

Despite Rollercoaster Energy, 'Mamma Mia!' Bellows Beloved ABBA Vocals With Feel-Good Appeal

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Rating: **3.0/5.0**

CHICAGO – While it'd be embellishment to say you'd have the *time of your life* at the new musical film "Mamma Mia!," any *dancing queen* or an admirer of seeing Pierce Brosnan croon a tune instead of trigger James Bond destruction can at least have some of the time of your 108 minutes.

Sandwiched amid three compelling female performances, Donna (played by Meryl Streep) is appreciated as the overwhelming lead of the middle-aged trio. She's effectively complemented by a feisty Christine Baranski and a lone-wolf Julie Walters. The three ladies, though, dwarf three more energy-lacking male performances.



Left to right: Tanya Chesham-Leigh (Christine Baranski), Donna Sheridan (Meryl Streep) and Rosie Rice (Julie Walters) lead the Greek chorus in the musical romantic comedy "Mamma Mia!".

Photo credit: Universal Pictures





Amanda Seyfried as Sophie Sheridan in the musical romantic comedy "Mamma Mia!".
Photo credit: Peter Mountain, copyright Universal Studios

Working with Colin Firth and Stellan Skarsgård – both of whom at times feel somewhat in an unintentional slumber – Pierce Brosnan saves the middle-aged male trio with powerful, leading male vocals and his usual charisma.

The three men arrive at the wedding of Donna's daughter, Sophie (played preciously by Amanda Seyfried), amid confusion of which one is Sophie's true father.

While the camera yet again finds the heartthrob in Pierce Brosnan, this time he's a sensitive and singing heartthrob without all the high-tech James Bond gadgetry and penchant for blowing stuff up.

Still, it was enormously difficult to see Brosnan without beautiful ladies on both arms and things in his pocket triggering big Hollywood booms.

As for the music of 1970s pop-music group ABBA throughout the film, "Dancing Queen" and the namesake number "Mamma Mia" stand as the standout sequences. As usual, the music was pre-recorded by the actors and then lip-synced in the film with decency (though it's still noticeable and slightly off-putting).

Pierce Brosnan's vocals clearly make use of the most synthesizing and improvement from modern-day computers. Meryl Streep and Amanda Seyfried, on the other hand, excelled more naturally. Seyfried, though, didn't appear able to stand solo in her musical numbers and best shone when blended with ensemble assistance.



Amanda Seyfried as Sophie Sheridan on the set of the musical romantic comedy "Mamma Mia!".

Photo credit: Peter Mountain, copyright Universal Studios

This, by the way, is marketed as a "romantic comedy". While it earns the romance classification through its campy scripting, there's comedy? Really? That's news.



Left to right: Bill Anderson (Stellan Skarsgård), Sam Carmichael (Pierce Brosnan) and Harry Bright (Colin Firth) in the musical romantic comedy "Mamma Mia!".

Photo credit: Peter Mountain, copyright Universal Studios

For many, 2008's "Mamma Mia!" will bring to mind the recent memory of the 2007 musical film "Hairspray" with John Travolta, Michelle Pfeiffer, Christopher Walken, Amanda Bynes, James Marsden, Queen Latifah and Zac Efron.

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Unlike the consistent energy level throughout "Hairspray," though, "Mamma Mia!" wavers and instead can feel like an up-and-down rollercoaster of thrilling highs and awkward lows.

While "Mamma Mia" as a jukebox musical launched the current trend on Broadway, the film iteration also shines in its ability to "grow down" middle-aged men and women through their acting.

Though inspiring for some who want to be as young as their minds and bodies permit, the film grows increasingly cliché in its quest to regress the ages of the seasoned bunch instead of drinking the fine wine with pride and reality.

In the end, "Mamma Mia!" goes cliché even further to the unfortunate max. Under pressure to maintain the musical status quo, the film decides to hurl all story progression development out the window and entirely too quickly ties all loose ends ridiculously air tight.

"Mamma Mia," which opened everywhere on July 18, 2008, stars Meryl Streep, Amanda Seyfried, Pierce Brosnan, Colin Firth, Stellan Skarsgård, Julie Walters and Christine Baranski.



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