



It's a Girls World...

By Facundo Pignanelli

It was with those words that *Music Week* Magazine decided to illustrate their November 1996 issue. The reason why? Baby, Ginger, Sporty, Posh and Scary from the Spice Girls had spent another week at the top of the UK Singles Chart with *Say You'll Be There*, taken of their also number one debut album *Spice*. For all intents and purposes, the *Spicemania* was in full swing. This phenomenon would find its counterpart some years later but in another part of the world. It would be thanks to the success of the Argentine version of the reality TV show *Popstars* – originally broadcasted in New Zealand and later replicated throughout the world – that another girl group would, arguably, reach the same level of success. Valeria, Lourdes, Virginia, Lissa, and Ivonne would go on to form BANDANA, releasing record-breaking albums and topping the Argentine CAPIF charts just like their Brit counterparts. But the similarities don't end there. In this essay, I want to look at the characteristics of both groups and how they made the world a *girl's world*.

One way to measure the level of success in the music industry is with sales numbers. In the introduction, I referred that both groups were chart-topping in their respective countries and throughout the world. The Spice Girls were reported by their label, Virgin Records, to have sold almost three million copies in the UK alone of their debut album *Spice*, it having topped the UK Albums chart for 15 weeks and being certified triple platinum. Similarly, BANDANA managed to sell two million copies of their debut album throughout Latin America, the USA and Spain. It also topped the CAPIF album charts for 10 weeks and received double platinum certification, in a country that was in the middle of an economic recession and where music pirating was widespread.

If the sheer volume of sales is not enough, both groups also achieved similar records in their respective countries. *Say You'll Be There* has the honour of breaking the record of single pre-orders in the UK, having registered 334.000 copies for pre-order ahead of its October 1996 release, and therefore having the number one spot at the chart even before it's commercial release. Likewise, BANDANA has the record of achieving gold certification by CAPIF (in those years, requiring sales or pre-orders of 50.000 units) before it's commercial release in December 2001, a feat no other Argentine act has able to do again.

Another aspect that can vouch for the success of a group is brand sponsorships. Both BANDANA and the Spice Girls were icons of their time thanks in no-small part for all the brand sponsorships they had, skyrocketing the public perception of the group. The Spice Girls and BANDANA were both sponsored by brands like Pepsi and Impulse, among several others.

In the case of Pepsi, the soda company launched a massive *Generation Next* ad campaign in markets like the US, the UK, Europe and even Argentina, featuring the Spice Girls performing their song *Move Over* on the commercials and launching a promotion where fans could send soda can pull tabs in the mail to receive an exclusive single, *Step To Me*, which would not see an official release until the recently announced reissue of their second album *SpiceWorld*. Plus, Pepsi would sponsor the band's first ever live concert – and their only live concert in 1997– *Girl Power! Live In Istanbul* and fans could only gain access to tickets for the two-date tour in the Abdi İpekçi Arena in Istanbul through Pepsi-sponsored contests and sweepstakes.

5 years later, Pepsi would replicate the success of the *Generation Next* campaign in Argentina with a sponsorship deal with BANDANA. Part of their *Animarse a Más* campaign, the company sponsored the TV show *Popstars*, featuring it in several advertisements and its image being seen across the show. After BANDANA was formed, they launched a series of ads featuring the group and were one of the sponsors of their *El Festival de tus Sueños* series of shows at Velez stadium at the end of 2002. One year later, Pepsi would join forces with the fast-food giant Burger King to launch a campaign featuring the song *Muero de Amor Por Ti*, featured in Disney's film *Lilo and Stich*, and you could only get the single by purchasing a meal at one of the company's locations.

The fragrance brand Impulse would also join both *Spicemanía* and *Bandanamania* with their exclusive products. The 1997 campaign *Wear nothing, but Impulse Spice* launched across the world, featuring the girls in adverts walking around the street 'naked' and causing a huge reaction. It also launched the exclusive *Impulse Spice* fragrance, both in perfume and deodorant. There will be just one other music act to have their own exclusive Impulse fragrance, and of course that would be BANDANA. In 2003, Impulse launched *Impulse Edición Especial*, featuring not only one, but five exclusive fragrances, each tailored to one of the member's personality and tastes. Fans could buy cans of deodorant featuring the exclusive fragrances with an exclusive design and the regular Impulse deodorant in an exclusive design featuring the five members of the group.

And this where we go beyond the music world, and we enter the *girl's world*. Both groups didn't only achieve domination of the music sphere, but also jumped into the silver screen with smashing success, ultimately cementing their reputation as pop icons.

In Christmas 1997, fans were crowding cinema screens across the world for the launch of *SpiceWorld: The Movie*, a tongue-in-cheek homage to the Beatles *A Hard Day's Night*, featuring a fictional account of the groups early days and how they managed the worldwide stardom that featured afterwards, so much so, that they are visited by

Aliens in one of the movie's memorable scenes. The movie broke ticket sales records in the UK – having the top spot for attendance numbers in UK cinema history until the release of *Titanic* in 1998 – and was a smash-hit upon its VHS release in 1998 and its DVD release in 2007. The accompanying soundtrack to the film, and the group's second album, *SpiceWorld* would also top the charts worldwide and sell twenty million copies worldwide, proving that the Spice Girls were now a household name.

BANDANA, in turn, would jump to the silver screen with 2003's *Vivir Intentando*. It being, too, a fictionalized account of the group's history and it would go on to top attendance numbers in Argentina and across Latin America. It was released on VHS and DVD in early 2004 in Argentina and Uruguay, topping sales charts and would receive a continent-wide release on cable TV thanks to the Disney Channel in mid-2004. Just like *SpiceWorld*, *Vivir Intentando*, the album, would serve as the film's soundtrack and third, and last, album for the group. It also topped the Argentine charts and received commercial and critical success in Spain as well, spawning four singles on both countries.

A much broader aspect of comparison is the groups position as cultural icons in their countries of origin. Both groups have the honour of being the biggest girl group acts of their countries and are part of their culture to this day. They managed this not just by their music output – in fact, it being limited at 3 studio albums each plus one live album by BANDANA – but also by their impact on culture as a whole.

In the late 1990s, the success of the Spice Girls – most notably with the group performance at the 1997's Brit Awards, in where Geri Halliwell wore the iconic Union Jack dress – sparked an era called *Cool Britannia*, where the countries symbols, like the flag, culture and Royal Family were seen as cool again, especially in the USA. The group was synonymous with Britain, so much so, that they met Nelson Mandela in mid-1997 along with then Prince Charles, a visit Mr. Mandela would call “*one of his greatest moments in my life*” and called the group “*heroes*”.

In the early 2000s, BANDANA would launch a similar movement across Argentina. In a country that generally regarded international acts, the group proved they could be just as successful while remaining a truly Argentinean product. They were heavily covered by the press, even having their own special edition of *Almorzando con Mirtha Legrand*, and with kids playing pretend to be them across Argentinean school grounds. Their personalities were just like any other Argentinean girl, and they used the same Argentinean slangs and customs everywhere they went, exporting Argentine culture along them.

In conclusion, both groups share more than what it meets the surface. At a glance, one would think that the only similarities between them would be that a. they are a

music group and b. 5 female members form the group. However, across this essay we have seen that there is much more than what meets the eye. Both BANDANA and the Spice Girls are music icons of their own right, due to their achievements and status as cultural icons. It seems then, that *Music Week* words in 1996 were spot on. It truly is a girl's world, thanks to five young ladies from the United Kingdom, joined years later by 5 hopefuls from Argentina, both contributing to the pop world for years to come.