

## People &amp; Places

## Music

## ABBA's comeback album

## Sting back with 'Bridge' over the troubled water

By Mark Kennedy

**'The Bridge,'** Sting (A&M/Interscope/Cherrytree Records)

Sting's new album is aptly titled "The Bridge" — we need one. In almost every song there is water.

It is rushing in the opening song, in the form of rain in another and as a cold grey sea in a third. Water is in a glass the parched singer asks for in the second song and in mist in the seventh. The title song tells of a swollen river, and the fields are drowned.

"The Bridge" is a moody and varied collection in an unmoored time, with nods to Scripture, ancient allegories and malevolent characters. It's a strong album from a singer-songwriter who sees warning signs ahead. "This is my lonely mission/To wake the world up to its fate," Sting sings.

The outlier is the first single, "If It's Love," a relentlessly cheerful tune with happy whistling, a Broadway-like song delivered with a smile that seems to surprise even the singer who created it ("The reason's hard for me to trace," Sting acknowledges).

Elsewhere is dread and a steady menace. One of Sting's wistful characters wakes up in a married woman's bed in "The Bells of St. Thomas" and notes drily of "The last days of judgement upon us."

In the Celtic-tinged "The Hills on the Border," a malevolent spirit tempts a traveler, and a husband confronts a cheating spouse in the murky synth-laden "Loving You," singing "I pray the waters of forgiveness/Will rain down on you and me."

Repeated listens reveal connections between songs. The terrifically funky "Rushing Water" references the Book of Numbers, which is the title of the third song. A hammer to the head is repeated in "Rushing Water" and "The Bells of St. Thomas."

And, of course, water is everywhere. Even the bonus tracks are drenched with it: the traditional "Waters of Tyne" and a cover of "(Sittin' on) The Dock of the Bay." It is an album to raise a glass — of anything but water — and cheer.

## "Voyage," ABBA (Capitol Records)

A bouncy, synth beat bridges the decades and brings ABBA into the present.

"You look bewildered," Agnetha Fältskog sings above the retro rhythm, "and you wonder why I'm here today."

Well, yes. ABBA is back with its first album since 1981. While skeptics might ask why, the four Scandinavian septuagenarians decided why not, and "Voyage" does nothing to tarnish their legacy as global hitmakers.

The highlight, "Just a Notion," comes midway through the 10-song set. A backbeat kicks in, followed by saxophones. The singers leap to a higher register, and pounding piano chords help the arrangement bloom. Sugar rush!

Alas, that brisk tempo is an outlier. Like most of us whose heyday was in the 1970s, ABBA has slowed down.

Ballads predominate on "Voyage," and the mood is mostly melancholy as Fältskog and Anni-Frid Lyngstad sing about relationships, Christmas, freedom and a bee. There are more tunes built for Broadway than for Eurovision, and the entire album contains fewer hooks than 2½ minutes of "Waterloo."

Even so, Benny Andersson and Björn Ulvæus remain remarkable craftsmen as composers and arrangers, and the vocals of Lyngstad and Fältskog — now pitched lower — still blend beautifully. After more than 40 years of silence, it's nice to hear.

## "Street of Dreams," Bill Charlap Trio (Blue Note Records)

Jazz pianist Bill Charlap opens his trio's latest album with four bars of shifting quarter-note chords, the reliable pulse a compelling contrast to the unpredictable colors he creates.

The final tune settles into a slow, stalking rhythm, and after a closing contribution from Charlap's left hand and a witty hesitation, the combo comes down hard on the final downbeat, sticking the landing with a satisfying splash.

From start to finish, "Street of Dreams" is a gem.

That's no surprise: The trio of Charlap, bassist Peter Washington and drummer Kenny Washington formed in 1997 and has become a sure thing, releasing a succession of excellent albums. The latest set consists of eight tunes from the American songbook and such jazz composers as Duke Ellington and Dave Brubeck.

As usual, the trio is a model of complementary cohesion. Kenny Washington is especially distinctive with his brushes, and Peter Washington makes sure the beat always swings or sways.

Charlap rarely reaches forte, aside from his occasional stabs in the lower register. He has the alluring ability to play both quietly and quickly, and when he offers a flurry of notes, no two are alike. Chromatic climbs mix with several-steps-at-a-time descents, and the result is an exhilarating morphing of melody as Charlap's lyrical explorations toggle and twirl.

The trio also embraces boldly restrained tempos that give the space between notes its due. On "Street of Dreams," even the silence makes for elegant entertainment.

## "The Atlas Underground Fire," Tom Morello (Mom + Pop Music)

Once the paint-peeling guitar riffs, spleen-shaking drums and rip-roaring parade of guests subside, Tom Morello's "The Atlas Underground Fire" really gets hearts racing.

The final cut is "On the Shore of Eternity," an 8-plus-minute dance instrumental that makes it sound as if the album has been hijacked by an aerobics class. Morello wants America to shape up.

The rock star and social justice warrior delivers that message via a sprawling 12-tune patchwork pandemic product. Morello's guitars hit hard, even though he recorded them on his phone's voice memo app, and the passion of his politics comes through. But long-distance file-sharing by the album's many collaborators results in a whiplash-inducing grab bag.

Morello co-wrote every tune except the AC/DC classic "Highway to Hell," which happens to be the set's highlight. It showcases Bruce Springsteen and Eddie Vedder in their full-throated glory, acting as though they've sung an arena anthem before. (AP)



This image released by Polk &amp; Co. shows Brandon Micheal Hall, (from left), LaChanze, and Chuck Cooper during a performance of the Roundabout Theatre Company play 'Trouble in Mind' in New York. (AP)



Lady Gaga arrives at 'The House of Gucci' LA premiere at the Academy Museum of Motion Pictures on Thursday, Nov. 18, in Los Angeles. (AP)



Baskin



Wada

## Variety

**TOKYO:** Emi Wada, the Japanese costume designer who won an Oscar for her work in Akira Kurosawa's "Ran," has died, Japanese media reports said Sunday. She was 84.

Wada died Nov. 13, the reports said, citing unidentified family sources and not giving the cause of death.

Wada was catapulted to stardom by the samurai costumes she created for the 1985 "Ran," a striking portrayal of bloody intrigue and betrayal inspired by William Shakespeare's "King Lear."

When accepting the award from the Academy in 1986, Wada held the man-shaped statue and said with a smile, "He doesn't need my costume."

Wada also designed costumes for other reputed film directors including Nagisa Oshima and Zhang Yimou, as well as for the theater and opera.

Amon Miyamoto, a theater director who worked with Wada, expressed praise for her.

"I've never known anyone who pursued perfection and authenticity as much as you," he said on his Facebook page.

"To have been able to create something with you is an honor I will never forget for the rest of my life," he added.

Wada was born in the ancient capital of Kyoto, a city filled with bamboo, wooden structures and stone gardens that she said inspired her sense of beauty.

She made a point to emphasize the textures of the materials she used for her costumes. She considered her aesthetic Japanese, and she supported efforts to preserve the traditional craftsmanship of Kyoto that was often behind her gorgeous costumes.

Her husband Ben Wada, a director whom she married when she was 20, helped her get her first costuming jobs. He died in 2011.

"Over the 60 years I've been doing this work, I've never gotten tired of it. I see myself as really lucky," Wada said in a 2017 video message for the Tokyo International Film Festival.

In 2020, she created the costumes for Ann Hui's "Love After Love," which premiered at the Venice International Film Festival.

Funeral services were held with family and close friends, media reports said. (AP)

**TAMPA, Fla:** A detective in Florida investigating the disappearance of Carole Baskin's second husband said that the

## Stage

## Crystal plans his Broadway return in a familiar role

## 'Trouble in Mind' makes its B'way debut

NEW YORK, Nov. 21, (AP) — Alice Childress' searing play "Trouble in Mind" has finally made it to Broadway and the only frustrating thing about the show is that it has taken this long.

The two-act play takes place — appropriately enough — on a Broadway stage and is an uncomfortable exploration of the racial divide in the 1950s. So it works perfectly in the 2020s.

Childress wrote a satire of the white theater scene at the time, poking holes in liberal banalities and the white commitment to Black equality. It will still take your breath away, making it a mandatory stop in the fall season.

The strong Roundabout Theatre Company's production that opened Thursday stars LaChanze and Chuck Cooper still standing on fissures that were raw in the 1950s, from how agreeable to white authority Blacks must pretend to behave in order to work to the plea of white actors uncomfortable with too much Black boldness.

"Trouble in Mind" opened to acclaim off-Broadway in 1955, and was going to move to Broadway in 1957. It would have been the first play on Broadway by a Black woman, but Childress refused a request by producers to make it more palatable for white Broadway-goers. (Lorraine Hansberry's "A Raisin in the Sun" would later break the Black female playwright barrier in 1959.)

The show in 2021 at the American Airlines Theatre is directed by Charles Randolph-Wright, but the fictional director onstage is the deliciously named Al Manners (Michael Zegen). He starts out as edgy and inclusive — demanding something he calls "the firm texture of truth" — but soon proves to be straight-up dictatorial and ultimately racist.

Childress uses the play-within-the-play "Chaos in Belleville" — a truly bad work with stereotypical Black characters meant to exercise liberal white guilt about a Southern lynching — to make her spiciest points. The term Uncle Tom is thrown about with

regularity.

LaChanze plays Wileta, an actress of a certain age who bristles at the shallowness of her role and the illogical third act. Outside the theater, newspapers talk of rocks thrown at children trying to desegregate schools.

Wileta counsels John, a younger actor (Brandon Micheal Hall) about the Catch-22s facing Black actors: Be confident but not cocky, be natural and don't let on you've taken classes. "They don't like us to go to school," she says. John says he adores the theater. "Show business," she corrects him. "It's just a business. Colored folks ain't in no theater."

## Characters

Backstage, Wileta and her Black co-stars — including Cooper as the veteran actor Sheldon and Jessica Frances Dukes as pragmatic Millie — joke grimly about the roles on offer these days.

The women play nannies and maids named Crystal, Pearl or Opal or Gerdania, Magnolia or Chrysanthemum. Millie says during one show that she did, she just shouted "Lord, have mercy!" for two hours.

As they perform the play-within-the-play, the company reveals how bad it is: Wileta plays a maid whose son is in mortal danger from a white mob yet inexplicably irons shirts. Sheldon will soon be asked to whittle a stick. The Black characters must sing church hymns soulfully.

Wileta soon snaps, despite being told by the director that he has tried to give her roles dignity. "You know what your dignity is?" she shoots back. "A old black straw hat with a flower stickin' up in front, hands folded cross my stomach, sayin' the same damn fool things."

Cooper's Sheldon is at the other extreme: He recognizes the paltry options but is willing to play along. "White folks is stickin' together, stickin' together, stickin' together... we fightin'." Wileta will surely keep

fighting and the play ends on an uncertain note. Opening night may be rocky.

Full credit to Roundabout for seeing that a play written at the time of Emmett Till's murder needed to be seen by a crowd who lived through the murder of George Floyd. Childress died in 1994 without a Broadway show. It's our turn to show her she was right not to water it down; it's our turn to make it into a hit.

## Also:

**NEW YORK:** Billy Crystal is not ready to say goodbye to "Mr. Saturday Night."

The comic icon has turned his comedy film into a Broadway-bound musical and hopes to open it next year with him reprising his film role as Buddy Young Jr., a bitter, old insult comic chasing a last laugh.

"There's something about this guy and that world that I love," Crystal tells The Associated Press. "I think that we've brought this story and this character to a better place than I could have imagined even."

Crystal has written the stage adaptation with his film's co-writers — Lowell Ganz and Marc "Babaloo" Mandel — and married it to music by Jason Robert Brown and lyrics by Amanda Green. John Rando will direct.

"What the music has done to elevate the story and to propel the story and bring out dynamics in the characters is quite amazing to me," Crystal says. "It's something I couldn't be more excited about, honestly."

He will star opposite Tony Award-winner Randy Graff, Chasten Harmon and David Paymer, who will recreate his Oscar-nominated performance as Buddy's brother, Stan Yankelman.

Crystal has just ended a developmental run of the show at the Barrington Stage Company in Massachusetts. Performances begin on Broadway on March 1, 2022, at the Nederlander Theatre.

When asked about the Costa Rica rumor, Garcia refused to comment, but he said federal agents had run down leads in the Central American country. Getting a search warrant for the animal sanctuary to follow up on the septic tank rumor would require probable cause, either evidence showing something happened on the property or a witness who could testify to that effect, he said.

Besides Baskin, a former handyman at the sanctuary, Kenny Farr, also "didn't interview with us," the detective said.

It's unusual for a spouse or relative to refuse to cooperate when a family member goes missing, and Baskin is a person of interest, though others are too, Garcia said.

Baskin said in an email to The Associated Press that she has referred Garcia to her attorney. She pointed out she did everything she possibly could to assist detectives after Lewis' disappearance, including interviews, continued correspondence and unfettered access to the Big Cat Rescue property.

"There is nothing that I know that is not either in the Sheriff's files or in the diary I have published at SaveTheCats.org," Baskin said. "And no way I am going to have a clearer memory, or anything to add, twenty-four years later."

In response to a question on Reddit this week, Baskin wrote that she believed that Lewis took off in a small experimental airplane that crashed into the Gulf of Mexico.

"He wasn't licensed to fly, yet did all the time. He couldn't file a flight plan and had to take off from closed airports to evade detection," Baskin said. "I think this was the most likely scenario." (AP)



Pedestrians pose for pictures in Times Square, Monday, Nov. 15, 2021, in New York. Even as visitors again crowd below the jumbo screens in New York's Times Square, the souvenir shops, restaurants, hotels and entrepreneurs within the iconic US landmark are still reeling from a staggering pandemic. (AP)

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