



Eurovision Song Contest: the Story

by Nathaly Schwarm-Bronson from 1956 to 2001

In the mid-1950s the members of the European Broadcasting Union set up an ad hoc committee to investigate ways of rallying the countries of Europe round a light entertainment programme. At Monaco in late January 1955 this committee, chaired by Marcel Bezençon, Director General of Swiss Television, came up with the idea of creating a song contest, inspired by the very popular San Remo Festival. The idea was approved by the EBU General Assembly in Rome on 19 October 1955 and it was decided that the first “Eurovision Grand Prix” – so baptized, incidentally, by a British journalist – would take place in spring 1956 at Lugano, Switzerland.

The next step was to put together a set of rules to be followed by the participants, of which there were originally ten, although only seven countries were eventually allowed to take part: Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Switzerland and West Germany. The other three countries – Austria, Denmark and United Kingdom – registered after the official deadline and were thus disqualified from entering the contest.

The rules of the first contest allowed the participants to enter a maximum of two songs each, and it was strongly recommended that the songs be selected at a national final involving the participation of the public, to render the contest as popular as possible. There was no rule on language, each participant being entitled to choose the language in which they wished to perform. There was, however, a rule on the amount of time allowed: three and a half minutes was the maximum for each performance. Nor was there any restriction on the number of artists on stage, and each country could use its own conductor if it so chose. The order of appearance was decided by drawing lots, but the participants could choose which of their two songs they wanted to perform first.

The jury was made up of two delegates from each participating country, among whom one president and two scrutineers were appointed by secret ballot of the members to collect the votes and draw up the final rankings of the songs at the end of the performances. The jury was to judge the contest from a small television screen and each jury member awarded a mark for each song, ranging from 1 to 10 in ascending order of merit, on a paper provided for the purpose. The song obtaining the most points was awarded the “**1956** Grand Prix of the Eurovision Song Contest”. At that time there was no rule against members of the jury voting for their own country, and no material awards were attached to the contest. As for the financing of the contest, participants paid their own expenses and the host country (Switzerland that year) bore the whole cost of organizing the European final. The winner of the Grand Prix was Switzerland with the song “Refrain”, performed by Lys Assia.

Another contest was organized in **1957** on the strength of the instant success achieved by the “Eurovision Grand Prix”, but this time the host country was West Germany. In comparison to 1956, several rules were changed.

First of all, this time all ten countries participated in the final, each country could only perform one song, to be rendered by one or at most two singers, and no vocal accompaniment was allowed. The jury was composed of 10 members from each country who announced their votes by telephone after the last entry. These ten members were allowed to award only one vote to their preferred song and no jury member was allowed to vote for his/her own country's song. Furthermore, the jury members could only watch the voting after they had cast their own votes. The scoreboard was introduced for the first time. That year the Grand Prix was awarded to the Netherlands with the song "Net als toen" performed by Corrie Brokken, and the tradition of prizes was introduced. The celebrated artist Lys Assia, who had won the first Eurovision Grand Prix, was placed 7th with the song "L'enfant que j'étais", representing Switzerland.

By **1958**, the "Eurovision Grand Prix" had become an annual event, and the tradition whereby the winning country hosts the following year's contest was introduced. That year the United Kingdom did not participate in the contest, and this allowed Sweden to make its debut. Incidentally, some of the songs performed became popular hits within their countries and made the charts in others, such as the French entry "Dors mon amour" performed by André Claveau, winner of the Grand Prix and Italy's entry "Nel blu dipinto blu" (Volare) performed by Domenico Modugno who probably became the most successful song of all time placed 3rd. Lys Assia returned for the third time representing Switzerland and was placed 2nd with the song "Giorgio".

In **1959**, Luxembourg withdrew from the contest, the United Kingdom returned and Monaco made its debut, thus increasing the number of participating countries to eleven. Only one rule changed that year, to ensure that no professional composers or publishers were allowed to sit on the juries. The Netherlands were awarded the Grand Prix for the second time with the song "Een beetje", performed by Teddy Scholten.

Having won the 1957 and 1959 contests the Netherlands refused to organize the **1960** "Eurovision Grand Prix" and this allowed the United Kingdom to take over. The number of participating countries rose to thirteen, Luxembourg returned and Norway joined the contest. In addition, Finland decided to broadcast the final live. A new rule was introduced in the voting system, whereby the juries were assembled only to hear and not see the dress rehearsal of each competing song just before the actual contest. France was awarded the Grand Prix, and for the first time the winning song, "Tom Pillibi" performed by Jacqueline Boyer, became a real international hit.

In **1961** three more countries joined the "Eurovision Grand Prix", increasing the number of participants to sixteen. The Grand Prix was awarded to Luxembourg with the song "Nous les amoureux" performed by Jean-Claude Pascal, and the German artist surprised everyone by singing partly in German and partly in French.

In **1962** the time allocation per song was reduced to three minutes and a brand new voting system was introduced which allowed the national jury to select the three songs it considered the best. Each member of the national jury could award 6 voting points; 3 points to the best song, 2 points to the second best and 1 point to the third best. All ten members of each national jury would vote anonymously, and thus the number of points would total 60, the three songs with the largest number of points being considered the best. The song with the highest number of points would receive 3 points, the second highest 2 points and the third highest 1 point: this would become their final vote and be announced as part of the “European jury’s vote”. Although Belgium, Spain, Austria and the Netherlands scored zero points as a result of the new system, it clearly showed that France had won with the song “Un premier amour”, performed by Isabelle Aubret, scoring 26 points.

Like the Netherlands in 1960, France declined to stage the **1963** contest. The United Kingdom took over the “Eurovision Grand Prix” and for the first time the programme was produced by a woman. Following on from those of the previous year, further changes were made to the voting system, in particular by expanding the number of jury members for each participating country to 20. The number of points allocated to each member was increased from 3 to 5; this gave juries the opportunity to vote for their five favourite songs. The system was exactly the same as in 1962, the only change being that jury members could now vote for five songs instead of three. Two of today’s most celebrated singers participated in the contest, Nana Mouskouri, who performed for Luxembourg and finished in 7th place, and Françoise Hardy who represented Monaco and finished 5th. The winner was Denmark with the song “Dansevise”, performed by Grethe and Jorgen Ingmann.

In **1964**, Sweden had to withdraw from the contest due to an artists’ strike, but there were still sixteen participating countries since Portugal joined in. The voting system was changed once more: the membership of each jury was reduced from 20 to 10 and members had 9 points to award. The song that was awarded the most votes within the jury would be allotted 5 points, the second obtaining the second largest number of votes would be allotted 3 points, and that with the third largest number of votes would be allotted one point. In the event of one song gaining all the votes, this song would be allotted all 9 points, and if only two songs received all the votes the first one would be allotted 6 points and the second 3 points. If three songs or more received votes, the first would be allotted 5 points, the second 3 points and the third 1 point. Portugal, Switzerland, West Germany and Yugoslavia scored zero points, while Italy far outstripped its closest runner-up with 16-year-old Gigliola Cinquetti, who also went on to achieve wider fame, singing “Non ho l’età”. Other well-known artists were Hugues Aufray, representing Luxembourg and placed 4th with the song “Dès que le printemps revient”, and Udo Jürgens, representing Austria placed 5th with “Warum nur warum?”.

In **1965**, Sweden returned and Ireland entered the contest, which increased the number of participating countries to eighteen. The Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries broadcast the contest, and this opened new horizons for the show. That year a French star was born called France Gall, who won the contest representing Luxembourg and singing “Poupée de cire, Poupée de son” written by Serge Gainsbourg. Star vocalist Udo Jürgens returned for a second time and was placed 4th with the song “Sag ihr, ich lass sie grüssen”, representing Austria. Belgium, Finland, Spain and West Germany scored zero points.

In **1966**, the only major change was the new rule on language. The rule stated that the song selected by each participant must be sung in the language (or one of the languages) of its country. This rule may have been introduced because the year before a country had sung in a language other than its own - Sweden performed in English. As regards the juries, the only change was that each national jury would consist of representative members of its country's public, who could include light and pop music experts but not professional composers, publishers or record manufacturers. That year Monaco and Italy scored zero points. The Grand Prix winner was Austria with the song "Merci chérie" performed by Udo Jürgens, who was participating in the contest for the third time, and well-known French artist Michèle Torr came 8th with the song "Ce soir je t'attendais", representing Luxembourg.

In **1967**, Denmark decided not to take part in the contest, thus reducing the number of participating countries to seventeen. The voting system reverted to that used in 1957, involving ten jury members representing each country and allowed to award one vote each to their preferred song. For the first time, the winner of the Grand Prix was the United Kingdom with the song "Puppet on a string" performed by Sandie Shaw; Switzerland scored zero points.

In **1968**, United Kingdom hosted the contest for the first time after being awarded the Grand Prix the previous year. Spain won by one point with the song "La, la, la ..." performed by Massiel, with top artist Cliff Richard in 2nd place with the song "Congratulations", representing the United Kingdom, and Isabelle Aubret in 3rd place with "La Source", representing France.

1969 turned out to be one of the most exciting years, with four countries out of the sixteen being awarded the Grand Prix: France with the song "Un Jour, Un Enfant" performed by Frida Boccara, the Netherlands with "De troubadour" performed by Lenny Kuhr, Spain with "Vivo cantando" performed by Salomé (Maria Rosa Marco) and the United Kingdom with "Boom bang a bang" performed by Lulu. That year's contest was also marked by other important events: Salvador Dali created the Eurovision Grand Prix publicity and a 12-year-old boy sang for Monaco, which finished 3rd.

Finland, Norway, Portugal and Sweden decided not to take part in the **1970** contest, thus reducing the number of participating countries to twelve only. Since four countries had won the previous year, lots were drawn to decide which of the winning organizations would host the Grand Prix. The Netherlands won the draw and hosted the contest. A change was made in the voting system to avoid possible ties. If two or more songs were awarded the same number of votes, the winning songs would be immediately performed again and all of the juries, except for those of the countries concerned, had to state by show of hands which song they preferred. In the unlikely event of an ongoing tie where the voting could not decide between songs, then, and only then, would the Grand Prix be awarded jointly to both. Performer Dana, representing Ireland, won the Grand Prix with "All kinds of everything", outshining stars such as David Alexandre Winter, placed 8th with "Je suis tombé du ciel", representing Luxembourg; Julio Iglesias, placed 4th with the song "Gwendolyne", representing Spain; Henri Dès, who tied with Spain in 4th place with "Retour", representing Switzerland; Mary Hopkin, placed 2nd with "Knock, knock (Who's there?)" representing the United Kingdom, and Katja Ebstein, who took 3rd place with "Wunder gibt es immer wieder", representing Germany.

In **1971**, the four countries which had withdrawn the year before returned, accompanied by Malta who joined the contest, thus restoring the number of participating countries to 18. Some of the rules were modified, including one concerning the number of performers allowed on stage which was limited to six. The voting system was completely revised, each participant now being allowed to appoint only two jury members, one under 25 and the other over 25. They were allocated ten points per song and could award from 1 to 10 votes to each. The winning country was Monaco, represented by Séverine with “Un banc, un arbre, une rue” and Spain placed 2nd, represented by Karina with "En un mundo Nuevo". Star performer Serge Lama finished 9th with “Un jardin sur la terre”, representing France; Katja Ebstein, returning for a second year, was placed 3rd with “Diese welt”, representing Germany, and Peter, Marc and Sue came 11th with “Les illusions de nos 20 ans”, representing Switzerland.

Monaco renounced staging the **1972** contest, thus giving United Kingdom another opportunity to be the host broadcaster and this time it decided to hold the contest in Edinburgh, Scotland. The winner of the contest was Luxembourg, represented by Vicky Leandros with the song “Après toi”. The Irish entrant made quite an impression, performing a song in Gaelic.

In **1973**, Malta and Austria decided to withdraw from the contest and Israel joined, thus requiring reinforced security. The rule on the language in which songs were performed was changed to allow participants to choose the language in which they wanted to sing. Luxembourg again finished in 1st place with “Tu te reconnaîtras” performed by Anne-Marie David. Well-known singer Patrick Juvet, representing Switzerland, came 12th with “Je vais me marier, Marie”, Mocedades, representing Spain, came 2nd with "Eres tu" and Cliff Richard was placed 3rd with “Power to all our friends”, representing the United Kingdom.

In **1974** Greece joined the contest, while France had to withdraw a few days before due to the death of President Georges Pompidou. This brought the number of participants down to 17. The rules on juries were changed to put the number of jurors back to 10 per country. For national juries a rule was introduced stating that an equal number of men and women was preferable, including five members over 25 and five under 25, the minimum age being 16 and the maximum 60, with not less than 10 years between the two age ranges. They were allocated five points per song and could award from 1 to 5 votes to each song. Sweden won the Grand Prix that year with the song “Waterloo” performed by ABBA, who became the most popular group in all of the contest’s history. Among the runners-up were well-known artists such as Gigliola Cinquetti, representing Italy, placed 2nd with “Si”, Mouth and MacNeal, representing the Netherlands, who came 3rd with “I see a star”, Olivia Newton-John representing United Kingdom, placed 4th with “Long live love”, and Tina Reynolds, representing Ireland, who came 7th with “Cross your heart”.

In **1975**, all seventeen countries from the previous year participated in the contest along with France, Malta and Turkey. However, for reasons that were unclear, Greece decided to withdraw just before the contest and this brought the total down to 19. The number of jurors in each national jury was increased to eleven and these jury members could award 1 to 5 points per song.

However, the final votes to be given on TV were as follows: 12 points for the song gaining most votes, 10 points for the song with the second largest number of votes, 8 points to the third song and so on down to 1 point for the song coming tenth in terms of votes. The Netherlands won the Grand Prix with the song “Ding Dinger Dong” by the group Teach-In. Second place was awarded to the United Kingdom with the song “Let me be the one” interpreted by the Shadows, who became chart toppers in many European countries.

Sweden, Malta and Turkey withdrew from the **1976** contest but Austria and Greece joined, thus bringing the number of participants to 18. There was a noticeable increase in the number of non-English speaking countries, such as Austria, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway and Switzerland, opting to perform songs in English. The United Kingdom won the Grand Prix with the song “Save your kisses for me”, which was performed by the Brotherhood of Man and became a smash commercial hit, selling over 6 million copies around the world. Top group Les Humphries came 12th with “Sing, sang, song”, representing Germany, and Peter, Sue and Marc, participating in the contest for the second time, were placed 4th with “Djambo Djambo”, representing Switzerland.

In **1977** Yugoslavia withdrew from the contest and Sweden returned. The language rule was reinstated: all participants had to perform in the language or one of the languages of their country. However, both Belgium and Germany were allowed to enter an English-language song since they had already chosen their entries before the rule was re-established. France won the Grand Prix with “L’oiseau et l’enfant” performed by Marie Myriam, who became a big star in France. Monaco finished 4th with the song “Une petite Française” by the celebrity performer Michèle Torr, who was participating for the second time.

In the **1978** contest, Denmark and Turkey joined the 18 countries of the previous year, bringing the number of participants to 20. Israel won the Grand Prix with the song “A-Ba-Ni-Bi”, which was performed by Ihzar Cohen and the Alphabeta and became a big hit across Europe. Other star performers participated in the contest, such as disco queen Baccara, who came 7th with “Parlez-vous français”, representing Luxembourg, and Colm C.T. Wilkinson who was placed 5th with “Born to sing” representing Ireland. Norway finished last, scoring zero points.

Turkey withdrew from the **1979** contest, bringing the number of participants down to 19. Due to political problems in the city of Jerusalem, where the contest was held, all the delegates and performers were kept under tight security at all times, although nothing untoward occurred. That year everyone scored and Israel won the Grand Prix for the second year in a row with the song “Hallelujah”, performed by Gali Atari & Milk and Honey. Celebrity entrants included Sandra, placed 12th with “Colorado”, representing the Netherlands; Jeanne Mason, placed 13th with “J’ai déjà vu ça dans tes yeux”, representing Luxembourg, and – participating for the third time – Peter, Sue and Marc placed 10th with “Troedler und Co.”, representing Switzerland.

Having won the 1978 contest and hosted the 1979 one, Israel declined to organize the **1980** “Eurovision Grand Prix”, opening the way for the Netherlands to take over. Monaco and Israel withdrew from the contest, while Turkey and – a pleasant surprise – an African/Arab country, Morocco, participated in the event for the first time, bringing the number of participants up to 19.

Well-known artist Johnny Logan and Chorus & Sax won the Grand Prix with “What’s another year”, representing Ireland, which became a big hit in Europe and number one in the UK charts. Participating for the third time, Katja Ebstein was placed 2nd with the song “Theater”, representing Germany.

In **1981**, Cyprus entered the contest and Israel and Yugoslavia returned to the fold, while Italy and Morocco decided not to participate. This brought the number of contestants to 20. The Grand Prix was awarded to Bucks Fizz with “Making your Mind up”, representing the United Kingdom. Norway finished last with zero points. Participating for the fourth time, Peter, Sue and Marc finished 4th with “Io senza te”, representing Switzerland. Egypt decided to broadcast the contest for the first time.

France and Greece withdrew from the **1982** contest, reducing the number of participants to 18. The Grand Prix was awarded to Nicole with the song “Ein bisschen frieden”, representing Germany. Finland finished last with zero points.

Ireland decided not to participate in the **1983** contest, while France, Greece and Italy made their comeback and brought the number of contestants up to 20. The Grand Prix was awarded to Corinne Hermes with “Si la vie est cadeau”, representing Luxembourg, which became a big hit in France. Other artists were Carola Haeggkvist, with the song “Fraemling”, representing Sweden, who was placed 3rd and became a star in her region, and Danijel Popovic, with “Julie”, representing Yugoslavia, who finished 4th. Ofra Haza, with “Hi”, representing Israel, was placed 2nd, and it was only later that she became a star and chart-topper across Europe with the big hit “Im nin'alu”. Spain and Turkey tied for last place, scoring zero points. Australia broadcast the contest for the first time.

Greece and Israel decided not to participate in the **1984** contest, however Ireland joined in again and brought the number of contestants up to 19. The Grand Prix was awarded to the Herrey', with “Diggi-loo-diggi-ley”, representing Sweden.

In the **1985** contest, the Netherlands and Yugoslavia decided not to participate while Greece and Israel returned, keeping the number of contestants at 19. The Grand Prix was awarded to Bobbysocks, with “La det swinge”, representing Norway. For the first time the transmission of the contest was satellite-only.

Greece and Italy withdrew from the **1986** contest, however the Netherlands, Yugoslavia and – for the first time – Iceland took part in the event, bringing the number of participants up to 20. That year, 15-year-old Sandra Kim won the Grand Prix with ease, scoring 176 points with “J’aime la vie”, representing Belgium. The Eurovision Song Contest celebrated its 30th anniversary.

Due to friction between the French-language television station RTBF and the Dutch-language BRTN, a choice had to be made as to who was going to produce the **1987** “Eurovision Grand Prix”. After some deliberation, it was decided that RTBF would be that year’s host country. The return of Greece and Italy brought the number of participants up to 22. The Grand Prix was awarded to star performer Johnny Logan, with “Hold Me Now”, representing Ireland.

Plastic Bertrand came 21st with “Amour-Amour”, representing Luxembourg. He was already a major pop star in the French-speaking world, with hits such as “Ça plane pour moi”. Umberto Tozzi finished 3rd with “Gente di mare”, representing Italy.

With the withdrawal of Cyprus, the number of contestants in the **1988** contest fell to 21. One major change occurred in the rules with regard to the national jury for the European final. The membership of each national jury was increased to sixteen, composed of an equal number of men and women, while four members had to be aged between 15 and 25, four between 26 and 35, four between 36 and 45 and four in the age group 46-60 and over. The jury membership was still to exclude professional composers, music publishers, record manufacturers, professional musicians, singers and any person with interests in the music industry, as well as members of staff from participating organizations or any person in contact with those organizations in the field of light entertainment. Each national jury member was allocated 1 to 10 points to award to each of their preferred songs. However, the final votes to be announced on TV remained the same. The Grand Prix was awarded to a major star, Céline Dion, with "Ne partez pas sans moi", representing Switzerland. Other well-known artists included Lara Fabian, placed 4th with "Croire", representing Luxembourg, and Gérard Lenorman, 10th with "Chanteur de charme", representing France.

In **1989**, all the 21 countries from the year before participated in the contest, plus Cyprus making its comeback, which brought the number up to 22. For that year the rules were changed to set an age limit of 16 for entrants, in view of the youth of the performers Gili, representing Israel, and Nathalie Paque, representing France. The Grand Prix was won by Yugoslavia, presenting a song with an attractive pop beat. The song was "Rock me" performed by Riva.

The **1990** contest was staged in Zagreb, Yugoslavia, with the same 22 participants as the previous year. The only major change was that the “postcards” between the songs showed the artists in the country they represented. This had not happened since 1982. The winner of the Grand Prix was well-known artist Toto Cutugno representing Italy with the song "Insieme 1992".

In the **1991** contest the number of participants was the same as in 1990, except that the Netherlands did not participate due to their national Remembrance Day which opened the way for Malta to join. The contest was held in Rome. Unlike the previous year, the postcards between the songs showed monuments of the host city with the artists who were to feature next in the contest singing a well-known Italian song. Problems occurred, partly because one of the presenters, Toto Cutugno, had language difficulties and appeared not to have fully grasped the voting procedure and partly for technical reasons. This resulted in Mr. Frank Naef, the European Broadcasting Union scrutineer at the time, having to take over during the voting session. That year, the Grand Prix was won by two countries, France with "C'est le dernier qui a parlé qui a raison", performed by Amina, and Sweden with "Fangad av en stormvind" sung by Carola. The rules stipulating that in case of a tie for the first place, the country which obtained the highest score the most often (12 points, 10 points and so on) would win, Sweden did it.

In the **1992** contest, the number of participating countries increased to 23, with the return of the Netherlands. The postcards were changed again, with the country presentations showing Sweden's most popular beauty spots. The winner of the contest was Ireland, with "Why me" performed by Linda Martin. The song and music were written by Johnny Logan, who became the first artist to win the contest three times.

The **1993** contest saw major changes, with three new countries joining the show. Three of the former Yugoslavian republics which had proclaimed their independence – Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia and Slovenia – swelled the number of participants to 25. The postcards showed each country's artists filmed in Ireland's most renowned beauty spots, which they had visited during the rehearsal week. That year the host broadcaster of the contest became the winner for the fifth time with the song "In your eyes", performed by Niamh Kavanagh and her vocalists.

Unlike past host broadcasters who had won the contest twice in a row, Ireland decided to play host again in **1994**. Even with the withdrawal of such countries as Belgium, Denmark, Israel, Italy, Luxembourg, Slovenia and Turkey, the number of participants remained the same. They were replaced by newcomers Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, the Russian Federation and Slovakia. For the third time in a row Ireland was the winner of the Grand Prix, with an all-time record of 226 points for the song "Rock'n roll kids" performed by Paul Harrington and Charlie McGettigan.

In **1995**, Ireland became the only country to be host broadcaster for a third time. With the withdrawal of Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovakia and Switzerland, the number of participants would have decreased to 18, but the return of Belgium, Denmark, Israel, Slovenia and Turkey brought the number back to a respectable 23. Christine Marchal took over the coordination of the contest at the EBU Permanent Services. The Grand Prix was awarded to Norway with the song "Nocturne", performed by Secret Garden. Well-known singer Anabel Conde placed 2nd with "Vuelve Conmigo", representing Spain.

In **1996**, in view of the large number of countries wanting to take part, a new Eurovision Song Contest pre-selection concept was introduced. The number of participants was limited to 23, including the winning country from the previous year (Norway). Pre-selection was conducted solely on the basis of audio recordings. Each national entry, lasting no longer than three minutes, was sent in on tape. The artists on the audiotapes had to be the same as would appear in the European final if selected. These recordings were to be forwarded to the European Broadcasting Union Permanent Services in Geneva. A compilation of all of the songs received on the prescribed date was made and sent to all participants. Each participating country was to select a jury of eight members based on the same principle as that used for the European final, and this jury would then evaluate the entries, allocating points to each one by secret ballot. The score was then sent to the EBU Permanent Services 24 hours after receiving the tapes by fax or phone. To avoid possible influences the pre-selection jury could not be part of the European final jury. The results were announced the next day at the same time as the draw for the European final running order. The countries selected were Austria, Belgium, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, France, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Malta, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and United Kingdom.

The winner of the Grand Prix was Ireland, which had now set the all-time record for the most wins (seven). The song was "The voice" and the performer Eimear Quinn.

In **1997** the pre-selection system was modified to allow all countries to participate in the contest at least every two years. The winner of the previous contest qualified automatically, while the other 17 countries were selected on the basis of their average points over the last five years (total of points divided by the number of times the country had participated).

If this produced a tie between two or three countries, the total number of points scored in the most recent years in which the countries had participated was the deciding factor. The other seven places were assigned to countries, which had not been admitted the previous year but had broadcast the contest and complied fully with the rules. This system of rotation was designed to reduce the number of participating countries; two lists emerge from this concept, the Active Participants and the Passive Participants. The aim was to enable different countries to enter and thus to maintain an average of 23 to 25 participants in the contest. Should any Active Participant country decide not to participate in the contest, the EBU Permanent Services would ask the next country in line in the Passive list if it wished to become an Active Participant. If the reply was affirmative it could enter the contest, if negative, the EBU Permanent Services would ask the next country in line, and so on. The contest was hosted for the seventh time in Ireland.

The Grand Prix was won by the United Kingdom with "Love shine a light" performed by Katrina and the Waves, which became an international hit.

For the **1998** contest the only change to the pre-selection rule was that the number of places remaining for the Passive Participants was no longer limited. That year the system of "televoting" was introduced to get the audience more involved in the show. However, a back-up jury was still required in case problems emerged during the voting sequence. Each country provided 24 telephone lines with numbers ending in digits between 01 and 25. Each of these sets of digits represented a song. The audience was given three minutes to vote, in view of the limited time allotted to countries to announce their results, which was set at five minutes. To minimize the risk of people voting for their own song in other countries, the telephone numbers were set up so that dialling across frontiers was impossible. Furthermore, each household could only vote three times during the sequence. This new system caused major controversy. Some people liked it because it brought them closer to the contest, while others were unhappy about the outcome of the results. A national jury was also required for all countries and especially those that did not have the infrastructure for televoting. The rules were applied in the same way as for the back-up juries, but instead of having 8 jurors the number was increased to 16. All of the results from the juries were sent to the EBU Permanent Services and certified by a notary who was present during the voting sequence to prevent fraud. This procedure only applied to the back-up juries if their votes were used as a result of a problem during televoting. The number of participants remained at 25. The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia made its debut and Slovakia, Israel, Romania, Belgium and Finland made their comeback in place of Austria, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Denmark, Iceland, Italy and Russia, who had to take a one-year break since their average was insufficient for them to participate. The winner of the Grand Prix made quite an impact, as it was Dana International, a transsexual from Israel, with the song "Diva". Another performance unlikely to be forgotten was that of Guildo Horn, with his unusual act and appearance; he was placed 7th representing Germany with the song "Guildo hat euch lieb".

The **1999** contest aroused controversy over the changes in the language and orchestra rules. The change in the language rule meant that all participants could choose the language in which they wanted to sing. The change regarding orchestras was that the producing organization was no longer obliged to provide one. The number of participants fell to 23. Insufficient points forced Finland, Greece, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Switzerland to take a one-year break, and they were replaced by the previous year's Passive Participants Bosnia-Herzegovina, Denmark, Iceland, Latvia and Lithuania. However, on 23 October, Latvia decided not to take part as an Active Participant in the 1999 contest. In accordance with the rules, the EBU Permanent Services then informed the country from the Passive Participants list with the most points that it could take part in the 44th edition if it so wished. That country was Hungary, which declined the offer. Next on the list was Portugal, which accepted. New steps were taken to improve the staging of the contest. First, the EBU Permanent Services decided to hold a meeting of heads of delegation in Jerusalem two months before the contest. Second, the Eurovision Song Contest Internet site of the European Broadcasting Union was updated and improved with features such as live video clips of the upcoming contest entries. Third, the EBU Permanent Services tried to put together a compilation CD of the 1999 entries for the benefit of Kosovo refugees. Unfortunately, this CD could not be released due to problems with rights and timing. The Grand Prix was awarded to Sweden with the song "Take me to your heaven", performed by Charlotte Nilsson.

The **2000** contest was held in Stockholm's (Sweden) prestigious Globe Arena before an audience of 12'000. The number of participants increased to 24. Bosnia-Herzegovina, Lithuania, Portugal, Poland and Slovakia were forced to take a one-year break due to their having gained an insufficient number of points in the previous year's contest. Finland, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania, the Russian Federation, and Switzerland returned, and Latvia joined the contest for the first time. This year's contest saw the introduction of two important new concepts. Firstly, a compilation CD of all 24 entries was made and released commercially. Secondly, Microsoft broadcasted the contest live on the Internet. The Grand Prix was awarded to Denmark with the song "Fly on the wings of love" performed by the Olsen Brothers.

During the **2001** contest, the rule regarding the criteria for admission was changed, which made the voting sequence more exciting. Until this year, participation in the Eurovision Song Contest depended on the average of number of points obtained by a country in the previous five competitions. Not only did this system mean that one bad result could affect a country for five years but it was also difficult for viewers to understand. What's more, the calculations were so complicated that it was impossible to announce during the programme which countries would be taking part the following year. To remedy these shortcomings – noted by EBU members, commentators and numerous observers – the following rule was applied: only countries placed in the top 15 would take part in the 2002 competition and the remaining places for the 2002 contest would be filled by those countries which had been unable to participate in 2001 but were keen to take part in 2002 and had broadcasted the 2001 event (Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Finland, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania and Switzerland – the so-called “passive participants”). As the first rule, that only the top 15 countries from the previous year will be allowed to participate the next year, does not apply to the four largest countries (France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom), the exact number of participants for the next year will always depend on their results. The Eurovision Song Contest 2001 was held in Copenhagen (Denmark) at the Parken Stadium and was the largest in the history of event, held before an audience of 38'000. The number of participants decreased to 23.

Insufficient points forced Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Finland, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Romania and Switzerland to take a one-year break, and they were replaced by the previous year's passive participants Bosnia-Herzegovina, Greece, Lithuania, Poland, Portugal and Slovenia. In 2001, Yahoo was chosen to broadcast the contest live on the Internet and the CD compilation of the 23 songs was released commercially, following its enormous success the previous year. The Grand Prix was awarded to Estonia with the song "Everybody" performed by Tanel Padar, Dave Benton and 2XL.