

# BÜTTNI MEETS . . .

## . . . IRA LOSCO

During one of my last visits to Malta I had the great pleasure to meet **Ira Losco** for lunch. But we didn't just eat! I was given the chance to get her known a bit better. I interviewed **Ira** while sitting in a nice new wine bar in Naxxar, and this came out of it:

First of all I asked her about her career and how she got in touch with music.

**Büttni:** „How did you start with music?“

**Ira:** „I've always really liked music. My mother always told me that I learned to sing before I learned to speak. I was already crazy about music from a very young age. In fact, my mom used to conveniently distract me while doing house chores, or when she needed some time for herself by sitting me in front of the TV when this Italian programme called „Popcorn“ was on. It was a chart show, presented by a very popular Italian DJ, and I loved it! My mother was always very fond of music as well, so it was only natural that since I was constantly surrounded by music I would end up in love with it! I've always had an ear for a good pop tune.

When I started to attend the Convent of Sacred Heart – I went there from the age of six till fifteen – I loved being in the choir. When I was ten I joined the school choir. And they gave me some solo parts. This vocal teacher liked my voice and she decided to keep training me and to give me more and more solo parts. When I left, then at sixteen I joined an alternative band together with my best friend, who is now living in London and doing electronic music. We used to write our own original music. That was my first experience in writing. We also had very similar influences, which in my case is very very important, when finding a song writing partner. I have only had two song writing partners in my life: Jamie, my best friend and Howard, who has worked with me on the last two albums that were released in Malta. It is very important for me to have similar influences in music as I get inspired.

So, back to what I was saying... I started with this alternative band and I think I gained quite some credibility from other people. They weren't and still aren't lots of female front women in Malta. So I was kind of one of the first together with Diane of Corkscrew, at the time. We won a couple of awards, like the university band award for example, and others like that. And then I was approached by this person who used to write in the song festivals. And I took part in one song festival singing in my own language which is Maltese. There I won an award for best newcomer and best performance on stage. And from that day on I got a lot of phone calls from people who wanted me to record their songs.

It happened so fast that I didn't get a chance to think whether I liked the fact that all of a sudden other people were writing songs for me! Anyway, so I kept going. I did the festival...“ (**Ira** is referring to the Song for Europe Festival) „...for three consecutive years. I did the first year with two songs and the second year with four songs, where I placed second. That made me first known on a national scale in Malta. Then, the third year I took part, I won the festival. I represented Malta in the Eurovision (Song Contest) in 2002. I had no idea that the song would place so well. We placed second! Malta was happy, and I was happy with the result we achieved, but somehow I was not satisfied with my personal achievement. You see I'm a very ambitious person and music means too much to me, to just leave it at that and stop creating. So after that being approached by Bridge Productions, a local production company (now fronted by Howard Debono, Ira's Producer/co-song writer and manager) was Heaven sent! I

*was encouraged to write my own music and remember where I was coming from. I previously used to listen to bands and acts like Tori Amos, Portishead, Massive Attack, etc.*

*The first album I wrote, called „Someone Else“, topped the records sales straight away, and nearly all the singles went to number one. Summer of 2004, saw me perform at Ringfest in Cologne, the Popkomm, on the RTL „Top of the Pops“ stage, I also performed at the „Stars for Free Berlin“, and „Stars for Free“ in Magdeburg. I also did some TV programmes in Rust and „Fernsehgarten“ in Mainz. That way I got a taste of Germany. It was just to introduce me and promote me. My first single did quite well in certain radio stations.*

*Early 2005, I started writing and recording for the second album, called „Accident Prone“, which went on to number one in Malta during the first week of its release. I had a terrific response, I think due to the fact that this album is more what I'm all about. I felt so confident with the album and knew it would work live because prior to the release in Malta, we were already touring with the songs in Germany. We spent the whole of last summer touring supporting huge German and international acts like US5, Söhne Mannheims, Nena, Ronan Keating, Melanie C, Elton John, Katie Melua (three times). With Katie Melua it was an acoustic set, which was really really nice. We did some other TV programmes, like „Fernsehgarten“ again. It was a brilliant year!!! And well, that's the story until now.“*

**Ira** mentioned some acoustic sets, for example the one she did with Katie Melua. And as she really rhapsodised about those acoustic sets, I asked her whether she likes them more than normal plugged concerts.

**Ira:** *„Aehm...mmhhh....no. I think I prefer the full band, because I give far more energy. I can't explain the feeling. It's too amazing. But the acoustic set has a different feeling. I like them both a lot. I think that with the acoustic set, it's far more intimate and I can really show off my voice. A lot of people were surprised, because when I did the festival back in 2002, 7th Wonder was an easy song to sing. I mean, anyone can sing it. And in fact, some people said „she is only there because of her looks, not because of her talent.“ So, when I started doing the acoustic sets my voice was more exposed. And then people said „Wow!“. You either love the voice or you hate it. But at least there was love or hate. I have this mentality, I prefer to have people who either totally love me or people who totally hate me. I hate in between....I am a very diplomatic person myself...but where music is concerned, I want people to be honest with me, so that I can give them all I've got in return.“ (**Ira** smiling)*

*„Like with me it's that I will really love an artist or I really hate one. But I don't really mean hate! Hate is too strong. Dislike is maybe better.“*

**Büttni:** *„So which artists do you like?“*

**Ira:** *„There are too many to mention. I like a lot of bands. I must admit that I listen to bands like Radiohead, Massive Attack, Portishead. Artists who I really admire for what they've achieved are Avril Lavigne, ... I really like both her albums, I mean really impressive for a sixteen year old..., ...and I like Coldplay. From Germany I like Silbermond, Wir sind Helden, maybe even more than Silbermond, because they're a bit more original in their compositions. But I like Stefanie's strength on stage. I love Söhne Mannheims. But I like a lot of different types of music. It's not just one type of music that I like.“*

The last time that I saw **Ira Losco** live was at Luxol where together with guitarist Alex she gave an acoustic set. I noticed that at that time she played a few songs of Alanis Morissette. So I asked **Ira** whether she also feels influenced by Alanis' music.

**Ira:** *„Yes, I like Alanis a lot. Alanis Morissette was one of the first female artists I listened to. I was thirteen or fourteen years old when she released her first album. And she was twenty two or twenty three. And yes, I like her a lot. She was a female who didn't give a crap*

*about what other people said. I really really liked her. Her music was full of emotion. She sang something and she really meant it. And yes, I am very influenced unconsciously without knowing it, I am very influenced by Alanis Morissette. Yes, I think you are right, my roots are there. I love a guitar and voice. But I still love the band as well very much, because my career started like that. It started with listening to Alanis Morissette who was coming from a very acoustic world, but also joining a band at the same time. So realising that the energy of a band is really important as well. I think it was a very healthy start.“*

Having a good voice is one thing, but more often than not a good musician gets a better feeling for music through playing an instrument.

**Büttni:** *„Do you play an instrument?“*

**Ira:** *„Yes, I studied the piano for six years, and I love to play it myself. I like composing on it a lot. In fact, I wrote most of my songs on the piano. But on the new album I have written quite a number of songs on the guitar as well. I learnt the guitar last year. I do power chords really, I know chords as well, but I tend to be a bit lazy. However, what is really funny is that when I write songs on the guitar, I'm doing these really weird chords. I guess it's because I love music so much. It comes naturally. But yes, I love playing the guitar on stage. It gives me a lot of energy and funnily enough I feel more confident playing the guitar, which I learnt in a year, rather than playing the piano, which I have learned for six years.“*

Then I asked **Ira** whether music is also present at home, when she is not „working“. Does she sing Christmas songs together with her family?

**Ira:** *„Not really, no. The funny thing is that my family likes what I do and they really really support me, but it's not like then in Christmas they come and ask me to „entertain“ them, they don't „expect“ that from me, they just really enjoy the fact that I'm at home with them! I think they know that it's my job and I do it every day. At home they know when to give me my space, when I go to the room where I have my piano, my guitar, my instruments and things, which is driving my mother crazy, because I leave everything in the way“ **Ira** starts laughing „No one walks in this room! Because my parents have understood that it's my job. If I don't write songs, then I don't have an album. And it's not a joke to them. So they are not saying „Oh you know, she's crazy, because she is crazy about music, but it's wearing off.“, they really accepted it. But also I respect the fact that they worry about me. They are proud though that I'm very determined and I work very hard to achieve my goals.“*

**Büttni:** *„Where do you get your ideas for songs from? What inspires you to write a song?“*

**Ira:** *„I think sometimes it's the course of your life, the experiences you go through. There might be some experiences that I went through and that really inspired me. Over here I am doing always something different every day. For example, one time I went to sing for the prisoners, which is something I've never done before. And it's a totally different experience. Even touring was something that I'd never done till last Summer. I wrote quite a lot of songs on tour for my album. So, it's the colouring of your life, I think, that makes you write. I think that every artist is somehow inspired, because they are artistic, because they look for artistic things. I think, if I were an accountant, I would never be able to write a song. You know, how would numbers inspire me?“*

**Büttni:** *„So music is not just a job, but you see it as an art?“*

**Ira:** *„Yes. Now it's my passion. I don't just see it as my job. I'm the type of person, I'm crap with money, I'm shit with it. You know, I'm really not into my accounts. And I am not that type of person who will budget. I don't do music because I aspire to money and fame. I do it, because it's my passion, and because I work hard for it. It's not really the success or the fame*

*at the end of the day. It's not even that, that drives you. It's the ambition, the determination to succeed. Obviously succeeding means fame at the end. Because in the entertainment business that's why people buy your CDs. The more people know you, the more buy your CDs and the more of a better selling artist that makes you. So that makes your living."*

**Ira Losco** also writes most of her own songs. I asked her whether she can imagine writing songs for other artists.

**Ira:** *"I've never done that before, but I can imagine doing it. However, I believe in one step at a time. I'm still in very initial stages of being an artist. I definitely feel very confident with myself, more than four years ago. But I like to keep myself down to earth. I think that I am still in a position where I have to concentrate on my act and on my stuff. I don't think it's a matter of selfishness, I feel I should concentrate on continuously bettering myself as an artist first. I don't like to fall into the Jack-of-all-trades-master-of-none syndrome!! I am also a perfectionist, if I do something I have to do it right. So if I ever write for another artist, it would have to involve long co-writing sessions, to better get to know the artist I am writing for and to make it more of a collaboration, because I believe in collaboration in music. I'm sure it would be very inspiring. And that will happen at the right time in my career."*

Then **Ira** explained a bit about the language of her songs, which is English. But why not Maltese or Italian or even German?

**Ira:** *"In Maltese the only problem is that internationally it suffers. For example, I'm in love with Etnika, they use Maltese. They're very impressive and they're taking the Maltese vocal music to another level. It is really really interesting. So that's something I'm really proud of, that they're doing that. But in my style of music, and what I'm trying to do, I don't think it would be applicable. I don't discount it, but I'd rather write in a universal language that more people understand. In German, if there is an opportunity to record I definitely would take it. Italian would be nice, too, and Spanish wouldn't be hard either. Italian I know, and Spanish is quite similar. I have done a course in university. I guess it depends on whether using the particular language will help the release of the single to do better. It would be very interesting for me, especially if I could collaborate with an artist who is already famous in that country, so like Silbermond. That would be amazing!"*

What are Ira Losco's plans for 2006? Any big tours planned?

**Ira:** *"The World Cup in Germany has given me some time to spend Summer concentrating on writing some new songs for my upcoming release and filming some new videos. Music is a 24/7 job. That's what I love about it. There's never time to stop and stare ... it's a continuous journey. I have a lot of gigs planned in Malta and I will also be taking another trip to a foreign territory (not sure yet where) to co-write with some internationally reknowned writers too, that is very exciting!"*

**Büttner:** *"Other than the German Market, what territories would be interesting for you to visit?"*

**Ira:** *"For these last two years we concentrated on the German market. I believe it has a lot of potential, because it is very big. When we were in Metzingen we spoke to Melanie C's band as well, and they were telling us that Germany is the place to be for live music. The German audience is amazing, they really appreciate music, they're really music lovers. But we do have other markets in mind. For me the Italian market has always been very appealing to me as well. The Italians are a bit like the Japanese. They idolize a lot. It's a market I definitely want to explore, as is Asia!"*

**Ira** told me about her tour around Germany in 2005. Can she still remember how many gigs

she had over there?

**Ira:** *„Oh my God! I could count them, if I had them written. I don't really know how many we had, but they were a lot! A lot, a lot! The summer tour last year could have been more more more of that. Of course! I was playing like every other two days. It was amazing, that much. But it is my job at the end of the day.“*

**Büttni:** *„So you had quite a few gigs. Isn't it very strenuous and stressful?“*

**Ira:** *„Yes and no. I love it so much that I don't see it too much. Okay, it is a bit scary when you start realising that your body is feeling the strain of it, and you know, prolonging, prolonging and so on. Okay, you spend five hours in a van, and sometimes you don't get the time needed to rest. But at the end of the day I love doing it.“*

Then the food was served and we had to interrupt the interview for a while.

After having had an amazing meal, we continued, and **Ira** told me a bit about her private interests and what she likes to do apart from making music.

**Büttni:** *„So, how do you relax?“*

**Ira:** *„Well, I don't really get much time to relax. But when I can, I try and... Relaxing for me is when I write, you know. It isn't really work for me. So I do that to relax. And obviously a holiday would be ideal, but I never get time to go on holiday. I haven't been on holiday for such a long time. The last time I went on holiday was, I think, in August 2004. With my boyfriend and some friends we went to Italy, to Sicily. We went to a festival, camping there, and it was real fun. But here you don't really get much time to relax. I spend my free time with my family when I can, because I hardly ever see them. I also have a little sister who is eleven years old. When I can I help her with some homework, or just spend some time with her. That's it.“*

Next chapter: The Future.

**Büttni:** *„What are your plans for the future?“*

**Ira:** *„It's to sing more and more ambitious stuff, like supporting certain acts. Last summer was amazing. So, now I want to support even more important international acts. The Rolling Stones or someone like Robbie Williams I'd like to support. And hopefully my dream will come true. But obviously then I want to do something for myself. I don't want to be a support act forever. I would like to headline a show. So that's one of my immediate ambitions and releasing an international album.“*

**Büttni:** *„Will it be the same album that you released in Malta?“*

**Ira:** *„I think it would have to be adaptable to the particular market it is being released in and depending on the time it gets released, maybe some more new songs that I would've written by that time, could be included in it also. I just wish that music remains part of my life. I don't know about family life yet, I don't know when. It is not in the top list of my priorities. My priority is music. And then, I think, those things will just happen naturally. I mean, I love the family life, I love children. But now I don't think I'm in a state of mind to be able to give so much time and dedication to another person. For now I've been working since I was a little kid. I've been working on my dream since I was sixteen years old. And I think it would be silly of me to give it up now, because I think it is just the beginning.“*

**Büttni:** *„You have sisters and brothers? And are they also into music?“*

**Ira:** *„I have two sisters. My other sister likes to dance. And she is now working with the media. She followed the same course that I did. She is very into editing and stuff like that, you*

*know, production. And my other sister, the little one, she likes to dance as well. She also has a good singing voice and I think she likes to sing. But I asked her a couple of times, if she likes to do it. And she always said that she prefers dancing. I am not sure, we will see.“*

**Büttni:** *„How are relations with other Maltese artists?“*

**Ira:** *„I get on with everyone. I don't think it's always reciprocal“ she laughs „but that's the way life goes I guess, some people urge you to succeed, others just can't wait till you fall flat on your face. I just set my mind to doing things the right way and in a professional manner. That's what's important to me.“*

**Büttni:** *„Do you find it difficult to be popular?“*

**Ira:** *„ No. I think, if I was one of those people who hated people, it would be difficult. Because over here you are always continuously running into people and there is no real privacy. I don't believe in celebrity status in Malta. Yes, you get recognised and people congratulate you and are excited to meet you, but there's no such thing as paparazzi! Also there are financial and career implications. Malta is very small, so obviously you release one album, it's hot news for a month, and then you have to see what to come up with again. In Germany I could release an album and still be playing it a year or a year and a half after that. I mean, one thing that really surprised me or I was really amazed of, is Tokio Hotel. Their single „Durch den Monsun“ was being played continuously from May 2005 up till now, they're still playing it on VIVA, which is incredible. Over here a single lasts two months max and that's it, and then it's not played anymore. So it's a continuous investment. I hate to say it, I love Malta a lot, but you can't survive here. Eventually I will live abroad.“*

**Büttni:** *„What about living abroad?“*

**Ira:** *„I would like to live abroad. I always used to say that when I was a little girl, for no reason. I didn't say that I want to live abroad because I knew it was better or anything. I just always wanted to be independent. And to taste different cultures. I would love to live in Germany, in Berlin. I would love it. Because it's very cosmopolitan and I guess I have good memories there. I guess that's why I want to live there. I want to be somewhere central and where I am accessible. I don't want to be in Malta and then having me fly back, or not give me the opportunity to be in certain events because I am not living there.“*

**Büttni:** *„But in the coming weeks and months you're gonna be here in Malta, right? What about gigs here?“*

**Ira:** *„Yes, I have a lot of gigs planned in Malta. It feels good to be playing in my country. The audiences here have become so warm and venues I play are always packed. I'm very proud of what I have achieved and I'm very very happy to have such a talented group of musicians playing in my band. I am also going to be filming some videos and working on another release, which I can't disclose any information on as yet!! I live day by day, we'll see what the future holds!“*

I couldn't have ended it with a better sentence. Indeed, we'll see what the future holds. Of course, I wish **Ira Losco** all the best for her future, be she successful in breaking the German market and many other markets, and may she always remain what she is, a person down to earth with a beautiful voice and the right sense for good tunes.

More infos about **Ira Losco** you will also find on her website [www.iralosco.com](http://www.iralosco.com).