

## Boom Banga Bang

**National heats for the Eurovision Song Contest begin in April, heralding the search for another 'Song for Europe'. Eyes glued to the Scoreboard, Lucy O'Brien is rooting for Norway**

Whether it's Cliff Richard doing his strange twiddle-legged dance through 'Power To All Our Friends', Brotherhood Of Man in those amazing cream flares, or Katie Boyle simpering and pronouncing the immortal phrase: 'Norvege: deux points', we all have an image of the Eurovision Song Contest in our minds. But, apart from Abba, no act since the contest's heyday of the early 70s has remained long in the international public eye. The song-writing standards have failed to keep pace with modern production techniques, and most 'serious' artistes avoid it like the plague.

Yet the show still goes on, amassing more viewers each year, and attracting yet more countries. This year Cyprus will be the 22nd country to join the sparkling roll-call that includes such strange bedfellows as Sweden, Turkey, Yugoslavia, Iceland and, of course, the UK. An estimated 600m viewers (including 75m in the Soviet Union) will settle down to watch the marathon transmitted live from Switzerland on May 5. Lolita Morena, former 'Miss Photogenic Universe' and mistress of five languages, will be our pert Italian-Swiss presenter, along with the suave Swiss Olympics sports journalist Jacques Deschenauz. They have to ensure that the show, with over 800 performers, composers, directors, officials and tv reps taking part, flows smoothly and accessibly. With 33 national tv organisations simultaneously transmitting their every move, that could be a nerve-wracking prospect.

The contest wasn't always so



Gaultier suit: European modernism uses the imagery of the past to feed the future

large. Back in 1956, a measly seven countries participated in the first event - Belgium, Germany, The Netherlands, France, Italy, Luxembourg and Switzerland. It was set up in a postwar atmosphere of creative cultural co-operation, the brainchild of a group of programme pioneers within the Swiss-based European Broadcasting Union. Eurovision was devised as a high-profile promotion of cross-border tv programming. What better way to do that than via those great common-denominators music and song?

According to the early regulations, the initial aim of Eurovision was 'to encourage the creation of original songs and to stimulate, by means of international competition, a spirit of friendly rivalry between writers and composers'.

Each participating tv organisation (one per country) was to present a song of three minutes duration. An international jury was divided into separate rooms to watch the contest on their own tv sets. The judging procedure has become more sophisticated over the years, but there are still sceptics who maintain that there's more of a spirit of rivalry than friendliness in the voting process. This mildly nationalistic pop parade has the

**'It is a spectacle of enthusiasm and bonhomie that erases rather than celebrates difference. Something that began as a cross-cultural media event has become a case of positive PR and bland razzmatazz.'**

perfect combination of populist entertainment and intense competition. People keep watching to see who wins, who nearly wins, and who ends up with *deux points*.

Like *It's A Knockout*, *Miss World* or the Grand Prix, Eurovision has more to do with tv and PR than with international co-operation. It is a spectacle of enthusiasm and bonhomie that erases rather than celebrates differ-



Cliff Richard: Twiddled his legs for all our Euro-friends

ence. Like *Sky* magazine, Eurovision adopts a simple pan-European parlance, hence the 'Boom-Banga-Bang' ditties and middle-of-the-road string arrangements. Even language differences are being ironed out as more and more entrants conveniently sing in "English. Something that began as a humanist, cross-cultural media event has, over 33 years, become a case of positive PR for television, and bland razzmatazz.

The show has an annual momentum of its own, set apart from the day-to-day runnings of the European music industry. Phenomena like punk and hip hop, for instance, have scarcely dented its presentation. In the 60s and early 70s it was a promotional vehicle for chart stars like Cliff, Sandie Shaw, Lulu and even Olivia Newton John, who didn't consider it too embarrassing for their recording careers. During the last ten years, though, Eurovision has taken on an increasingly middle-aged hue, and less credibility among young record buyers.

The contest follows a tv formula that's predictable in its

glitzy uniformity. Adopting a secure middle-of-the-road mode, it ignores the challenges of current global pop; the onslaught, for instance, of Parisian/Algerian rai, Belgian new beat, or British rap. To take such cross-fertilisation into account, as well as the impact of pop's new technology, Eurovision would have to be rethought and restructured. No more orchestras, no more homogenised songwriting, no more plonky refrains and obedient performers.

In the end, of course, it's the Scoreboard our eyes are drawn to, the subtle hierarchy of nations (where will Turkey come this year?), and the nail-biting sense of competition for its own sake. Whatever the cultural possibilities of 1992, this is a presentation of Europe that remains resolutely in the 70s. And it leaves only one question on everyone's lips: can Norway do it this time round?

## Continental-List

### EU & Non-EU

|                  |                 |
|------------------|-----------------|
| Strasbourg       | Westminster     |
| Football         | Cricket         |
| Glasgow          | London          |
| Golden Delicious | Granny Smith    |
| Abba             | Bucks Fizz      |
| Willi Brandt     | Norman Tebbit   |
| Butter mountains | Bad eggs        |
| Jetfoil          | Sealink         |
| Milan            | Milton Keynes   |
| Smurfs           | Wombles         |
| Perrier          | Lucozade        |
| Jack Lang        | Kenneth Baker   |
| Cappuccino       | Instant whip    |
| Marlene Dietrich | Gracie Fields   |
| Munich           | Bavaria         |
| Two-pin plugs    | Ear plugs       |
| Tutti frutti     | Apple crumble   |
| Dukakis          | Bush            |
| Human rights     | Get-out clauses |
| The Body Shop    | Boots           |
| Boots            | Wellies         |
| elan             | flan            |
| Chantal Cuer     | Sue Lawley      |
| La Dolce Vita    | Educating Rita  |
| Rifat Ozbek      | Paul Smith      |
| Winos            | Lager louts     |
| Marie Claire     | Woman's Realm   |
| Daniel Day Lewis | Rupert Everett  |
| Multilingual     | Monotone        |
| Nina Hagen       | Sheena Easton   |
| Milan Kundera    | Kingsley Amis   |
| Baguettes        | Mother's Pride  |