

# BÜTTNI MEETS . . .

## . . . JULIE & LUDWIG

During my last visit to Malta I had the pleasure to meet two of Malta's leading singers of the semi-classical sector, as they like to emphasise on. On a windy winter day I met **Julie** and **Ludwig**.

We met in the heart of Valletta, in Republic Street. And on the way to a Café, which was just a few metres away, we were stopped several times by people greeting the two famous singers. Even the Minister for Culture stopped by to wish them and me a Happy New Year.

Then at the quieter environment of separated part of a Café I asked the singers various questions, starting with how they did welcome the new year.

Smilingly **Julie** answered: *„We went to eat. I mean nothing more. As for the past two years we decided not to work as singers. We wanted to enjoy it more.“*

And **Ludwig** added: *„Just for Christmas and New Year's Eve we decided not to work.“*

And **Julie** again: *„Although you could work even more. But we decided that!“*

**Ludwig** continued: *„So on New Year's Eve we went...“* (**Julie** added: *„...were invited“*) *„...for dinner to a friend of ours whom we do some promotion for Armani and Dunhill. And he has this nice restaurant. It was just us and his family in his restaurant, so it was really peaceful.“*

**Julie** pointed out: *„We tried not to be in a big crowd.“*

And **Ludwig** said: *„We avoid big crowds. Because, you know, sometimes it gets too much.“*

I took it up and asked provokingly about whether they suffer from being popular.

**Julie** took some time, but then replied with a smile: *„It's nice, but sometimes a disadvantage on the other side. We enjoy meeting people and they stop by and say: 'I watched you on TV and you were doing well, very nice.' But on the other hand when we go somewhere, you go in a restaurant or whatever. Okay, they come and talk to you, but you have no privacy. They want to sit there with you for maybe two hours and talk. They put their plates there and start a conversation like „Hey...“. Yeah, like that. We, when we are not working, try to find quietness.“*

And **Ludwig** added *„We try to find our own time and space.“*

From the way they explained all this I could clearly understand, that it is not easy to be popular, especially in a small country like Malta.

I asked myself how these popular singers may relax and I addressed this question to the couple and they answered alternating as follows:

**Julie:** *„Okay, I go to his place...“*

**Ludwig:** *„To my place.“*

**Julie:** *„Either he cooks, 'cause he likes to cook...“*

**Ludwig:** *„Then I get around five or six DVDs.“*

**Julie:** *„And we choose...“*

**Ludwig:** *„We choose a DVD.“*

**Julie:** *„And a good bottle of wine, (smiling) maybe Glühwein.“*

Glühwein?! Did she say 'Glühwein'?

And **Julie** said with a bright smile: *„Yes, we were introduced to Glühwein!“*

And **Ludwig** added concluding: *„Well, and that's it.“*

But I wanted them to tell me a bit more and so stressed a bit on this Glühwein thing and that they don't really have the necessary cold weather for it in Malta.

**Ludwig** came along with the answer: *„For us it will be fine, because of the humidity.“*

And **Julie** said: *„And then you get a good night of sleep after drinking. A full night long.“*

Okay, that was winter, but how about summer?

**Büttni**: *„And how do you relax in summer?“*

After taking a sip of Cappuccino **Julie** said: *„In summer it is a bit of a problem. Either we go to Gozo for a couple of days, before the season starts, like June or May.“*

And **Ludwig** added: *“Before school finishes. Before all the functions starts cropping up.*

*Because then the summer is a very good season for us. Then during summer we go, if we want to go, for example for a swim, we either go very late...“*

**Julie** continued: *„...or early in the morning.“*

And **Ludwig** again: *„...or early, like seven o'clock in the morning. But most of the times we go to another singer's house. His name is Renato. He is an old guy, who went in the Eurovision as well. And he has a big pool with his house. We just enjoy it, or do a barbecue. It's just us, him, a couple of other singers and the pets. And we can stay there, really relaxed, until what time we can. We can say whatever we want. It's really really nice. Summer is amazing.“*

**Julie** smiling and daydreaming about a relaxing summer just said: *„Yeah...“*

Then she added: *„'Cause here in summer, you know, you have these Ikel Malti, Maltese Nights, during Festas.“*

**Ludwig**: *„In other countries you do the tours. You tour around. But a tour over here is very relaxed.“*

But **Julie**: *„...unless you have to go to Gozo!“*

And **Ludwig** brought the answer to an end: *„Yes, unless you have to go to Gozo. But it's really nice. During the morning you are relaxed. And then in the evening you work.“*

So that's how **Julie** and **Ludwig** relax. But what do they do when they don't relax? What do they do when they work? What do they work as?

**Ludwig** told me that they both teach. But only in the winter season they teach, and they are lucky not to have long working hours.

**Julie** pointed out: *„We finish at two o'clock in the afternoon.“*

And both singers started telling me about their big passion: Theatre, musical theatre.

**Julie**: *„And we have the theatre! So then in the afternoon and evening you can work until eleven o'clock or even midnight, especially during technical rehearsals. That's very hard. You wake up at six o'clock in the morning to go to work, and you know, work till late in the eve.“*

**Ludwig** came back to his job: *„We have now arranged our jobs. We are still teachers, but especially in my job, I see a lot of kids. I am like a guidance councillor, dealing with child-abuse problems. I used to teach, before I had my second career, for only two years. I had my own class. But then with travelling and all that, it is not fair then on the children. So it's better like that. We have to live a compromise. And I have no problems with the education division, neither with the minister. He supported us even during Eurovision. I didn't go to work obviously for those months.“*

I guess he was referring to the same minister that we shook hands with in the middle of Republic Street less than an hour ago.

**Ludwig** completed: *„I got my permission and that stuff, and they really supported us over that. I'm very thankful.“*

All singers once start singing. So how and when and where did **Julie** and **Ludwig** start with

it?

I asked them for their stories, and **Julie** was the first to answer.

**Julie:** „It's a long story. Let me start with my part. I started singing in a church choir. I mean, not the singing like now. A four year old child, you know. The thing is to enjoy it. My parents never pushed me. I used to study the piano, but I used to enjoy the singing more. And I started from there. Then when I was twelve years old, a relative of mine, who is an author, asked me: „Why don't you try it out in the kids' festival?“ And it was on TV, on the national television. And I placed second. And that was my first time in there. It boosted me up. From there I started going to lessons, I started the real, meaning opera. That's what I started with. I used to sit for the Royal Exams of London. And that's how it started. Then I got to sing more than rather playing the piano. I mean first singing and then the piano. But it's good to know an instrument, so it helps you up while studying.

I used to take part in festivals. And then I went to a theatre company which I started singing parts in musicals with. Then I went up playing the main parts. I continued from there. And then, me and him (**Ludwig**) met at the Song for Europe Festival. We were backing vocalists when Times Three won. That was 1999, wasn't it?“

**Ludwig** interrupted her: „We met before! We have done musicals before!“

And **Julie:** „Yes. We used to work in musicals together.“

And **Ludwig** added: „But we weren't together at that time.“

**Julie** then continued: „No, we weren't together at that time. But I mean, when we used to sing together, we didn't realise that people used to like us to sing together. I mean, I can't explain it. Because we sing as solo artists. Even nowadays when we do musicals.“

**Ludwig:** „But sometimes people fall in love with something.“

**Julie:** „And then, if you're wise enough, work on that.“

Now **Ludwig** also wanted to tell his story: „Now my story. My story started with my uncle who was a majestro and a priest. He was the majestro of the capella of the St. John's Co-Cathedral. So, obviously all his nephews must study an instrument. Must!“

**Julie** with a serious voice: „It's a Must in their family!“

And **Ludwig** went on: „So all the cousins used to go. I never loved the piano. And it's either the piano or the violine!“ ... „I don't know what happened. When the Archbishop Mons. Joseph Mercieca was made Archbishop, he (my uncle) wanted us to do like the London Choir Voice, like they have in Westminster Abbey. It was something! I mean us Maltese, the altar boys, the students. Us! And (my uncle) Michael said: 'Let me try all the nephews.' We were three boys and he wanted to put us everywhere. So he started doing the scales and he told me: 'Gees, here we've got something!' 'If you stop your piano, have a considerate of your voice!' And at first it was really boring, I mean all the exercises, the vocal lessons.“

**Julie** agreed: „Yeah, especially when you're a kid, not really understanding what you are doing and all this.“

**Ludwig** again: „Yes, the vocal exercise, diaphragm, all the technique. And then I was in a musical in a choir. And the main part singer for some reason was chucked out of the musical because he was skipping rehearsals. So the majestro said like: 'You!'. He told me: 'Tomorrow you come to the studio, we sit and try the pieces, and if you sing well, you have the part.' And I was in and it started from there. Then, when I met **Julie**, I used to like to tease her, like 'Hey what are you doing? You get into these rubbish festivals, for the Eurovision, that stuff. I mean, with that nice voice...' And then **Julie** was getting much more principal parts than I was, because she was getting into the festivals. And she was over here and there. Everywhere.“

**Julie** proudly said: „I was getting known, you know.“

**Ludwig:** „If you want to get known, you have to enter the festivals! It's unbelievable.“

And **Julie** with a smile: „So I was right! When you want the people to know you, you have to

consider entering those festivals. And you never know. Because people like you.“

**Ludwig** continued: „She told me: 'Listen **Ludwig**, I mean, ...' She said: 'I never loved the festival. But the festival always loved me.'

**Julie**: „Yeah, I was lucky.“

**Ludwig**: „I mean, second place in the international festival for the first time. A televoting award. Eurovision after the second year. I mean that was something!“

**Julie** added: „And we went abroad as well.“

With satisfaction **Ludwig** continued: „Abroad as well competing. And now I can enjoy doing what I like without any competition. The competitions are over. We have established our names. I mean, it's unbelievable how you get the parts now. Sometimes they phone you and say: 'Hey listen, you want this part?' Amazing!“

**Julie** interrupted: „But still it was not easy!“

And **Ludwig** agreed by saying: „No, it wasn't easy, I mean, it's easy saying it, but it took some time, three or four years!“

**Julie** became a bit more serious again when she said: „Ok, not much, not that long, but it wasn't easy. 'Cause you see: Here it's not easy to succeed. You have a certain amount of people and they rule so to say.“

**Ludwig's** voice was now on a lower scale when he continued saying: „Even the composers. You have like three or four composers. And if they don't write for you,...“

He didn't want to finish this sentence.

So **Julie** added: „...you don't really make it. Until you prove yourself, and you prove that you're very good and show that you're very good.“

**Ludwig** grabbed up the part about the composers and tried to explain it on an example about glasses: „And then you must have the song. Because they compose like six or seven songs. But then they all will have, aehm... ..it's like I have five glasses, but I have a crystal glass, which I am going to bet with it. I have the other five which are good. But this crystal one! And if you're lucky, then it's all up to the people. And they will know, like the people love you. And you have the chance.“

**Julie**: „Sometimes it's not just how good you are. It's the people who make you up there.“

**Ludwig**: „Yes! You have to have a talent.“

**Julie**: „We achieved a lot thanks to the people! It's the people who makes you.“

So that's how **Julie** and **Ludwig's** careers have started. What do they do now?

**Büttner**: „And now you are more into operas and musicals?“

Like shooting a gun **Ludwig** said: „Musicals!“

And **Julie** said: „Musicals, not really operas.“

**Ludwig** continued: „We can sing an opera, but it's another technique. Since we have studied voice, we know that opera is another technique. So technicallywise we know that we're wrong. We can still keep the rules.“

Again very proudly and with a smile **Julie** said: „I prefer the semi-classical and musical theatre.“

**Ludwig** added: „It's better. If I am not a cook, I am not going to a four star hotel and try to cook, if I'm not a cook. I mean I can cook, but it's not what I can do best. Because it can do more damage than good.“

Both **Julie** and **Ludwig** underlined that their singing style is more suitable for the semi-classical and musical sector. That is what they like and enjoy and can do best.

Then I asked them about working abroad. **Ludwig** told me that they had just returned from Bulgaria where they worked with philharmonic school and a very popular tenor. It was a great

experience, but they missed the love and passion in Bulgaria.

In fact, **Ludwig** said: *„But then they don't have what we call a „pop tenor“. They're very into musicals and opera, they all like it, but but... ..in Italian they call it „tenore del amore“, one who sings with love, with passion. This you don't find there!“*

Further more, about working abroad, **Ludwig** said: *„Then it all depends on your CV and on the country you go to. For example if you go to the UK and show them that you have been to the Eurovision, they put you down on the list as much as possible.“*

But the singers also said that their appearance in the celebrations of EU Accession in 2004 helped them especially as it was aired all over Europe.

And **Julie** then said: *„And at last our voices were used when the Queen was in Malta.“*

**Julie** referred to a dance show with their voices in the background.

**Ludwig** explained it a bit more in detailed: *„The project incorporated that we do around seven different voices, like taking different harmonisations and levels as it was a pure dance show. And you couldn't really say like: 'This is Julie and Ludwig.' Because you were to hear like a hundred of different people. It's like a big choir.“*

Now **Ludwig** was proud when he said: *„And we went to the European Parliament!“*

**Julie** added: *„Yes, we were invited there to sing.“*

Wow, how many people have sung for the European Parliament? Now I know two who have! But again the couple told me that even for that you have to know the right people. They have good relations with the government and with the different ministries. And also you need the support of the composers.

**Ludwig** also said clearly that you can't really compare Malta with other countries.

**Ludwig**: *„When you win in the festival here and go for the Eurovision, you become very popular. You have to go everywhere and show up everywhere. But then you see other countries, and you are nowhere. Then you have to start from scratch.“*

I had not finished my question about whether or not they could imagine living abroad when both at the same millisecond said 'Yes'.

And **Ludwig** told me: *„Thanks to music we have travelled a lot...for free..., which is the most beautiful thing about being a singer! You travel abroad and you have all this accommodation. We never get bored. Okay, sometimes it gets too much. For example, this time I had to leave on Boxing Day. So it was really sad for me and for my family, I mean that I had to leave them then. But that's part of our work.“*

**Julie** said with self-confidence: *„We know that we want a career!“*

**Ludwig** then became a bit romantic: *„And the nice thing about us is that I understand her and she understands me.“*

**Julie**: *„We try to support each other.“*

**Ludwig**: *„I cannot imagine working with another person.“*

But **Ludwig** again wanted to express his satisfaction and fascination of their job and their career: *„It's a crazy world. One day you are here and suddenly you receive a phone call, and two days later you are somewhere else, you travel to another country.“*

He again told me about their trip to Brussels: *„The Brussels thing, I remember, it was a Monday morning and it was funny, because the secretary of the minister, who is something in Brussels, a representative for Malta, he used to be the Minister for Foreign Affairs, phoned me.“*

I think **Ludwig** was referring to Joe Borg, formerly Maltese Minister for Foreign Affairs, now

being EU Commissioner for Fisheries and Maritime Affairs.

**Ludwig:** „So quarter to eight in the morning I received this call and he said: 'Issur Galea'. And in Maltese we have two meanings of 'Issur', it's either 'Mister' or it's the Bastion. And as soon as he said 'Issur Galea', I told him 'The bastions are in Valletta'. I'm no Sir. And he told me: 'Hey listen, we want you to come to the Foreign Affairs Ministry to meet the minister' And I thought it was my best friend making a joke. And so I gave him a nice Maltese show in a talk. I told him: 'Listen, it's quarter to eight in the morning, I's still not all awake.' And they started to mention like the protocol. And I said to myself: 'Madonna, this is real!' And then he told me: 'The minister is gonna talk to you right now.' And I said: 'But hey, I'm wearing a pair of Jeans and that stuff.' And the answer was: 'No problem, we will make access for you although you're not dressed decently. Just go for **Julie** and come, 'cause we have two tickets for you. And I will explain everything then later.' My reaction was: 'What tickets? Where to and when?' And the guy said: 'In two days you'll be leaving.' Leaving? In two days? I remember going to **Julie**, and **Julie** was still relaxed, she was cooking. I told her: '**Julie**, I'm sorry, you have to turn off everything, you're coming as you are. Listen, the guy is waiting.' And then I remember we went there and the guy gave us these tickets with accommodation and spending money. And it was really great. But sometimes it's like that.“

But the two singers don't just sing in big theatre shows or for the European Commission. Sometimes you can hear their voices on functions, weddings, parties, etc.

**Julie** commented about this: „That's extra money. And when we can do it, we go for it.“

A bit later **Ludwig** told me about their success and the sales of their latest single, which was sold out very quickly. By the way, **Julie** and **Ludwig** are signed with BMG Germany.

**Julie** then again focused on the hard competition in a small country like Malta. You find their CD right next to the one of Celine Dion, which is just a little bit more expensive. So which CD is going to be sold? These problems also other Maltese artists face.

We came back to their life with music and work. **Julie** said a sentence which brought all to the core statement: „Teaching is work, but the music is our satisfaction.“

She also made clear, that when you want to live this life, you have to have more income, you can't live from music only. So their job and its wage helps. It gives them security, which I can only understand. Of course, **Julie** and **Ludwig** are stars, but they are Maltese stars, so on a much smaller scale than a German star like Westernhagen for example.

**Ludwig** mentioned that Robbie Williams is also signed with BMG like they are. But the differences are extraorbitant.

Nearing the end of the interview I asked them again about their passion for musicals.

**Julie** mentioned Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice as her or even their favourite writers and composers in the musical scene, but also Leonard Bernstein.

With a smile **Julie** said: „My favourite musical is the Phantom!“ She means the Phantom of the Opera.

**Julie:** „I also love Le Miserables, Miss Saigon and the West Side Story.“

But **Ludwig** explained to me that when such a show is done in Malta, then it is usually not the full musical but only highlights.

**Ludwig:** „It's with orchestra and costumes, but it's highlights only.“

But there are exceptions, and **Ludwig** mentioned Superstar which was done in full length.

Then the couple gave me an outlook for 2006, their projects, musicals, etc.

In April they will take part in the Masquerade musical, which is actually a Broadway show.

But like other shows this will be showed only in a short period of time.

**Ludwig:** „*It will be for a short period of time, but it will be high class.*“

He then pointed out that there are also the Maltese productions.

**Ludwig:** „*Then there are the Maltese productions, which an artist must do as well! Because there you have the common people, who will then eventually buy your CD.*“

And **Julie** explained: „*Because the people who come to the MCC (Mediterranean Conference Centre) or the Manuel Theatre are of a particular class.*“

In their theatre and musical shows **Julie** and **Ludwig** sing in many languages, mostly in English, but also and of course in Maltese! Besides this even sometimes in Italian or in French or even in German.

German? Well, not really in shows. **Julie** now mentioned some Christmas songs.

**Julie:** „*Oh Tannenbaum, die Stille Nacht...*“

Actually they had a concert where they were guests in, and they had to sing Christmas songs. But thanks to their German friend Stephan they learned the pronunciation and so were able to sing nice German Christmas songs.

Everybody knows that I like the subject of Europe and the European Union, and so I asked **Julie** and **Ludwig** about their position in Europe and where they do see themselves.

**Julie's** answer was: „*Europe helps us. It helped our career, especially singing the official song at the EU Accession activities. It is healthy. We have many friends who work in England or Ireland or Germany. For us singers it's England and Germany mainly where we can concentrate on, and this Europe now helps. ... Before we joined the EU people were afraid that people would come over to buy out the land and steal our jobs. But that's not the case. For someone who wants to have a career it only helps. You can go abroad easily, study and work.*“

And **Ludwig** added: „*Politically I don't know, politically I have never bothered as such. Although we were in favour of this. I think it was a challenge in move.*“

**Julie** again: „*Now we have to see. in ten years I can tell you more. But I think it's for the benefit of the country.*“

**Ludwig:** „*The country has improved a lot!*“

**Julie** also said that now for graduates it is easier to leave the country when they don't find a job here. They go abroad to find work there. Something, that used to be very difficult ten of fifteen years ago.

With this they gave a clear statement in favour of Malta's EU membership.

**Julie** said a nice sentence: „*We feel like EU now.*“

And she gave me the example of when they travelled to Turkey where „*...they were so jealous of us being in the EU...*“.

We came back to the outlook for this year.

Last year they did the „1565 – The Great Siege“ and this year a CD of this is going to be published.

In 2006 **Julie** and **Ludwig** will appear on a number of productions. They told me about a Maltese production where they show the life of the Pope John Paul II (a musical) in April.

Then in May they will be in Bulgaria again. In summer **Julie** and **Ludwig** will go to the UK.

In early summer they will also perform together with the National Orchestra, then it will be of musicals again, of course, a mix of Les Miserables, Miss Saigon and others. Other singers will be involved in this project, too. Another production will be in Gozo, but that's later on in the year.

Asking about how their relations with other singers are the couple started describing that there is a big difference between working together in a musical and competing in a festival. The competition in a festival can be so hard and the rivalry can get so big, that even unfair things happen.

**Julie:** *„Once they did cigarette burns on my dress.“*

**Ludwig:** *„When it's competition over here, then it stops, then you're rivals.“*

**Julie:** *„But working in the theatre is like pulling on the same rope, for the same thing. That's more teamwork then, and you get more satisfaction.“*

**Büttni:** *„So you will not enter a competition like for the Eurovision again?“*

**Ludwig:** *„Well, you never know. But for now we prefer to do what we do now. We carry on with musicals, maybe also a bit more abroad.“*

**Julie:** *„I cannot say 'No'. I mean when I go there it is still a great experience. And it's fun.“*

About their future both singers told me that they want to continue with singing as long as possible always focusing on the musical scene. **Julie** also told me that they like to work with youngsters whom they sponsor to go abroad. So besides their own career they try to give their experiences to new talents. I have great respect of that knowing that other artists are often too selfish and think about their own career only. But with **Julie** and **Ludwig** it's different, maybe it comes from their jobs as teachers or from the experience they have made there, in their teaching jobs. However, I think it is a nice thing.

**Ludwig** came up with Masquerade, Malta's biggest theatre school, whom he works with. He plays an active role in recruiting youths, or rather getting them interested in singing, playing, dancing, in expressing themselves.

**Ludwig:** *„We want to give opportunities wherever we can.“*

**Julie** added: *„It is nice when you see that your students are doing well, it gives you this special satisfaction that you have done something good.“*

Asking about their private plans for the future, **Ludwig** said: *„First we want to concentrate on our career. We also want to get married. But we are still young. And we are taking it easy. And as we said, we support each other. And then God does the rest. 'In God we trust', that's what we say.“*

We continued chatting about this and that. And all of a sudden I asked about their New Year's resolutions.

**Julie:** *„Not really big resolutions, stupid ones, like I want to get on a diet that serves for only two days, so I don't do anything. Obviously I like this year to be better than the last one.“*

**Ludwig:** *„We take it day by day. You have to work, you have to do many things to get there. And then maybe out of five opportunities you reach one or two. But at least you're trying. You have to build and build and build.“*

The end of the interview was reached. One hour has passed like nothing. But time passes fast when you spend time with such nice personalities like **Julie** and **Ludwig**.

More news about **Julie** and **Ludwig** can be found on their website

[www.LudwigandJulie.com](http://www.LudwigandJulie.com) which is going to get a bit of a new face with more updates that the two singers can do themselves, in order to get closer in touch with their international fans.

One last thing: **Julie** and **Ludwig** told me that they are also going to launch a new single this year, so more to look forward to!