

UNIONVILLE MAN STARS IN MUSICAL BASED ON ABBA'S TUNES

Mamma Mia! He's quite an actor

BY JENNIFER BROWN
Staff Writer

Adam Brazier was just a toddler calling to his own mamma when Swedish mega group ABBA stormed on the pop charts in the late '70s.

But even then, he said, he had a love for songs such as Money, Money, Money and Take A Chance On Me.

Maybe they spoke to his dreams of becoming an actor, but now the 25-year-old Unionville resident is about to join the ranks of Super Trouper in the hit musical *Mamma Mia!*, which opened last week at the Royal Alexandra Theatre in Toronto.

"There is a photo of me at the age of about two with big '70s headphones on and you can see the record playing and it's ABBA. I think it's in my DNA," Brazier quipped during a late afternoon rehearsal break recently.

"I think it's pretty timeless. I don't think there's another group, with the exception of maybe Queen at a certain time, who captured a sound they way ABBA did. You can tell ABBA within seconds of hearing it."

From Dancing Queen to Chiquitita and Honey Honey — it's all ABBA, all the time.

Mamma Mia is based on the hit music written by ABBA founders Bjorn Ulvaeus and Benny Andersson.

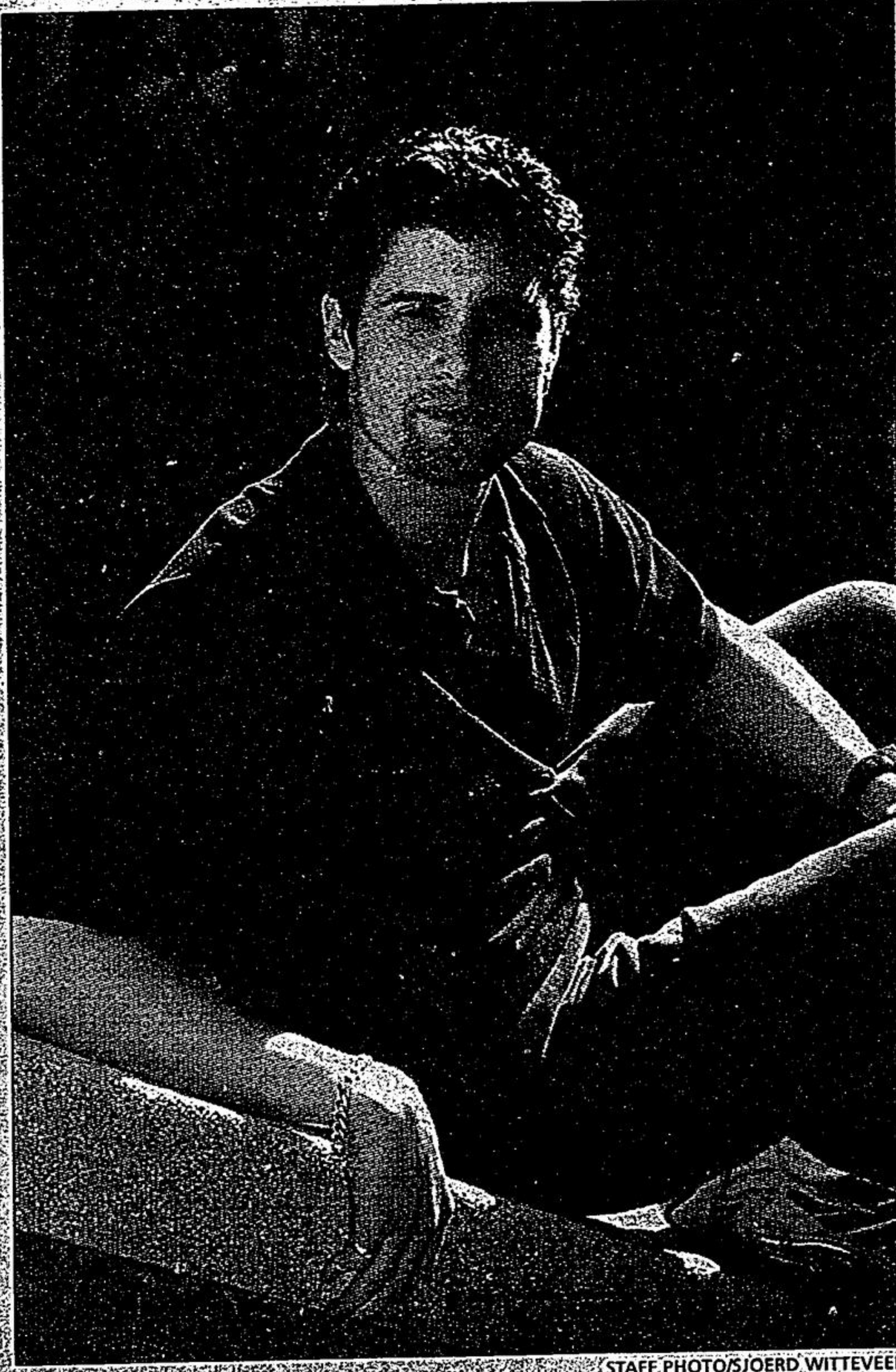
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However, Brazier suggested even devout ABBA fans will rediscover one or two lesser-known songs during the show, which features 22 of the pop group's hit tunes.

"There are a few songs I didn't remember, like Slipping Through My Fingers and Under Attack — I love Under Attack — and, of course, Dancing Queen and Super Trouper," said Brazier, referring to what has possibly become the group's signature song.

A native of Unionville, Brazier attended Unionville High School's performing arts program and recently returned to the nest while his new home is being built in Toronto.

"I've moved back home for the first time in five years," Brazier said, shaking his head.



STAFF PHOTO/SJOERD WITTEVEEN

Adam Brazier takes to the stage as Sky in *Mamma Mia!* at the Royal Alexandra Theatre in Toronto.

He graduated from the George Brown Theatre School in 1996 and soon joined the Stratford Festival, where he appeared in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Camelot* and *Oedipus Rex*. The same year, he received the Tyrone Guthrie Award to study singing — something that would later aid him in his current role.

The next season, he appeared in *Man of La Mancha* and *The Miracle Worker*. He was also cast in *A Funny Thing Happened on the Way to the Forum* and *Godspell*. In *Mamma Mia!*, Brazier stars as Sky, the young man engaged to Sophie, the daughter of Donna, the feisty, independent mother.

The production revolves around Sophie's quest to find her birth father before she marries Sky.

The story unfolds on the Greek island where Sophie and Donna live and explores the life of a

woman coming to terms with her past as she tries to tell her daughter about the complexities of love.

Tying this funny and warm story line together is the seemingly timeless and catchy ABBA music written by Ulvaeus and Andersson, the creative talent and male half of the Swedish foursome who reigned in the '70s.

When the show opened in England last year, London's Prince Edward theatre sold out and a similar ticket sale phenomenon occurred in Toronto, when the show went on sale in March, breaking all previous records by selling more tickets in the first day than any other show in Canada.

More than 80,000 tickets have been sold since tickets first went on sale.

Brazier said, while personal memories of ABBA's music may

have drawn theatre-goers, the show isn't just about the music.

"I think people like the idea of ABBA, it's so campy and it sounds like it would be a lot of fun and it is a very fun show," he said, adding that because the music makes up so much of the show, rehearsing has been somewhat difficult without any audience feedback.

"It really needs an audience — I think the audiences will love it."

In the London performances, audiences were dancing in the aisles by the second act, recalling their own Dancing Queen days.

Brazier has several very funny scenes in the production, including one, he hints, that leaves little to the imagination and required several trips to a tanning salon.

And in terms of his fellow cast members, he gives high praise for the work of Louise Pitre, who plays Sophie's mother, Donna.

"To me, the highlight of the show is when Louise sings The Winner Takes It All," he said.

Audiences may be appreciative of the show, but Brazier predicts critics will hate the production.

"Let's face it, it's not high art, it's not a cerebral show, it's not presenting any big message," said Brazier.

"But it doesn't claim to be anything like that, either."

Brazier admits he, too, had doubts about the concept when he first heard about the production coming to Toronto. He was still performing in *Godspell* at the time and initially dismissed the idea of auditioning.

"I said, 'Come on. I even cancelled my first audition. I was about to go to Winnipeg with *Godspell* and (*Mamma Mia!*) said they really wanted to see me."

He was called back a second time from Winnipeg for another audition and landed the role of Sky. It was an important step for the young actor, who was set to return to Stratford for another season.

The *Mamma Mia!* production presented not only a lead role, but an opportunity he had been looking for — touring with a company.

When the show finishes its Toronto run, it will move on to San Francisco, Los Angeles, Boston and Washington, with plans under way for a return engagement in Toronto.

"I have never travelled like that, so that was the lure for me," he said.

Mamma Mia! runs until November at the Royal Alexandra Theatre.

For ticket information, call 1-800-461-3333.

REGIONAL News Digest



WHAT'S HAPPENING

McHappy Day Today

McDonald's Restaurants

Celebrities, sports personalities, members of the media and politicians, such as MPP Al Palladini, above with the Hamburglar, will be celebrating McHappy Day, when \$1 from every Big Mac and Breakfast Bagel is donated to charity.

Towns ponder smoke issue

Municipal councils have been asked to scrutinize a draft bylaw for a smoking ban in York Region by June 26.

York's no-smoking task force will then debate the proposals at its meeting June 28, with an eye to bringing the contentious issue back to regional council July 6.

But politicians are still split over who should have jurisdiction over the ban. That is, if they agree with a ban at all.

The bylaw would prohibit smoking in public places beginning in June 2001. But business owners will be able to build separately enclosed smoking areas covering no more than 25 per cent of their floor space.

Bars and nightclubs would face the same ban in 2004.

Vaughan Councillor Joyce Frustaglio, chairperson of the task force, is pushing for a bylaw controlled by the region.

While the regional bylaw would take precedence, Frustaglio is also hoping York's nine local councils will adopt similar policies that could take into account local concerns.

However, Markham Councillor Ralph Aselin, a member of the task force, warned his town is leery of giving the region ultimate power over the ban.

He's also worried that if the ban is defeated — even over the political reason of jurisdiction — it would take years before advocates could get the issue back on the table.

— Lisa Queen

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