

BEROSKE

P R O D U C T I O N

Irma / Faces

So we all binge-watch our favourite series from time to time, but how about binge-listening? Imagine listening to the thirteen songs on Faces and never wanting to stop. Each song is like a little episode, and each song will soon have its own video coproduced by Irma. She's an artist who has grown up in the digital age and deeply understands how technology can help culture. In this, the age of internet, sounds cannot exist without images, and vice-versa - their dialogue is a new language. Faces is a musical vision, a view of the world enlightened by sharp melodies, shaken by powerful, telluric rhythms and carried by the frank, intensely precise voice of Irma. Just 25 years old, she conceived this, her second album, from A to Z, deciding to write it during an 18-month stay in New York, alone. As she explains, "With my first album Letter To The Lord, everything happened so quickly. After the tour - which was amazing, mind-blowing - I felt the need to be alone for a while. I didn't want to rest on my laurels and go all soft. I hate feeling secure. I had to get away." OK, but why New York? "Because it's a city where people go when they're looking for something, trying to find a dream." Holed up in a tiny studio in the East Village, she started an astonishing writing process, bought a small camera, walked around the city a lot, filmed anything that inspired her: "The leaves, the trees, red lights, passers-by..." What interested her the most was people, anonymous individuals, chance encounters - talking to them, filming them, listening to their stories. Every evening she went back and looked at her films, transcribed what had been said, filling notebook after notebook... And then, finally, she would pick up her guitar and put the words to music. "I was already thinking about playing concerts. An album should be performed, you have to feel the physicality - you have to breathe life into the songs." Once the writing was done, Irma started handling the recording as both engineer and artisan, playing all the instruments, beating out the rhythms and getting deeply involved in the programming. "I like to do everything to the max," she explains. The result is a visceral, demanding, buoyant body of work with incredible maturity. For "Hear Me Out", the first video from the album, she chose director Raf Reyntjens who created Stromae's video for "Papaoutai", and the next video will take her back to her native Cameroon, something she's delighted about.

Irma was born and raised in Douala. For her, Cameroon = childhood, a happy, privileged childhood. Her biologist father and pharmacist mother paid great attention to the successful education of their children, and music was everywhere, all the time - the church choir, piano lessons (starting age 7), Dad's guitar at home, albums by Michael Jackson, Jeff Buckley, Ben Harper... It was a happy time, albeit with a certain reality check. "In Cameroon," says Irma, "you have 1% rich people and 99% of the population suffering. I saw the injustices, the misery on my doorstep and it made me incredibly angry." She was just 13 when she composed one of her first songs, the prophetic "I Know" in which she sings "My only weapon is this song." Little did she know her stock of weapons was soon to expand in unexpected ways...

Irma arrived in France at the age of 15 to continue her studies. For her, France = adolescence... and rebellion, obviously. During the end of year concerts at her catholic school she dared to play "Another Brick In The Wall" by Pink Floyd and "Highway To Hell" by AC/DC, marking the beginning of a life she had certainly not seen coming.

Irma didn't force her way to fame - she was chosen. One day age 19, out of boredom, she dressed up and filmed herself singing Jacques Brel's "Au Suivant", thinking she would send the video to her best friend. Too big to e-mail, she posted it on YouTube. Immediately, the video started getting shares and enthusiastic comments. Encouraged by the reactions, she recorded a few more cover versions followed by some of her own songs, a request often made in the comments. Then one morning she woke up and found herself on the YouTube homepage in twenty- five countries around the world. Producers started calling, offers for TV reality shows started arriving (she didn't even consider accepting) and then the founder of My Major Company contacted her. Irma liked the concept of cofunding a project, the idea of sharing, of a community. Success came quickly - in just 48 hours, a record 416 cofunder-producers had invested in the project. "All of a sudden

I had responsibilities, I couldn't let them down," she says. Irma left for New York to record her album with Lenny Kravitz' producer, but it turned out to be a little less than the American dream. Although she knew what she wanted, she wasn't happy with the way the album turned out. "It was over-produced. I didn't even recognise my own songs, and I didn't feel I could play them that way in front of an audience." Bravely, she told her label about her doubts. Far from being annoyed, the people at My Major Company were sympathetic and even impressed - this wasn't a tantrum from an inexperienced girl, but a young woman asserting her position as an artist, showing her determination and integrity. Irma was given the time necessary to rework her album, and discovered a taste for playing on stage, "a deeply moving pleasure, a crazy feeling." Her album Letter to the Lord was released in February 2011. Whether they had first discovered her on the internet or at a concert, the fans were eager to hear what she could produce, and they weren't disappointed. A year later, Google used one of her tracks in an ad for their Chrome browser and told her extraordinary story. The track was "I Know" - the song she had composed ten years earlier as a young girl, dreaming in Cameroon.

Irma is back with Faces and eagerly preparing to play live again.