les Misérables* translator Herbert Kretzmer. English translations of individual songs have been presented at various concert performances throughout the last two or three years, mainly

by Helen Sjöholm or Swedish musical theatre stalwart Tommy Körberg, always in association with Benny Andersson or Björn Ulvæus.

In March of 2006, a workshop was held in New York and featured Sara Chase as Kristina, Kevin Odekkirk as Robert and Alice Ripley as Ulrika. At the time, there had been talk of a fall 2007 opening at The Broadway Theatre, but those plans never materialized partly due to a protracted legal battle over the use of the original book written for the musical ^[5].

A concert version of musical was performed under the shortened name "Kristina" (in English, publicly for the first time) in a concert presentation at Carnegie Hall on September 23 and 24, 2009 with Helen Sjöholm playing the lead ^[6]. It received glowing reviews in the main, with Time saying: ^[7] "Some of the most rapturous melodies ever heard in Carnegie Hall poured out of that grand old barn last night."

Original Cast

- Kristina - Helen Sjöholm
- Karl-Oskar - Anders Ekborg
- Robert - Peter Jöback
- Ulrika - Åsa Bergh
- Fina-Kajsa - Marianne Mörck

Replacement performers included Frida Bergh (Kristina), Joakim Jennefors (Karl Oskar), Niklas Andersson (Robert), Lisa Gustafsson (Kristina) and Christer Nerfont (Robert).

Plot

Act I

A young girl, Kristina, sits on her swing and dreams about her beau Karl Oskar. He is on his way to see her, and she pictures how he makes his way through the familiar surroundings ("Duvemåla Pasture"). When Karl Oskar arrives he tells her that he has inherited his father's farm, and can now make Kristina his wife. The two are wed and begin a life together, but times are hard as they keep getting bad harvest years. Kristina worries that they won't be able to support their growing family, and suggests to her husband that they don't have intercourse, in order to prevent another pregnancy. Karl Oskar talks her out of it, saying that it would be a betrayal of his lust and love for her ("My Lust for You").

Karl Oskar's brother, Robert, is on his way to begin working as a farm hand on a nearby farm. He stops by a stream and wishes he was as free as the water ("Out Towards a Sea").

Kristina is pregnant again, and both she and Karl Oskar worry that they won't be able to feed their little ones during winter. There is a drought, and the harvest is bad. In a fit of rage Karl Oskar tells God that since he took their hay last year, he might as well take the rest. Shortly thereafter lightning strikes the barn and what little hay they had goes up in flames. Kristina, who is very religious, tells her husband that he got what he wished for ("Bad Harvest"). Robert returns home, having been beaten by his master. He refuses to go back, instead he wants his share of the inheritance. He plans to leave Sweden and travel to North America. Karl Oskar confesses that he has been considering the same thing. Kristina is horrified. Karl Oskar and Robert try to convince her that she will love life in America, but she is too afraid. She prays to God that he will not force her to go out on the sea and risk the lives of her children ("No").

Meanwhile Kristina's uncle Danjel is having a gathering in his house. Danjel believes that God has chosen him to lead the people away from the wrong teachings of the church, and he has gathered a group of outcasts to celebrate communion ("Little Group"). However the gathering is disrupted by the provost and the local authorities, who scatter the group and threaten Danjel. One of the guests is Ulrika of Västergöhl, a former prostitute who is now on the straight and narrow. She is furious over the hypocrisy of the provost; one of his men used to be her customer. She vows that her daughter Elin will never have to suffer because her mother was a whore ("Never").

Kristina, and Karl Oskar's parents, try to convince him that it is foolish to move. They would never be able to return and would never get to see family and friends again. They wouldn't speak the language and would end up completely isolated. But when Kristina makes christening porridge for the new baby, their starving oldest daughter (Anna) eats it all and dies as a result. Realising that the poverty in Sweden is just as dangerous as anything on the sea, Kristina agrees to move ("Come To Me Everyone"). They visit the provost and write down their reasons for emigrating in the church book. The provost tries to convince them to stay by telling them of all the horrors waiting in America, and by saying that God will wipe America off the face of the earth within fifty years. The emigrants don't care however, and begin their journey ("We Open Every Gate"). Karl Oskar, Kristina, their children and Robert have gained some

companions on their journey. Danjel and his family are moving to escape the religious persecution. Ulrika and her daughter is moving with them, and so is Arvid, a friend of Robert's.

The ship turns out to be smaller than they had thought it would be. There is no room for Karl Oskar in the family area and he must bunk with the bachelors. For the first time in their marriage, Kristina and Karl Oskar are separated ("Farmers At Sea"). One day Kristina discovers lice on her body. She is horrified, since she believes lice to be a sign of poor hygiene, and she has never had them before in her life. She blames Ulrika, who does not have a louse on her. The two have a heated argument while an old woman, Fina-Kajsa, tries to calm them by telling the story of how lice came to be ("Lice"). One night in the middle of a storm Karl Oskar is woken up by his oldest son, Johan, who tells him that Ma is bleeding. Kristina, pregnant with her fifth child, has fallen ill to scurvy. The captain does what he can to help her, and Karl Oskar sits by her side, waking through the longest night of his life ("Stay"). When morning comes Kristina is alive, but Danjel's wife is not ("Burial at Sea").

On Midsummer's Eve land is finally spotted. The emigrants set foot on American soil for the first time. The sight of all the New Yorkers out for a Sunday walk overwhelms them, as does the foreign language ("A Sunday in Battery Park"). Kristina sits and rests in Battery Park and longs for when she can finally have a place to call home again ("Home"). The group travel by train and then by steamboat, amazed at how wide America is ("From New York to Stillwater"). They arrive in Stillwater one rainy night and are taken in by the Baptist priest Henry Jackson. The women are amazed by how he handles household chores, and begin to understand that women are more equal to men in this new country. The immigrants struggle with the language barrier as they try to communicate with Reverend Jackson ("To Think That Men Like Him Can Exist").

Finally the immigrants become settlers, as they begin to build their homes. Kristina opens the chest with their belongings and gets a feeling of home ("Camphor and Lavender"). Robert is not content with living at his brother's new farm though. He tells his friend Arvid of his plans to go on the California trail and look for gold. Karl Oskar is highly skeptical, but his brother is firmly set on leaving ("the Dream of Gold"). Kristina gives birth to a healthy baby boy, and as she holds him in her arms she tells him about the land where she was born, and of her astrakan apple tree which is still carrying fruit ("My Astrakan").

Act II

A few years have passed by. The settlers have begun to build a new life and a new civilisation by Chisago Lake. They gather and celebrate their choice to move to this New World ("the Superiors"). But Kristina doesn't cheer with them. She lies awake at night, tormented by her longing for Sweden, and begs God to let her return. Karl Oskar wakes up, and tells her that if God tries to move her back he will reach out his hand and keep her by his side. He shows her the boot that belonged to Anna and reminds her of why they left. He also tells her that he plans to write her father and ask for some seeds from her astrakan tree back home. Hopefully a new tree planted at their new settlement (named New Duvemåla after the farm she grew up on) will help her feel more at home ("Bright Evenings in Springtime").

When Christmas comes Karl Oskar has bought Kristina a new stove, called the Queen of the Prairie. Their friends gather at New Duvemåla to celebrate Christmas, and they all marvel at the new stove ("the Queen of the Prairie"). The fun gathering is disrupted when Karl Oskar gets into a fight with Nöjd, a fur hunter. Nöjd tells Karl Oskar that he doesn't own the land he farms, and informs him of the crimes committed against the Indians. Karl Oskar defends himself by stating his plight back home in Sweden, and by telling Nöjd just how hard he has worked to turn the wild grass on his property into a home and a farm ("Wild Grass").

One day Robert returns. Arvid is not with him, but he has a lot of money. Karl Oskar takes the money to the bank in Stillwater, and while he is away Robert and Kristina talk. Robert tells her how he has come to accept his fate and bow to it ("I Have Resigned At Last"). Kristina finds a watch which belonged to Arvid and demands to know where Arvid is. Robert tells her the story of how they went searching for gold, but ended up lost in the desert. Arvid drank poisoned water and died, the watch slipping from his hand ("the Gold Turned Into Sand"). A furious Karl Oskar returns, informing Kristina that what Robert brought home was Wild Cat money. Wild Cat money is fake money, and Karl Oskar believes that his brother knew all along. He doesn't see that Robert has been tricked, and sick of his brother's lies and exaggerations he hits him in the face ("Wild Cat Money"). Robert leaves and walks out to the woods where he finds a lonely stream. He brought home the yellow fever along with the money, and by the stream he succumbs to it and dies ("Out Towards a Sea (Reprise)").

Back in Sweden Ulrika was a whore and no respectable man would look at her twice. Now she is a coveted maiden, and has several suitors ("Won't You Marry Me?"). She accepts a marriage proposal from Reverend Jackson and tells Kristina she is converting to Baptism. The two women marvel at how they have gone from enemies to the best of friends, and Kristina wishes her friend many years of blissful marriage ("A Miracle of the Lord"). She comes to watch her friend being baptised ("Down to the Sacred Wave").

Kristina suffers a miscarriage which is a hard blow on her already fragile health. Ulrika takes her to the doctor, and then brings Karl Oskar the bad news. After all the children Kristina has birthed, and after her miscarriage, her body is broken and can't handle much more. The next childbirth will mean her death ("Miscarriage"). A devastated Kristina is alone under the stars. She thinks of all the bad things that have happened to her, having to leave her home, losing her child and now losing her husband as well. It is as if God didn't exist. She desperately begs to God, not knowing what she will do if he isn't real ("You Must Exist").

As time passes, Kristina begins to feel better ("Harvest Feast"). She longs for her husband and one night makes up her mind. She tries to convince Karl Oskar that it is God's meaning that husband and wife should be together, and that if God wants her to live she will live, but if He wants her to die He will take her regardless. Karl Oskar resists her, until she repeats the words he said to her so many years ago ("Here You Have Me Again").

During the civil war, the state of Minnesota gets a civil war of its own, an Indian uprising. Chaos, murder and violence begins to spread as Kristina finds out that she is once again with child. She tells Karl Oskar and wants him not to worry, but he is very concerned. She turns to God and asks for help to comfort him, since she is so weak and tired herself ("Red Iron/Help Me Comfort"). The settlers begin to flee their homes as the uprising spreads ("Where Do We Belong?"). Karl Oskar sends the children away, but cannot leave himself. Kristina has miscarried again, and lies dying in her bed. He sits vigil by her side and picks the first apple off her astrakan tree. On the third day she once again recognises him, and takes the apple in her hand. She tells him not to worry, and that she will be waiting for him at Duvemåla Pasture, like she once used to do. Weakly she takes a bite, but dies before she can swallow it. Karl Oskar holds her in his arms and weeps ("In Good Keeping").

Music

The song titles are the original Swedish ones. The titles in parenthesis are the titles directly translated into English.

Act One

- "Prolog"
- "Duvemåla hage" (Duvemåla Pasture)
- "Min lust till dig" (My Desire For You)
- "Ut mot ett hav" (Out Towards A Sea)
- "Missväxt" (Bad Harvest)
- "Nej" (No)
- "Lilla skara" (Little Group)
- "Aldrig" (Never)
- "Kom till mig alla" (Come To Me Everyone)
- "Vi öppnar alla grindar" (We Open Every Gate)
- "Bönder på havet" (Farmers At Sea)
- "Löss" (Lice)
- "Stanna" (Stay)
- "Begravning till sjöss" (Burial At Sea)
- "A Sunday in Battery Park"
- "Hemma" (Home)
- "Från New York till Stillwater" (From New York To Stillwater)
- "Tänk att män som han kan finnas" (To Think That Men Like Him Can Exist)
- "Kamfer och lavendel" (Camphor and Lavender)
- "Drömmen om guld" (The Dream of Gold)
- "Min astrakan" (My Astrakan)

Act Two

- "Överheten" (The Superiours)
- "Ljusa kvällar om våren" (Bright Evenings In Springtime)
- "Präriens Drottning" (The Queen of the Prairie)
- "Vildgräs" (Wild Grass)
- "Jag har förlikat mig till slut" (I Have Resigned At Last)
- "Guldet blev till sand" (The Gold Turned Into Sand)
- "Wild Cat Money"
- "Ut mot ett hav (reprise)" (Out Towards A Sea (Reprise))
- "Vill du inte gifta dig med mig?" (Won't You Marry Me?)
- "Ett Herrans underverk" (A Miracle Of The Lord)
- "Down to the Sacred Wave"
- "Missfall" (Miscarriage)
- "Du måste finnas" (You have to be there)
- "Skördefest" (Harvest Feast)
- "Här har du mig igen" (Here You Have Me Again)
- "Red Iron"/"Hjälp mig trösta" (Red Iron/Help Me Comfort)
- "Var hör vi hemma?" (Where Do We Belong?)
- "I gott bevar" (In Good Keeping)

References

1. ↑ The Globe And Mail, Oct 10, 1995, page D2
2. ↑ ibid
3. ↑ Minneapolis Star and Tribune, October 14, 1996, page 05B
4. ↑ Time, October 23, 2001
5. ↑ / Kristina The Musical Legal Dispute (http://www.broadway.com/Andersson-and-Ulvaeus-Win-Kristina-Court-Battle-Musical-Broadway-Bound/broadway_news/545
6. ↑ Kristina The Musical Official Website (http://www.kristinathemusical.com/)
7. ↑ [http://www.time.com/time/arts/article/0,8599,1925955,00.html

External links

- Official Website (http://www.duvemala.com/eng/)

- icethesite – Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvaeus news site - Kristina från Duvemåla – The Musical (<http://www.icethesite.com/content/kristina.aspx>)
- Vilhelm Moberg – The Greatest Swedish Author (<http://www.vilhelmmoberg.com/english.html>)

The Emigrants by Vilhelm Moberg

Novels: *The Emigrants* \ *Unto a Good Land* \ *The Settlers* \ *The Last Letter Home*

Films: *The Emigrants* \ *The New Land* **Musical:** *Kristina från Duvemåla*

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