

From Space Hero to Pop Star

Marc Armitage

When I was living and working in Sweden, a friend and fellow PhD student of mine with the Högskolan i Halmstad (the University of Halmstad) called Anders Nelson, now Dean of the University, told me a story about his young son Viktor.

At one stage Viktor had a thing about¹ Buzz 'To infinity and beyond' Lightyear – and frankly who wouldn't? Buzz was a movie star (first in the film Toy Story, then later in the follow-up Toy Story 2, and more recently in the imaginatively titled Toy Story 3). He was a space explorer, he was fearless and he could fly (or at least so he thought so)², he had flashing lights, futuristic sounds, and he was on TV. In short, Buzz was a modern media hero with an old fashioned bent.

Viktor was engrossed with him. He had the toys, the bedclothes, the pyjamas, the books, the films ... the lot and Buzz formed a central part in Viktor's playing for a good two years. What caught my imagination about this story the most was that Anders said the then five/six year-old Viktor was more than playing WITH Buzz Lightyear ... he WAS Buzz Lightyear. This was a character that was clearly important to Viktor's play world.

Until one day something happened.

Viktor happened to see a strange person on the TV: a tall, thin, rock star with spiky purple hair and a guitar. This was the musician Per Gessle³; a name that to many of you might mean nothing but to others will be better known as the male half of the massively successful Swedish pop act Roxette⁴ (Marie Fredriksson being the other half).

Viktor's fascination changed. His penchant for Buzz Lightyear disappeared practically overnight and he now *became* Per Gessle. He wanted to dress like Gessle, he wanted the same spiky hair style, and perhaps most significantly he acquired a toy guitar and spent hours strumming and singing along to Gessle's CDs perfecting his act.

At this point it's probably important to note that Per Gessle is a bit of a local hero in Halmstad where he was born, bred and went to school before finding fame and fortune both with the duo Roxette and his own band Gyllene Tider (The Golden Times)⁵. When Gessle performed with Gyllene Tider in Halmstad for the first time in many years at the end of the 1990s practically the whole town (45,000 people including me) attended at least one of the two gigs held in a massive outdoor venue.

Viktor's passion for Per Gessle become as significant as it had earlier for Buzz Lightyear until one day he took out the little booklet from inside one of his CDs. Inside the booklet were photographs of buildings that he recognised which made him curious so he asked his father, 'Why are these photographs here in this little book?' Anders explained to him that these were photographs of buildings in Halmstad because Gessle lives here in Halmstad.

Viktor was suddenly wide eyed and shocked. Eventually he stammered, "You mean, Per Gessle is a REAL person?"

He genuinely hadn't realised. His hero Buzz Lightyear was larger than life ... but he wasn't real and he knew that. To now discover that the equally bigger than life Per Gessle however WAS real ... can you imagine the shock?

¹ <http://www.disney.co.uk/toy-story/characters/buzz-lightyear.jsp#characters/buzz>

² http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ejwrxGs_Y_I

³ <http://photos.lucywho.com/per-gessle-photo-gallery-c17303758.html>

⁴ <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roxette>

⁵ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gyllene_Tider

When, I wonder was the last time we experienced a similar shock of discovering that something we were absolutely convinced about actually turned out to completely wrong?

I, for example, distinctly remember discovering that Eric Morecombe's trick with the paper bag was just that – a trick (remember that?)⁶. Back then I simply refused to believe it. I'm still not sure. As we become older and wiser and more knowledgeable the possibility of those moments seems to grow less likely and our ability to be profoundly taken aback rarer.

Personally I'm not sure that's such a good thing.

Marc Armitage
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⁶ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NLdx-FEzEO>