



CALIFORNIA GIRLS

L.A. Scandinavian



California lured Scandinavians long before the railroad got there. The thought of “making it,” albeit then with different goals in mind, enticed the impoverished Scandinavians as early as mid-19th century. They came sailing, walking and riding, all in search of a better life. With few exceptions our girls featured here arrived by airplane but are nevertheless modern day explorers and adventurers.

1. Madeleine Falk started at the Ballet Academy of Gothenburg, and thanks to a grant from Prime Minister Ingvar Carlsson, pursued a career in dancing and acting, eventually ending up in Los Angeles. There she met the love of her life, Louis Garcia, “the world’s best trick jump-roper”. The pair has since traveled the world as “The Rebel Ropers”, performing for Nike in Singapore, on the Today show, at several hotels in Las Vegas, and locally at the House of Blues. Always with a smile, the charming Swede flies through the air – spinning the rope or juggling clubs at the speed of light – while balancing on giant balls, negotiating hoops of fire, at times on stilts. An original member of “Girls on Stilts”, she also works with the variety troupe “The Mums”. Dancing also led to an impressive career in acting: Madeleine has appeared on *CSI* and *Judging Amy*, and recently she played the leading role in *Blind Dolls*, filmed on location in Mexico City. She feels blessed to already have lived a very full life; her pride is her family: Louis, Gabriella, 6, and a baby on the way.

2. Anna Jönsson Connell. Mother of three and powerhouse for the evolving new generation of Scandinavians in southern California. Anna started modeling in Paris at age 20 after a year as a student

and au pair. The Lund native landed a contract with Wilhelmina after a short time with Paris-based City Models.

Modeling kept her busy in and out of Paris and New York, when, during a commercial shoot in Kenya, she met her husband, Scott. They left New York in 1995, Anna nursing their second child while driving across the continent to settle in L.A. Scott planned to pursue a career in acting, while Anna, too, was busy, pregnant with their third child. In 1996, she came in contact with SWEA at the annual Christmas Fair, and just one year later she was in charge of the event’s traditional glögg... about 100 gallons of it. In 2006 Anna assumed the role of president for the L.A. chapter.

Anna also devotes her energy to studies in journalism at UCLA and will likely pursue a career in creative writing, assuming she’ll find the time in the midst of her busy life.

3. Irene Tuomainen. A girl from central Stockholm with family roots in Finland. Wrote her first song at the age of seven. As a teenager, Irene was lead singer and keyboard player for the girls’ band, Pam-push, which toured successfully for 10 years. Now a songwriter and music producer, she started out as a staff writer for Warner/Chap-

pell Scandinavia, then studied musical publishing, songwriting, and history of music at UCLA. Her first publishing company in Hollywood, Lady Marmalade Music, was launched in 2001. Late in 2004 Irene expanded with Feature Sounds, a music publishing company which places music in film, TV, advertising, and video games. With Edgar Cortazar, Irene is currently writing for various major Latin artists for Warner and Latin Power, and she has a licensing deal with WB for Feature Sounds’ entire music catalog for TV and movies. Her song “Hearts of Time” was nominated for Best Country Song in the Southern California Music Awards last year.

4. Louise Skosey grew up in the countryside outside Stockholm and recently arrived in Los Angeles. Her father, Carli Tornehave, is a well-known singer in Europe, and while Louise always enjoyed music, she chose to study political science at Stockholm University and broadcast journalism in London. She has worked in different capacities with Modern Times Group and most recently as a TV producer with production company Modern TV in the Swedish capital. Louise loves to travel and has visited many exciting places around the world. On a trip to Malaysia, she met her husband, Lyle. Apart from traveling, Louise and her husband share a love for horses, racing across the polo field at the California Polo Club in their free time. Louise is now assistant director at The Children’s Miracle Network, one of the largest non-profit organizations in the country, raising funds for Children’s Hospital Los Angeles.

5. Elisabeth Ekornes received a Bachelor of Arts in Music/Voice from the Music Conservatory in Oslo, Norway. She has performed on TV and radio as an opera singer and actress, toured Norway in roles including Polly in *The Threepenny Opera* and Dorothy in *The Wizard of Oz*, and was first invited to the United States as a singer at the Leif Eriksson Festival in Minneapolis and the Norsk Høstfest in North Dakota.

Elisabeth is also interested in language, and as a published poet, Elisabeth has received the Editors’ Choice Award from The International Library of Poetry. In Norway, she sold poetry to Hallmark Greeting Cards, and in Los Angeles, Elisabeth was hired by Cinemagnetics and Crest National as a Norwegian subtitles translator for *Meet the Parents*, *Bridget Jones’s Diary*, *Chocolat*, *About a Boy*, *Simone*, and other films.

A self-taught artist, Elisabeth recently finished writing and illustrating her first children’s book, *Shelly’s New Shell*, with original music, soon to be released. Recording a classical CD with songs by Edvard Grieg and teaching voice at a private music school in L.A. is what currently keeps her busy.

6. Pernilla Nylander. Originally from Halmstad, Sweden (the west coast town that the duo Roxette calls home). With a designer aunt and a dressmaker grandmother, Pernilla was inspired by fashion early on. In her teens she started to experiment by embellishing and painting jeans, changing existing patterns, and making her own clothes. Then her other love, dance, took over. After studying at the Dance Academy in Stockholm, Pernilla toured the world as a dancer. She learned how costumes were made and designed her own attire as well as other costumes for the shows. Since then, costumes have been a large part of her production, always picking attractive

and colorful materials which are comfortable to move in – a must for performers. After a successful dance career, including the long-running show *Splash* in Las Vegas, touring with Tito Puente and performing at the Latin Grammys, Pernilla was ready to go back to her first love of designing clothes. She attended classes in costume design for film and TV at UCLA and shortly thereafter she opened her own design studio, Nylander Design. She is now courted by Hollywood celebrities for her sexy and comfortable creations.

7. Mikaela Nagler made her first drawings of buildings at the age of six. As a pastime, while in her dad’s architecture office, she placed dolls inside house models, dreaming up a world in miniature. The interest led to the equivalent of a master’s degree in architecture from a school in Belleville, Paris where she also received a thorough art education, her second passion. During her years in France she met her husband Todd, a Los Angeles-based general contract and father to Max, 2. In 2001 Mikaela started her own firm, and last year she merged with architect friend Daniel Heifetz to form MiDA design group. Residential projects located in Beverly Hills, Malibu, and Hollywood Hills range from contemporary to traditional in style. Mikaela recently designed a nightclub and is currently working on a restaurant and two large condominium projects, as well as adding the finishing touches to the new office, located on Ventura Boulevard in Sherman Oaks.

8. Gudrun Giddings. During a brief time away from her law studies in Los Angeles, the Kalix, Norrbotten native was offered a job in the entertainment business. Soon her avocation became her vocation: Work in theatre and film turned into a successful career. Today Gudrun is the director of production, overseeing the North American production of Oscar nominated movies like *Good Night, and Good Luck* and *Resident Evil* for Paris-based Metropolitan Filmexport at Davis Films.

Gudrun is a member and supporter of Women in Film and is on the board of the American Scandinavian Foundation of Los Angeles, which participates in coordinating the yearly Scandinavian Film Festival in Beverly Hills. As a new SWEA-L.A. member, she is looking forward to getting involved in their film-related activities.

Gudrun credits her faith and family for the foundation upon which she balances her success. In this business of movie making, she tries to remember the importance of understanding human relations, to advocate peace and compassion in the world.

9. Lina Brunkell arrived from Stockholm in 2000 and just finished her studies in anthropology at Cal. State L.A. in Monterey Park. The daughter of Marie Bergman (of the 1970’s group Family Four) is a jazz singer in her own right, with South by South West Festival – she performed alongside Louise Hoffsten – on her resume. As a teenager in Sweden, she sang with Jimmy Wahlsteen and Jonas Sjöberg, now well known musicians. Lina is a researcher and translator currently splitting her time between the Swedish Consulate General and translating subtitles for film and TV. This summer she is marrying legendary jazz pianist Alan Pasqua, who at one point was her music teacher at USC. Her dream is to some day work from home and accompany her husband on his music tours around the globe.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY NATE BRESSLER