

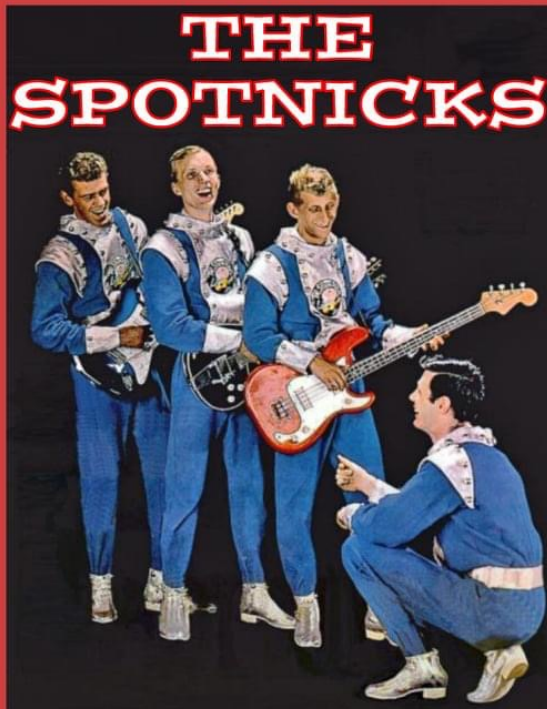
# PIPELINE

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## INSTRUMENTAL REVIEW



**THE SPOTNICKS** with **DEREK SKINNER**  
Celebrating 21 years of MuSick Recordings  
and the best in rock instrumental reviews

# JOURNEY INTO SPACE

## My days as a Spotnick

by Derek Skinner (from Pipeline Magazine [www.pipelinemag.co.uk](http://www.pipelinemag.co.uk))

*My space name is Drrrk - before that I was known as Derek Skinner...*

### Stockholm Sweden 1963

I stood outside the derelict house and waited for them. It was sunny and I was looking forward to the meeting. I had seen them perform once and listened to their recordings so I knew what to expect. Roland Ferneborg was their manager. He had phoned a few days before and said that Ove Johansson was ill and they needed a drummer at once. "Derek would you like to play with The Spotnicks. You'll be earning good money." He ran the Vaudevill Studios and booked lots of bands and artists. I had come to Sweden with Johnny Vallons & The Deejays in January. Our manager in London had booked The Spotnicks for a tour in England and the Musicians Union insisted that a British group tour Sweden. "There's a tour in Spain, TV and recording dates coming up." After years of sleeping in cold and draughty vans I asked Ferneborg where I would be sleeping on tour. He said "In hotels of course, where else? The Spotnicks are an international success group and you can stay as long as you want to."

How could I refuse? He said the guys would pick me up in a couple of days.

It was 9.40am and they were late. I had been playing with another band called the Pop Twins but The Spotnicks would be different. I was beginning to doubt if



they really were coming when I heard an engine and then their space ship (a Chevrolet van) came into sight. Bob and Björn jumped out wearing ordinary clothes and we shook hands and exchanged a few words. "We're off to Södertälje to meet our guitarist Bosse, shall we go Derek?" After a short drive we parked and entered a hotel. We went up to a room and I saw someone sleeping in bed. Bob shouted something in Swedish. "Go away" said a tired head, which rolled over and went back to sleep. We went and had some coffee and an hour later Bo Winberg came down in a better mood.



reflection when things were seen in a different light. I hoped this honeymoon would be a long one. It was easy to play with them and what a great sound they had.

We played a couple of gigs and it didn't take long to get into stride with their playing. There were space numbers and rock tunes and we performed in ordinary clothes. It was my fourth professional band and I had begun to realise that a honeymoon period, when everything was just great, was followed by a time of



Björn Thelin, Bo Winberg, Bob Lander, Derek Skinner

Recording started at Europa Films studios north of Stockholm. We did the tracks for the Spotnicks In Spain album in record time - no pun intended. After a few more live gigs it was time to pack and travel south to Spain. Starting in Barcelona, we did a TV show

## The Spotnicks - Derek Skinner (from Pipeline Magazine [www.pipelinemag.co.uk](http://www.pipelinemag.co.uk))



Bo, Bob, Derek and Björn in 1963

performing in our spacesuits and helmets in a Mars-setting with smoke rising all around us between the rocks. There was a large TV-orchestra to back other artists and the musicians sat in a long row spread around the studio. They had strings, reeds and brass and I remember how difficult it was for them to play in time as the distance between the instruments caused a delay.

We then stayed at a hotel in the country near the coast for a few days and swam in the hotel swimming pool. It was a very hot July. Then we travelled down to Valencia to do a stint at the Festival Of Fireworks. We performed the first night for an enthusiastic audience in a huge marquee tent with several stages. Other bands played folk, jazz or dance music on the other stages, though not at the same time of course.

Whilst playing the first day I noticed a particularly enthusiastic woman in front of the stage. She looked very happy swaying back and forth to the music. I also had the impression that she was looking at me. When we'd done our spot we retired to the minimal changing room behind the stage. I was thinking how good it would feel to get out of my space suit. The fabric made it hot. Some people entered and first in was the woman I'd seen. Besides us there were a few other artists and the woman looked at us all as if searching for someone. Her gaze locked on me and with a broad smile she hastened over and

hugged me, covering me with kisses and words of endearment - mostly in Spanish with the odd word in English. It was quite embarrassing but despite that I found I was enjoying it. Looking up I saw a worried man behind her. When she was done, the man responsible for booking the artists entered and introduced us to the mayor of Valencia and his wife. Afterwards the record company boss in Spain invited us to dinner at his home. We saw some of the spectacular fireworks streaming across the night sky as we made our way back to our hotel. A week or so after leaving Valencia we were told that the marquee had gone up in flames caused by stray fireworks. All the instruments and amplifiers had been destroyed. The musicians were distraught and I recall thinking how sad it must have been for those whose instruments were destroyed, but I was grateful that we had left before the fire.

We performed in countries all over Europe doing radio and TV gigs and I stayed with the band for two and a half years between 1963 and 1965. I made four LPs: *The Spotnicks In Spain*, *In Stockholm*, *In Berlin* and *In Gothenberg* plus many singles and EPs. We worked in Denmark, Norway, Holland, Germany, Belgium, France and Spain as well as Sweden and England.



Bob, Bo, Björn and Derek onstage in 1964

## The Spotnicks - Derek Skinner (from Pipeline Magazine [www.pipelinemag.co.uk](http://www.pipelinemag.co.uk))

### You ain't nothin' but a hound dog

Bob's girlfriend was the daughter of a popular Swedish singer, Harry Brandelius. He lived with his family in an enormous house in the countryside in the county of Södertälje which is 30km south of Stockholm. When The Spotnicks were in the vicinity Bob would of course stay there with his girlfriend. Late one night, or should I say early one morning, I was driving Bob home after a gig. It was about 3am and completely dark as I drew up and switched off the motor. Bob jumped out and had all but disappeared across the gravel when I heard weird sounds and my eyes fell on something large approaching. A frightful beast appeared out of the darkness and was running towards me. It was at least three feet high, its tongue was hanging out showing huge canine teeth. It was about to lurch at me when Bob reappeared shouting "Sorry Derek I forgot to mention Jussi, but don't worry he's friendly and if he jumps up it's a sure sign he likes you - goodnight" and he was gone. The dog licked my hand and having done this he turned about and disappeared into the dark. I drew a deep breath and climbed into the van. Later I learned that the beast was named after the great Swedish tenor, Jussi Björling.

We played at folkparks (people's parks) in the summer and at folketshus in the winter. The band members in The Spotnicks were all from the west coast town of Gothenburg and I needed somewhere to live. I could afford things now that were impossible on the wages I had been earning previously. I remember one weekend when I'd received my week's wages I sat alone but happy in my hotel room counting my money. I had around 4,000 Swedish crowns, which was a huge amount.

Folkparks deserve an explanation. Because of the short summers people feel a need to enjoy themselves in the open air as much as possible and when I came to Sweden in the 1960s there were folkparks all over the country where bands and artists performed. One band would play dance music and a popular band or artist would perform later in the evening. In the winters it was the same procedure but indoors at a folketshus. A



Bo, Derek, Björn and Bob

folkpark would often be situated in a wood or in the countryside so visitors would have to arrive by car or bus (if there were any). Usually a group of friends would go in a car and have lots to drink, the driver staying sober so his friends could get home after the dance.

The Spotnicks were very popular and sometimes we played dance music at a folkpark then performed a show later on after which we would revert to playing dance music. A "show" would consist of the best tunes we could deliver. I started playing drum solos when it was "show time". Sometimes, if we were only playing shows, there could be two or even three venues on the same evening, which could be rather tiresome as it meant packing down three times, playing hard and then driving sometimes 50 or 80km to the next venue. At the end of such an evening I was shattered but happy.

### Border crossing Germany/France

We were on our way to gigs in Paris via Germany and arriving at the border crossing we showed our passports and papers and were surprised when the officer told us to wait. He was frowning, which I thought was not a good sign. Usually we had no difficulties when crossing borders, we were careful about such things. After 20 minutes or so an official with a very large military peaked

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\*  
\* **KARUSELLEN** \*  
\* **Spotnicks Show** \*  
\* Folkets Hus - store sal fredag 15. mai kl. 19.30 \*  
\*  
\* ★ ★ ★ \*  
\* **THE SPOTNICKS** \*  
\* **THE COOL CATS** \*  
\* **THE GAMBLERS** \*  
\* ★ ★ ★ \*  
\* Forhånds salg av billetter i Steen og Strøms platebar fra onsdag, \*  
\* 13. mai. Entré kr. 8.--. \*  
\* Arrangør: Karusellen Oslo D-lag av A.U.F. \*  
\*\*\*\*\*

## The Spotnicks - Derek Skinner (from Pipeline Magazine [www.pipelinemag.co.uk](http://www.pipelinemag.co.uk))



Björn, Bob, Derek and Bo in full space gear cap turned up and told us that the papers for our electrical equipment were not in order. After some irritating moments I understood that we would not be entering France that day.

It was early evening and the nearest embassy was far away. We would need help. He said we could stay at a small boarding house on the French side but would have to leave our trailer and instruments on the German side. My thoughts were far from virtuous. After a night's restless sleep in a crummy room the boarding house owner offered to drive us the 20km or so to the nearest town in France that had a telegraph office. We all climbed into his car, one of those big toad-like cars, and he drove at a furious pace around sharp bends - I was sure we would not survive, but we did. After sending a telegram we had to wait for hours before the permit was granted and sent by telex machine. Our chauffeur waited patiently enough and then drove us back to the border crossing. His driving was as fast and furious and I was wondering if the other guys were also composing their last wills and testaments as we swayed through hairpin bends. We survived the return journey too, or else I wouldn't be writing this would I? We entered France and arrived late that evening in Paris.

### What was it like playing with The Spotnicks?

I had just a normal kit of acoustic drums: bass drum, snare drum, two tom-toms, ride cymbal, crash cymbal and hi-hat cymbals. Today drummers cannot be seen behind a forest of cymbals and drums, each one with its own microphone. Considering the simple gear we had I think our instruments made good sounds. Not

having so much to carry or mount and dismount was of course an advantage. We could arrive at a venue and be ready to play within 45 minutes. A lot of the numbers we did had been done by other bands or artists so you could say we were a glorified cover band, but we had original numbers too. There were plenty of competitors but few could muster our sound mainly due to Bosse Winberg's amplifying system.

When I went to university in Stockholm to take my master's degree in social work in the 1980s I remember how one of the teachers stressed how important it was, when writing, to avoid unnecessary material and to keep to the point: "Kill your darlings" he said, and I think The Spotnicks were good at rationing material. That clear, sharp guitar sound dominated our playing and Bo had built his own system with loudspeakers and amplifiers and echo chambers which were an important ingredients for the special Spotnicks sound. When I lived in London Jim Marshall was my drum teacher and, having played with The Spotnicks, I can boast about having known two top and innovative sound-men: Jim Marshall and Bo Winberg. Jim will be remembered for his amplifiers and Bo Winberg for his guitar sound. A lot of the tunes we recorded were done at Europa films recording studio in Sundbyberg/Stockholm and some chez Bo Winberg in Gothenberg where he had his studio.

### Landvetter 1964

A friend of Bob's lived in a house by a lake in the country village called Landvetter, close to Gothenburg, and as it happened he had an flat to



Derek onstae with The Spotnicks

## **The Spotnicks - Derek Skinner** (from Pipeline Magazine [www.pipelinemag.co.uk](http://www.pipelinemag.co.uk))

rent. His family lived on the bottom floor and he wanted to hire out the upstairs apartment. The view to the lake was lovely and there was a huge veranda. In 1964 my girlfriend and I moved into the apartment, we loved the view and it was just 17km to Gothenburg where the others lived. Today Landvetter has a large airport serving western Sweden.

### **Casino**

We were touring in France and had played near to Toulouse and we were on our way to a gig at a casino in the hilly area between France and Spain. Our bass player Björn Thelin had asked the lady in reception how we should drive to get there. She said that it would take about three hours to get to our destination, pointed on our map and told us to follow this road south, then turn left here, then after about 24km turn right... and at this point I recall her answering the telephone and when she had put the receiver down new guests had arrived demanding her attention. Björn said he thought we'd find our way. For those unacquainted with Swedish the name Björn also means "bear". He told me once that before he joined The Spotnicks (he was very young at the time in 1957/8) he was a singer working under the name of Teddy and he was popular, especially with the girls. We left our hotel and soon found the main road.

After an hour or so we turned left. The air was clear and bright, outside that is... all of us smoked so it was pretty foggy inside. We drove on, it was getting dark and we debated as to where exactly we should make the next turn. We found ourselves on deserted roads and it was getting late. Instructions were to arrive at around 10pm - we would be served with food before playing. It was also stated that they'd be open all night. There was no traffic on the roads now and we were ascending all the time.

Bob was driving and I saw snow in the woods. We followed instructions and checked our map but could not figure out where we were. There was no road to turn right at. At 10pm we were lost. No phone. No houses. No cars. No people. No lights. We stopped for a slash and decided it was too late to turn back, we had to go on. Thankfully we had plenty of petrol and cigarettes. Midnight came. Just us

and the night and the road. "What the f.k" someone said, but in Swedish! We were tired, worried and angry - we should be on stage by now. On and on and on. Constantly climbing, but the petrol meter was falling. I drove for a bit. We had not seen one single house or car for three hours. All we need now is a puncture, someone said.

At 2.30am we saw lights up ahead and a little village came in view. Two figures were moving to our right so we stopped. Bo asked were the casino was - "Tournez a' droite." All of a sudden there we were. It was 2.40am when we parked outside the main entrance, people poured out though the doors to help us carry our stuff and we entered the casino. Everyone was well dressed in smoking or long dress and no one was angry at us. "Put your instruments up and you'll get food before you play" said the manager. "Shall we say you start playing at 4 o'clock?"

### **Flying high**

Because of the great distances in Sweden we sometimes flew to gigs in a small plane, a Cessna I think it was called. Once we flew from Gothenburg to Östersund which is about 700km as the crow flies. Björn had given me his movie camera and I filmed from the plane. We played on an open-air stage in the afternoon. The other guys wanted to stay overnight in Östersund after the gig, probably lured on by girls' smiles in the audience. I returned to Gothenburg alone except for the two pilots. They had waited until I was ready to leave. I wanted to go home to my girlfriend.

Björn was a very friendly person and he gave me clothes and a film camera, a double-8. In Stockholm he lived with his wife and children in



Shadows & Spotnicks 1: Bo, Hank, Brian, Derek, Bob, Bruce, Björn and Licorice

## The Spotnicks - Derek Skinner (from Pipeline Magazine [www.pipelinemag.co.uk](http://www.pipelinemag.co.uk))



Shadows & Spotnicks 2: Björn, Bo, Derek, John, unknown and Hank

arrangement, although I did like Peter and his music.

Our manager told us he was negotiating for a tour in the USA and we would be playing at the Hollywood Bowl. I thought wow, fantastic. Unfortunately, and I cannot remember why, Roland failed to get a contract for us so we never went to the States. We were all very disappointed of course. We had worked hard and had done TV and radio and toured all over Europe and our records sold well. Our act was good and we had a special sound so it would have been great if we could have played in the States.

a small flat. He always had time to talk and was never in a hurry. Time passed slowly when I was young but during The Spotnicks period we were nearly always on the move and there was no time for reflection.

We also toured in England twice whilst I was with the band. We went by boat over the North sea. Once Bo was on sick leave and British guitarist Bruce Baxter took over the guitar chair for a while and did a good job of it too. Bruce was also with us in France for a tour. I recall Bruce and I sitting in a small pub, the locals were drinking and eating whilst a John Wayne cowboy film was being shown. I thought it quite funny hearing John Wayne "speaking" French, because in France movies didn't have subtitles.

In 1965 we expanded from four to five musicians when fellow Gothenburger Peter Winsnes joined The Spotnicks playing electric-piano and singing. He contributed songs and piano on the Spotnicks In Gothenburg LP. Peter brought new tunes and energy to the band and the Spotnick sound was forever changed. I must admit I was not completely happy with the

### The thrill is gone

Sometime after the USA tour fell through I decided it was time for a change. I left The Spotnicks in the autumn of 1965 of my own free accord because I was tired of touring and I wanted to do something else. I was married and we were expecting a child. I was not looking forward to traipsing all over the place and doing the same numbers. It turned out to be a long tour for my ex-colleagues as they spent quite some time abroad in Japan and Mexico.

There would be other bands, but that's another story. Listening to the recordings today in 2018 I think they still sound fresh and energetic. There are things I could have done better, but on the whole I'm pleased with my contribution and *I'm happy to say that once my name was Drrrk, a drummer in the Spotnicks.*

*Spotnicks space shuffle calling base*

*Approaching earth at 120 bpm*

*The End*

