

TUNE INTO ENGLISH

ABBA's Waterloo



Questo brano orecchiabile ha un testo semplice ma divertente: usa la sconfitta di Napoleone come metafora dell'amore. Fu proprio con questa canzone che la band svedese iniziò una folgorante carriera.

ABBA burst onto the scene¹ in 1974 when *Waterloo* won the Eurovision Song Contest, held² in Brighton in the UK. The Swedish band managed³ to beat⁴ Britain's Olivia Newton John, Italy's Gigliola Cinquetti and Spain's Peret (Pedro Pubill Calaf), amongst others⁵. The song compares a romantic affair⁶ to Napoleon's surrender⁷ to the British at the battle of Waterloo in 1815, a defeat⁸ that ended the Napoleonic Wars. The first line, however, is historically inaccurate; Napoleon did not surrender on the day of the battle, but retreated⁹ to France and only acknowledged¹⁰ the British victory almost a month later.

ABBA members pose with the first prize they won at the 1974 Eurovision Song Contest in Brighton, UK.



Another fundamental difference is that the singers realise¹¹ that despite¹² giving their love interest a chance, they have not surrendered at all¹³; by falling in love, they are victorious. *Waterloo* is written in very simple English, as befits¹⁴ a group not singing in their mother tongue. You can also hear from their accents that ABBA are not native English speakers, but for future releases¹⁵ they improved¹⁶ their pronunciation. *Waterloo* was, in fact, a very important victory for ABBA, who went on to become (along with car manufacturer Volvo) Sweden's biggest exports. Their greatest hits album is the UK's second biggest-selling¹⁷ album ever, never leaving the Top 100 since its release in 1992. ☺

UPPER INTERMEDIATE B2

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GLOSSARY

- 1 to burst onto the scene: irrompere sulla scena
- 2 to hold: avere luogo
- 3 to manage: riuscire
- 4 to beat: battere
- 5 amongst others: tra gli altri
- 6 affair: storia, relazione
- 7 surrender: resa
- 8 defeat: sconfitta
- 9 to retreat: ritirarsi
- 10 to acknowledge: riconoscere
- 11 to realise: rendersi conto
- 12 despite: nonostante
- 13 at all: per niente
- 14 to befit: addicersi
- 15 releases: uscite
- 16 to improve: migliorare
- 17 biggest-selling: che ha venduto più copie
- 18 shelf: scaffale
- 19 to face: affrontare
- 20 to hold someone back: trattenerne
- 21 to give up: smettere

my, my!
an exclamation of mild surprise or dismay.

I was defeated, you won the war:
this is an example of the passive form, followed by the active form.

and how could I ever refuse?: a rhetorical question, which does not require an answer.

promise/couldn't:
the subject 'I' is incorrectly omitted in these two lines. Songs often do this for the rhythm.

My, my! At Waterloo, Napoleon did surrender
Oh, yeah! And I have met my destiny
in quite a similar way

The history book on the shelf¹⁸
Is always repeating itself

Waterloo, I was defeated, you won the war
Waterloo, promise to love you forevermore
Waterloo, couldn't escape if I wanted to
Waterloo, knowing my fate is to be with you
Wa-Wa-Wa-Wa-Waterloo
Finally facing¹⁹ my Waterloo

My, my! I tried to hold you back²⁰,
but you were stronger
Oh, yeah! And now it seems my only chance
is giving up²¹ the fight

And how could I ever refuse?
I feel like I win when I lose

Waterloo, I was defeated, you won the war
Waterloo, promise to love you forevermore
Waterloo, couldn't escape if I wanted to
Waterloo, knowing my fate is to be with you
Wa-Wa-Wa-Wa-Waterloo
Finally facing my Waterloo

So how could I ever refuse?
I feel like I win when I lose

Waterloo, couldn't escape if I wanted to
Waterloo, knowing my fate is to be with you
Wa-Wa-Wa-Wa-Waterloo
Finally facing my Waterloo
Woo, Waterloo, knowing my fate
is to be with you
Wa-Wa-Wa-Wa-Waterloo
Finally facing my Waterloo
Woo, Waterloo, knowing my fate
is to be with you

did surrender: the use of the auxiliary 'did' substitutes the past simple '-ed' form. It is often used to reinforce the verb but it is likely ABBA used it here for the rhythm.

destiny/fate: the Swedish group uses 'destiny' and 'fate' interchangeably. However, although both words deal with a predetermined future, there are some significant differences: 'fate' is outside of one's control, somehow decided by the cosmos or an external force; 'destiny' depends on one's choices in life.

forevermore: this is a more poetic use of 'forever'.

Scan this QR code with your smartphone or tablet and listen to the official song on YouTube while reading the lyrics.



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