



the power of four

Il Divo's operatic language of love has become one of the music world's most successful 'arranged marriages' and they're still clearly in the honeymoon phase, writes **Sally Browne**, who met the group in Barcelona

Brothers in song: Il Divo's Urs Buhler, Sebastien Izambard, Carlos Marin and David Miller

THE four handsome men who make up Il Divo were about to board a plane from Mexico to Europe when they got a call that would stop them in their tracks. It was from a woman who had just heard their new album and wanted to see them that night. Who is the one woman in the world who could make the talented four, who have sold millions of albums worldwide, change their course? None other than Oprah Winfrey. Hours later Carlos Marin, Urs Buhler, Sebastien Izambard and David Miller found themselves flying to Chicago to appear on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. The song they sang was *Amazing Grace*, from their new album *The Promise*, which features songs by artists from Albinoni to Abba delivered in their unique operatic style. Oprah, a big supporter of Barack Obama, wanted to add some soothing music to the frenetic vibe

surrounding the US election. Despite their heavy promotional and travel schedule, Il Divo delivered pitch-perfect. "She invited us back after the election to sing the *Winner Takes It All*," baritone Carlos Marin says cheekily. Days later the group are in Barcelona, in Marin's native Spain. High above the sparkling city, a red carpet is laid out fairytale-style in front of one of the city's most impressive buildings — the Museu Nacional d'Art de Catalunya. A giant party is brewing at which Il Divo will be the guests of honour and the stars of the show.

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Simon Cowell, the superstar English producer and *X Factor* judge who put the group together, has thrown quite a party. Barcelona's bold and beautiful trip up the red carpet as media from around the world gather to record the occasion. The four handsome princes arrive in excited mood, for they are about to deliver a sample of the album they have worked hard on. Inside in a cavernous room draped in lush curtains and bathed in red light, silver service table settings and candelabras twinkle. It's all very *Phantom of the Opera* and there's a shiver of excitement in

the air. Finally, the orchestra strikes up and from nowhere, four singers descend the steps towards the stage. It's a perfect polished performance, but it would be considering these four singers trod these same steps the night before, rehearsing until 2am. What Il Divo make seem divine and effortless (Il Divo means the divine male) is the result of years of hard work, training and touring. The next day, having risen early for a full day of interviews, they profess to be tired. But if they are, it doesn't show in their charming manner and sartorial style. "I was feeling very nervous presenting the new songs," French pop singer Izambard says. "It's exciting and it's challenging as well, because we really took some time to record this new album." But *The Promise* delivers on its promises to be Il Divo's most diverse album yet. Everybody involved, from

girlfriends and family to tour managers, has a say on what Il Divo should sing, Swiss tenor Buhler says. "We already now have people saying, 'You know, I can see you singing this or that,'" he says. "And that starts immediately after you finished the recordings for an album. For this record we had about 200 songs I think." They ended up demo-ing 17 tracks before coming up with the final 11, which they recorded in Belgium. "What we thought was to not put obvious Il Divo songs," says Marin, who originally had to bite his tongue at Cowell's choice of Frankie Goes to Hollywood's *The Power of Love*. Most of the songs are sung in Spanish and Italian, which makes for better use of their operatic voices. *Amazing Grace*, though, is sung in English. After extensive world tours, performances with Barbra Streisand

and Céline Dion and countless TV shows, the group decided to take some well-deserved time off last year. American tenor Miller reckons he spent much of the time at home in the US learning new languages. The four men's lives have changed considerably in the past four years of Il Divo. All successful singers in their own right, each was sceptical about joining an operatic boy band. But it has proved a successful formula, spawning many imitators and bridging the gap between the classical and pop worlds. It led Izambard to meeting the love of his life on tour in Australia — SonyBMG publicist Renee Murphy. They now have twins, Luca and Rose, born earlier this year. He calls them his "little Skippys" and they're big fans of *The Wiggles*. "I've always sang to them since they were in the womb," he says. "It's something that really calms them down. My wife is a good

singer, she loves singing to the babies." Luca and Rose's personalities are already starting to shine through. "The mother is spending too much time with the kids," says Izambard. "They're very Australian. Especially my son, he's very blokey." "At some point I hope we're all going to have kids and families and our kids will all play together, maybe have a band!" Delightfully unaffected, Il Divo come across as a band of brothers. It wasn't always so. At first they had to get used to their "arranged marriage," keep egos in check and overcome cultural and language barriers. "Now we have these inside jokes, we have the body language, the Il Divo language," Izambard explains. "It's just very much easier and much more enjoyable now. By taking the time off, that has helped." "I'm curious to know what these guys really listen to at home.

Miller gives a clue: "Most people are typically surprised by what's in our iPods right now. Urs listens to heavy metal, Frénchie over there likes to listen to pop music that's modern." ("And *The Wiggles*," Izambard interjects.) "Carlos enjoys Tom Jones and opera, but mostly Tom Jones," Miller continues, "and generally I enjoy techno music. So it's a very eclectic bunch of guys we are." The conversation triggers a memory for Izambard. The group were in their dressing room in Portugal and playing each other songs from their iTunes. "And I can tell you there was evil

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in there," he says, eyeing Buhler across the room. Devilishly handsome Buhler erupts in demonic laughter. "I played kind of the worst stuff I listen to," he confesses. "I played him a Norwegian death metal band." But there's no question of whose music will draw the others' out, because when travelling the group request separate floors in hotel rooms, and we do need some space. So that we don't disturb each other," Miller says. Not only have these talented guys generated a new interest in opera, they have also sparked a renaissance for a new type of male — one who is

elegant, well dressed, charming and warm. Judging by their huge number of female fans, it's a trend there is definitely a demand for. Do they have any tips for struggling Aussie blokes out there? "The key to communication is listening, not talking," Miller says. "It's all about timing, suggests Marin. "Buying something at the right time, flowers or whatever, kissing at the right time." "Leave the footy at home," new Aussie Izambard offers. "Unless, of course, she likes football," says Miller. Buhler sums up: "You can only be yourself, that's the only thing that will truly work. But it is very nice on a special occasion, be it for her birthday, or a wedding anniversary, or for Valentine's Day, even if you're not used to wearing a suit and a tie, she might appreciate it." Guys, take note. Ladies, pull this article out and slip it in the sports section. **The Promise is out now.**