

THE DROWNERS

LONG BIO • 2026

SKELLEFTEÅ

In Skellefteå in the early 1990s, playing in a band did not feel like an unusual life choice. It was simply what people did. They wrote songs, played live, went to the same parties and spent Sundays talking about music in cafés.

One of the people shaping that world was local music journalist Lars Andersson. He lent out albums, organised competitions and introduced young musicians to records they might never have discovered on their own. Around him was a network of record shops, rehearsal rooms, an independent label, a professional studio and a café where bands tested new songs in front of friends.

The scene revolved around songs. New demos circulated every week, often played at parties where friends listened, celebrated and quietly measured themselves against one another. People went home inspired and determined to write something better. The Wannadies were proof that music made in Skellefteå could travel. The distance between a local rehearsal room and a real record was not difficult to imagine.

Leif Rehnström and Mikael Sundqvist met on their first day of high school and immediately started talking about music. Both came from hard rock and metal, but gradually moved towards alternative rock as they discovered new records. Then they heard *Bellybutton* by Jellyfish. The direction became clear. They no longer wanted to be a rock band writing rock songs. They wanted to be a rock band writing pop songs.

In 1993 they formed The Drowners. Magnus Vikström joined on vocals, Jonas Bergqvist on bass, and in 1994 sixteen-year-old Andreas Persson arrived on a moped to play drums.

They were not virtuosos. They simply spent an extraordinary amount of time writing and rehearsing with the tools they had.

From the beginning, the objective was to make an album. At the time, without a label and physical distribution, releasing music independently was barely an option. A finished record meant the band would leave something behind.

When A West Side Fabrication signed The Drowners, that first goal was reached. *Destroyer* appeared in 1996, and "Teenager" began receiving national radio play.

The satisfaction lasted approximately no time at all.

RADIO, WIND-UP AND SOUND CITY

When *World Record Player* appeared in 1997, “Summer Break My Fall” began moving through Swedish radio. That year, Leif passed someone in the street who was whistling the melody from its intro. The stranger had no idea that the person who wrote it had just walked past.

It was the first clear sign that The Drowners had travelled beyond the circle of music obsessives who bought the first album.

People knew the melody before they knew the band.

The success changed the scale of what The Drowners considered possible. When Wind-up Records offered them an American deal in 1998, it felt less like an improbable rescue than the natural next step. Within a few years, the world around them had become larger than anything they had originally allowed themselves to imagine.

In 1999, The Drowners travelled to California to tour and record at Sound City in Los Angeles. The gold records in the entrance belonged to artists whose music had shaped their lives. The band was impressed, but not intimidated for long. They quickly began to feel that they belonged there.

Producer Matt Hyde had already spent several weeks with them in Skellefteå working on arrangements and dynamics. At Sound City, he showed them what making an album at that level required. Nothing was left to chance. Capturing the right performance mattered more than repairing the wrong one later, so the recording setup always had to be ready when something happened.

It was ten levels beyond anything The Drowners had previously experienced.

By the time the album was finished, the members were too deep inside its details to judge what they had made. Outside the studio, the alternative guitar pop that had helped make space for a band like The Drowners was giving way to something heavier, harder and increasingly dominated by nu-metal.

The Drowners had finally reached the studio they had imagined. The radio outside was already moving somewhere else.

THE FIRST FALL AND THE RECORDS THEY MADE THEMSELVES

“Is There Something on Your Mind?” gave the album a promising start on American radio. The song reached the New & Active section of Billboard’s Modern Rock chart, and The Drowners had every reason to believe radio was about to do for them in America what it had already done in Sweden.

Then the movement stopped.

The A&R who had signed the band and championed it inside Wind-up left before the album came out. Without him, The Drowners no longer had anyone inside the company they could call and ask what was happening.

At home, Sony repeatedly delayed the promised Swedish release and ultimately never issued the album. The momentum created by “Summer Break My Fall” disappeared.

As frustration grew, Leif wrote "On The Radio." The band's manager did not think sending the demo to Wind-up was a particularly good idea. They sent it anyway.

Not long afterwards, Leif received the call telling him that Wind-up was ending its relationship with The Drowners. He happened to be standing on the roof of a rock club in Skellefteå. He tried to explain why the label was making a mistake, but the decision had already been made.

It was the band's first serious reversal. The future The Drowners had spent years working towards disappeared during a conversation on a roof in Skellefteå.

For a while, the band was in pieces.

When a new independent label offered to release another album, The Drowners turned to the acoustic shows they had started playing while waiting for *Is There Something on Your Mind?* to come out. Free from major-label expectations, they had found another version of themselves: raw, unpredictable and fiercely energetic. It became the starting point for *Muted To A Whisper*.

Recording it themselves also changed the division of work. As Leif focused on the technical side, Magnus stepped forward with more songs. For the first time, they shared the songwriting across a Drowners album in roughly equal parts.

In 2002, Swedish public radio named Skellefteå its Pop City of the year and supported the first single from *Muted To A Whisper*: "On The Radio." The song written out of frustration at being unable to reach radio became a minor Swedish radio hit. The irony was hard to miss. More importantly, the band had made the album themselves, in a rehearsal room, and it had connected.

Back in Skellefteå, a basement studio became the band's permanent base. When Magnus had enough songs and the studio was ready, The Drowners began *Cease To Be*. They had songs. They had a studio. That was enough.

The album appeared in 2007. By then, making records without outside help had become part of the band's life. But The Drowners gradually slowed down. Other careers became necessary, families grew and there was less time for rehearsals, recording and travel.

The Drowners never decided to break up. They simply stopped making the next record.

THE YEARS BETWEEN

For most of the next decade, there was no next session. The members remained friends and occasionally played together, but careers, families and geography had removed the conditions under which The Drowners once worked.

Those years also brought separations, deaths and serious illness. By the time the band found its way back to new music, every member carried experiences that had left a lasting mark. The band had not ended, but it did not return unscathed.

THE RETURN

In 2023, The Drowners began releasing material from the archive. One of the first recordings to be completed was "Entrance Trial," a Magnus song left unfinished since 2002. Nobody spoke about a reunion.

When The Drowners played together in Skellefteå the following year, the show was intended as a one-off. Despite fifteen years without regular rehearsals, the old songs returned quickly. They were not surprised that they could still play. They were surprised by how much fun it was — and by how much the songs still meant to the audience.

A second, fully electric show followed in the summer of 2025. Around 3,000 people gathered beside the river. By the end of the night, the band knew this was not an exercise in nostalgia. The Drowners were good now, and they wanted to continue.

Then the songs began arriving. Over Christmas, a new demo appeared in the band's group chat almost every day. By January 2026, there was enough material for an album.

By the time recording began in March 2026, the songs, the players and the production skills were aligned.



BESIDE THE RIVER • SKELLEFTEÅ • SUMMER 2025

CURRENT LINE-UP

Magnus Vikström

Andreas Persson

Jörgen Lindmark

VOCALS

DRUMS

BASS

Mikael Sundqvist

Leif Rehnström

GUITAR

GUITAR

THE NEW ALBUM WILL BE RELEASED IN 2027.

**THE
DROWNERS**