

## Ida Maria, Biography

Lots of things have happened to the 23-year-old Ida Maria in the last 6 months. UK music insiders put her near the top of a BBC poll of bands most likely to break big in 2008 and her perfect brand of punk-pop has been described by NME as "the midpoint between The Strokes and Ms. Winehouse". She appeared on 'Later With Jools Holland' and stole the show, even upstaging her hero Morrissey ("I went to shake his hand after the show and was rather shocked by how much he smelt of aftershave," she says).

"On stage I go into a trance", says Ida. "I want to live the music with my whole body. Playing live should be hard, physical work, like being a fisherman or a carpenter. You should put everything you've got into it." As the London Evening Standard put it, Ida has "the rare performer's ability to turn every night into the gig of her life".

Woe betide any bands who fail to do the same. When she witnessed a Swedish electronica act called Zietgeist at a festival ("looking too cool and pretentious and up-themselves") she jumped over the security barrier, leapt onto the stage and decided to teach them a lesson. "They were making me angry," she says, "so I ran to the front and bit the singer's arse. Hard. They looked terrified. I was really happy for the rest of the night!"

Ida grew up Nesna, a tiny university town in the north of Norway, population 1,776, with one gas station, one pub, one closed-down shoe factory and lots of mountains. It's near the Arctic Circle, which means that it's in perpetual darkness for half of the year. "As soon as autumn comes everyone curls up and goes into a seasonal depression without noticing it," she says. "It's like the body saving energy and hibernating. I think that explains the whole Scandinavian melancholy thing. If there's a dark edge to my music I think it comes from that."

Her mother is a college teacher who'd sing in choirs and at weddings, her dad worked variously as a fisherman, carpenter, computer engineer and teacher and also played bass in various jazz and ska bands. She absorbed both their tastes in music and was also turned on to Bob Dylan and Jimi Hendrix by a rather bohemian family GP.

Aged 16, after failed piano lessons and rather more success with the guitar, she moved to Bergen, on the southwest coast of Norway, to study music. The music course was a disappointment ("it was run by these mad, fundamentalist Christians, who declared that dancing was like sex standing up"), but she learned more on the city's thriving music scene a place where the likes of Kings Of Convenience, Sondre Lerche, Annie, Erlend Øye, Røyksopp and Datarock would rub shoulders with assorted black metal bands, avant garde jazz musicians and bluegrass singer-songwriters.

"It was a fantastic place to be a musician, and a great place to develop," says Ida. "I used to have a thin, girlie little voice, but in Bergen I discovered the inner beast that was hiding in my vocal chords."

After two more years in Bergen, sharing a tiny, rotten, condemned apartment in Bergen with seven other people, she decided that she "wanted to stay in a place with proper windows, and floors that were somehow hanging together". So Ida moved to Uppsala in Sweden, where she enrolled to study at the city's prestigious university.

"I studied classical music history, pop music history, rock mythologies, ethnological music, all really cool subjects. And I loved it. But I soon realised that I'd become a full-time a musician and, instead of being in lectures every Monday, I'd be doing gigs around Norway and Sweden.

Having booked a last-minute slot at a big Swedish festival, she rushed around music venues in Stockholm to find musicians to join her band. "I got in the best guys I could find, we rehearsed for two days, and we then played the festival," she says. "We sounded like crap, but the guys were fantastic and they were all great players and it all kinda worked out."

The musicians (Stefan Törnby on lead guitar, Johannes Lindberg on bass, and Olle Lundin on drums) remain the core of Ida's touring band, with all of them playing and singing backing vocals on her debut album, released 28<sup>th</sup> July. 'Fortress Round My Heart' features ten exquisite three-minute punk-pop songs about God ("Stella"), depression ("Drive Away My Heart"), sexual politics ("I Love You So Much Better When You're Naked"), partying ("Queen Of The World"), drinking ("Oh My God") and love ("Louie") – all of them potential hit singles.

"I wanted to make 10, short, sharp, perfect tracks, no more than three minutes long. I wanted pop music that hits you hard RIGHT THERE," she says, hitting her stomach. "Music you can dance to, drink to, go crazy to. You know, I love and appreciate and understand jazz and classical and avant garde music, but pop is different. It's physical, it's visceral, it's concentrated. A producer in Norway once said to me, well Ida, you're a kind of arty punk singer, you can't really write 'pop', can you?' And that drove me mad. I was like, fuck you, I can write pop music. That's why I wrote these songs. I love how pop songs connect with people, I love that instant reaction. I love to be on stage and to smash things up, with words and with music. That's how pop should be."

Like most of her compatriots, she sings in English ("Norwegian has too many consonants, too many Ks and Rs and Ts and Gs - the poetry is wonderful but it's not sexy enough to sing!"). She says her songwriting is informed by a benign variant of "synaesthesia", a condition where your senses are jumbled up to the point where you see sounds and hear colours. She sees songwriting as "assembling shapes and patterns", and her songs are "yellow" or "black" or "spiky". "The stage is my canvas, it's where I put all those colours and shapes and patterns that are bursting out of my head all the time."

'Fortress Round My Heart', the debut album, released 28<sup>th</sup> July on Waterfall/RCA

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