

## Eurovision Form Guide

*The Sydney Morning Herald* February 2002

You'd think that people would have had enough of silly love songs. In Europe, however, a television audience of 100 million viewers is already chafing at the lederhosen – whatever – in anticipation of the 47<sup>th</sup> Eurovision Song Contest (post-midlife crisis edition), that will be broadcast live from Tallinn, Estonia this Saturday, May 25.

They won't just be watching. During a five-minute 'televoting window', viewers will be passionately telephoning and SMS-messaging their votes – think *Star Search-meets-Survivor* – for “artists” whose best career hope, ultimately, is to become a kitsch curiosity. With tragically few exceptions in 46 years, Eurovision reads like a Who's Not of the music industry.

That's because Eurovision is less about music than it is about television. With its inaugural broadcast from Switzerland on May 24, 1956, the ESC is now very likely the world's longest-running, annual television event. It was conceived, and continues, as a program-generating vehicle for the members of the television co-op European Broadcasting Union. In its longevity, innovation and audience pulling power, it makes *Big Brother* look about as fearsome as Pugsley Addams.

This year's fromage factor is supplied by hosts Anneli Peebo – well-known in Viennese opera circles – and Estonian (stage) actor, Marko Matvere. They'll be presiding over 24 finalists whose material, on closer inspection, betrays a number of evident Eurovision song criteria, namely:

- ∞ It must be about love.
- ∞ Its title must involve the words or concepts of Love, Us, All, Only, e.g. *Only Love; All is Love; If Only Love; Love is All; I Love Youse All* etc.
- ∞ It must contain the word couples high/sky; love/above; feet/beat; move/groove
- ∞ It must contain a bridge, key change and wah-wah pedal effects
- ∞ It may be sung in the performer's native tongue, or in American
- ∞ It must be written by somebody other than the actual “artist”
- ∞ Its performer/s must resemble extras from a nightclub-shooting scene in *Miami Vice*

Anyway, we'll spare you the rest of the depressing historical details, in favour of a form guide to this year's more fancied entrants.

**Slovenia** starts as sentimental favourite, thanks to the three female impersonators – Daphne, Marlena and the beguilingly-named Imperatrizz – who strut their stuff in air stewardess uniforms. Known as Sestre (Sister), the trash trio has already taken off with a TV commercial deal

for a Slovenian mobile 'phone network. The song *Samo Ljubezen* (Only Love), sung in Slovenian, aurally falls well short of the girls' Whitney Houston aspirations; imagine Spandau Ballet covering the theme from *The Love Boat*, while eating.

**Russia's** entry is the pre-fab four band, Premier Ministr' (literally, Prime Minister), boasting all the visual and aural excitement the name implies (apologies to The Whitlams). The group's bio-pic looks like a gathering of the Scooby Doo Fan Club after a sponsored visit to Gap Clothing. The four boys look fashionably 30-ish (thanks to Kylie, 30 is the new 20). Beyond the adenoidal whimpering of the lead singer, however, three of them seem to be redundant. **Song:** *Northern Girl*. **Lyric Sample:** Northern girl, Lady Ice/How can I melt you baby/Northern girl never cries /Tough like a pearl/Northern girl frosty eyes /I wanna melt you baby...

**Estonia.** The home team has drafted in Swedish songbird Sahlene (a.k.a. Anna Sahlin) for its locally-penned entry, *Runaway*. What at first sounds like a rebellious lyrical streak – something about running red lights, babe – never goes above 40 in the musical 50-zone that is Eurovision. Sahlene, just 24 years old, sounds like Tammy Wynette singing a commercial for home insurance. Live performance ought to include electronic mosquito-zapper. **Lyric sample:** Just run away to the stars/Just run away 'til you're high enough/I will be waiting above/I'll make it happen/I'll try so hard (ard ard ard).

One doesn't need to speak **Macedonian** to see that the words to *Od Nas Zavisi* (It Depends on Us) don't even rhyme. Some "artist"! It's a rather moody, electronic ditty, belted out with appropriate angst by 22-year-old Karolina Gocheva. Still, less than 60 seconds into it, *Od Nas Zavisi* already sounds like an incidental fragment from a film soundtrack. I visualised James Bond at an outdoor market, buying a grapefruit.

**Israel's** membership of the European Broadcasting Union explains its presence in the Eurovision Song Contest. This year's female singer Sarit Hadad is, reassuringly, both female and a singer, unlike Israel's 1998 winner, the transvestite Dana International. The tinkly, Marriott-foyer-grade piano tune *Let's Light a Candle* has its lyrics in both Hebrew and English, the result sounding like three minutes of Celine Dion reciting from a Linotype ETAOINSHRDLU keyboard.

One must presume that the title of **Belgium's** entry *Sister*, by Sergio and the Ladies, should no more be taken literally than in, say, Slovenia. The bottle-bleached, sunglassed-at-night Sergio (a.k.a. Serge Quisquater) is an "entertainer" in the Belgian chocolate mould of Darryl Summers. *Sister* is said to be inspired by the songs of Tom Jones and James Brown, but the lyrics might be more to the taste of, say, Gary Glitter. If not his sister.

**Lyric sample:** Sister, come on and move your body/Sister, so come on

and make my day/I'm in love and I can make it feel this way/That's why I wanna say/Oh yeah, that's how I wanna feel honey.

Golly, **Sweden** has a novel concept: Three humanoid action-figures, ready-made with nicknames Sporty Funkybabe, Sexy Glamourqueen and Classy Gospeldiva. The girl group, Afro-dite, started only recently on Sweden's disco revival scene, but is already preparing to scale the herring (surely, heights?) of ABBA's Eurovision success 28 years ago. *Never Let it Go* is pure, brain-bypass disco, studio-produced to within an inch of its life. The melody echoes that of schoolyard favourite, "There's a place in France/where the women wear no pants/And the men walk round/with their dickies hanging down..." Well, which school did *you* go to? **Lyric sample:** So, never let it go/never stop till you know/we'll be reaching for the top tonight/Surrender to the beat up and down/in the heat we'll be shaking, shaking.

**Germany** is rated highly with *I Can't Live Without Music*, the fourth Eurovision attempt for singer Corinna May, whose blurb reveals: "as a child, she often sang into a can of hairspray". Jury's still out on whether she inhaled. Ms May, who has been blind from birth, was disqualified in 1999 after it was discovered that her song "had been previously released with different words" – a charge that fails to distinguish it from every other Eurovision song, ever. *I Can't Live Without Music*, I can live without.