

# THE LITTLE GIRL WITH THE BIG VOICE

**MARIELLA PACE ASCIAK is a very modest woman. Despite her over 20 years experience in the music world and being the first Maltese singer to be signed up with one of the most important record labels in Europe, PolyGram, she comes across as a very modest woman, whose heart remains firmly at home.**



The high point at this point of her life, literally, was when she took part in a Sicilian song festival compered by Pippo Baudo.

The young Mariella, stood in awe as a towering Pippo Baudo presented her with the third prize. Ironically, Mariella was asked to represent Egypt in this competition, whilst the girl representing Malta was not placed at all.

In fact this is probably her main drawback as a performer. Unlike other entertainers, Mariella has never sought the limelight. Not for her the competitive tension of the Festival circuit, nor does she believe in playing up her undoubted talents. It is perhaps for this reason that Mariella is more of a household name to visitors to our country than with her fellow countrymen.

Her first contact with the musical world was through her mother who was an avid fan of the emerging local music scene in the sixties.

Mariella remembers her playing all the songs of the young Enzo Gusman, and following him from concert to concert. However Mariella's first love was not singing but acting.

She still has fond memories of her early days on the stage performing in plays at the Deporres Theatre in Sliema, directed by Fr. Henry Born. She soon proved to be a natural actress, and an even more natural singer.

Much to her mother's delight she decided to take part in children's singing competitions, and was soon winning prizes on a regular period.

Mariella's first foray onto the international stage was also a bit premature. The rules stated that the participants had to be 16 years old. However Mariella was only 14 at the time. Worse still, she nearly gave the game away when Baudo came to ask her her age. 'Fourteen', she blurted out, 'I then quickly corrected myself, saying I was 16 and blaming language difficulty for the slip up,' Mariella confesses with a glint in her eye.



The wicked witch with a heart of gold

the first time'. So after her scholarship she came back to Malta.

Since then she has been singing professionally with various establishments all over the island, gaining a name for herself as one of Malta's finest singers.

In fact it was her chance encounter with a member of the audience that has seen her CD being published by the German record company PolyGram

A German lawyer holidaying in Malta, Renate

Thomas, heard Mariella perform and felt that more people should know of her.

A demo tape, and several phone calls later, Mariella found herself dealing with PolyGram, one of the foremost international record companies.

At first they had offered to publish her CD on one of their

But Mariella's big break came in 1977 when she won a 3 month scholarship to the UK to study singing. 'Malta has no school where one can learn 'Pop' techniques of singing, so this was a chance in a million', Mariella told *The People*. 'However, although I leapt at the chance, I soon became homesick,' she added. 'I was only 19 at the time, and I was away from home for



A towering achievement: receiving third prize from Pippo Baudo



Mariella (R) is also popular in Turkey



Mariella Pace Axiaq in one of her many German concerts

lesser known labels.

But, in a move which says a lot about the quality of the technical back-up to be found in Malta, when PolyGram heard the recording made in Malta, they felt it was good enough to be published under their main name.

The CD is now selling in Germany and Mariella will be travelling to Hanover later on this year to promote it.

However Mariella will leave her heart at home. Never one who is happy to leave her family behind - she is adamant that whatever the out come of this CD, her family and her husband, George Debono come first.

She is also one who never forgets her roots, and she is still in loose contact with the Deporres Theatre where she took her first tentative steps.

In fact, last year she donned an ugly wig, put on heavy make-up and played the witch in the children's play 'Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs', much to the delight and terror of children and parents alike.

Mariella is by her own admission, a bit on the short side. For this reason she has earned the nickname, The Little Girl with the Big Voice. But perhaps this modest Maltese entertainer should be known as the singer with a big heart.

Chris Gatt