

“Superb, ecstatic,  
breathtaking!”

Hessische/Niedersächsische  
Allgemeine



Nominated for an  
OPUS KLASSIK Award  
in the category  
“Innovative concert  
experience of the year”



Valer Sabadus and Spark - The Classical Band  
present sounds of longing from Handel to Rammstein

# CLOSER to PARADISE



A close-up portrait of a man with dark, wavy hair and a light beard, wearing a dark blue shirt. He is looking slightly to the right with a gentle smile. The background is a blurred, textured wall.

“Valer Sabadus is an international star. The band Spark is unique and cult. Both together are a sensation: music without limits, performance at the highest level, magical modernity.”

Gmünder Tagespost

“The exceptional musical dialogue between famous countertenor Valer Sabadus and the extraordinary classical band Spark throws the gate to happiness wide open. Their music is highly original, as well as beautiful. And it opens up new horizons.”

Mannheimer Morgen

## ❧ WHICH IS THE WAY TO PARADISE? ❧

In their joint *Closer to Paradise* program, Valer Sabadus and the ensemble Spark make emotional longing tangible through music. The paradise of the program's title is the archetype of happiness, a place of peace and harmony, a symbol of a better world. What could be more appropriate than to choose that faraway location as the keystone, the pivotal point for a program in which a star singer who performs in a remote register combines with an innovative chamber formation whose members just love to experiment?

Various aspects of this universal emotional state of mind are revealed in four acts. Each section is sung in a different language and places the focus on a different era. Works by

Handel, Vivaldi, Schumann, Fauré, Ravel, Weill and Satie are interpreted alongside rock songs by Rammstein and Depeche Mode and modern music compositions by Michael Nyman and Chiel Meijering, in exciting arrangements by the band's musicians themselves, to reflect a modern perspective. Baroque arias, Romantic lieder and Impressionistic melodies fuse with avant-garde sounds, folk tunes, chansons and rock songs to emerge as completely new sound scenes.

In this natural melting-pot of tradition and modern trends, classical music is linked with 21st-century lifestyle and is infused with something timelessly new and fresh – just as a feeling of longing is an all-embracing and timeless phenomenon.



# ❧ CLOSER TO PARADISE ❧

## AURE DOLCI INTORNO A ME

Andrea Ritter (\*1978)  
The Arrival (2016)  
inspired by Georg Friedrich Handel's  
*Arrival of the Queen of Sheba*  
from *Solomon*, HWV 679

Georg Friedrich Handel (1685-1759)  
Augelletti, che cantate  
Aria of Almirena from *Rinaldo*, HWV 7

Antonio Vivaldi (1678-1741)  
Sinfonia (arr. Ritter)  
Ouverture from *Giustino*, RV 717

Antonio Vivaldi  
Vedrò con mio diletto  
Aria of Anastasio from *Giustino*, RV 717

Antonio Vivaldi  
Allegro  
from: Concerto in G minor Op. 3/2, RV 578

## LA VOIX DOUCE

Maurice Ravel (1875-1937)  
Rigaudon  
from: *Le Tombeau de Couperin* (1914-17/19)

Erik Satie (1866-1925)  
Les Anges from: *Trois Mélodies* (1887)

Kurt Weill (1900-1950)  
Youkali from: *Marie Galante* (1934)

Lev "Ljova" Zhurbin (\*1978)  
Tango Heavy (2007)

Gabriel Fauré (1845-1924)  
Au bord de l'eau (1875)  
from: *Drei Lieder* Op. 8

Léo Ferré (1916-1993)  
Écoutez la chanson bien douce (1964)

Intermission

## AUF SCHWINGEN DER NACHT

Michael Nyman (\*1944)  
Vermeer's Wife (1985)

Robert Schumann (1810-1856)  
In der Fremde (1840)  
from: *Liederkreis* Op. 39

German folk song (before 1775 / 2011)  
Ich hab die Nacht geträumet

Oliver Riedel (\*1971)  
Seemann (1994)

## DREAM AND DEVOTION

Chiel Meijering (\*1954)  
Dreams (2007)

Victor Plumettaz (\*1986)  
Scotch Club (2017)

Martin Gore (\*1961)  
One Caress (1993)

Daniel Koschitzki (\*1978)  
Closer to Paradise (2019)

Valer Sabadus - counter-tenor

SPARK - The Classical Band  
Andrea Ritter - recorder  
Daniel Koschitzki - recorder / melodica  
Stefan Balazsovics - violin / viola  
Victor Plumettaz - violoncello  
Christian Fritz - piano



“Spark and Sabadus tore down the frontiers between classical chamber music and hard rock, between art song and opera, between commonly accepted era definitions. And at the end, the audience were on their feet, applauding enthusiastically!” Main-Post

## VIDEO LINKS

- ➔ [Video trailer Closer to Paradise](#)
- ➔ [Vedrò con mio diletto live in concert](#)
- ➔ [Youkali live in concert](#)
- ➔ [Les Anges live in concert](#)
- ➔ [Dreams live in concert](#)
- ➔ [Seemann live in concert](#)
- ➔ [In der Fremde live in concert](#)
- ➔ [Scotch Club live in concert](#)

[www.valer-sabadus.de](http://www.valer-sabadus.de)

[www.spark-the-classical-band.com](http://www.spark-the-classical-band.com)





“Our ears were  
astonished by unheard-of  
sound alliances and the  
audience’s expectations  
were caught unawares.”

Schweinfurter Tagblatt



# ABOUT THE PROGRAM

Who has not experienced it, the emotion of longing – that painful, lovely feeling between melancholy and happiness? We can long for another human being, for a place, perhaps our homeland, for an emotion such as much-extolled love, for special moments, for another world or another time in which we think everything was better. In their program *Closer to Paradise* counter-tenor Valer Sabadus and the classical band Spark tread subtle pathways between dreams and the real world, hope and despair, light and shadows, utopia and reality. In four consecutive acts they make emotional longing tangible through music, roaming in the process through eras and emotional states. Baroque works are interwoven with modern sounds, Romantic art songs contrasted with pop numbers. The result is a merging of various scenes into an equally diverse and subtle portrayal of the universal emotion of longing.

## AURE DOLCI INTORNO A ME

The musical journey on which Spark and Sabadus embark begins – where else, when it comes to heartfelt emotions? – in Italy. *Aure dolci intorno a me* (Mild winds waft over me) is the title of Act 1. The line is taken from the aria *Augelletti, che cantate* in George Frideric Handel's opera *Rinaldo*. The mild winds, represented in the original by two recorders, and in Spark's version by recorder and violin, represent Almirena's longing for her lover. A little bird appears and joins in Almirena's song. Nature and the narrator-singer merge into one, an idyll reflecting the purity and beauty of their love. "Pray tell me where my loved one is," Almirena sings pensively, while in Antonio Vivaldi's opera *Giustino*, Anastasio eats his heart out for his lover Arianna, whom he must leave behind when he goes into battle, in the aria *Vedrò con mio diletto*. These two arias expressing yearning are framed by in-

strumental pieces by the two Baroque composers. Andrea Ritter's *The Arrival* written in 2016 is a wistful new adaptation of Handel's *Arrival of the Queen of Sheba* from his oratorio *Solomon*. In her version, Ritter decouples the famous opening sequence and transforms the passages that exude true joie de vivre and exuberance from every pore into an excitingly shimmering minimal music tableau. She links Handel's motifs with electro elements. One characteristic that is particularly striking is a natural delay which she employs as a stylistic device from the very beginning. Violin and one of the two recorders play almost the same sound material staggered by a semiquaver; the effect is composed into the body of sound, so to speak. Fast loops and fades are also to be found in Ritter's textures and as a matter of course she blends the original Handel motifs with her own figurations into a whole new entity – an ecstatic dialogue between two eras.

A fiery, impulsive movement from one of Vivaldi's concertos brings the first part of the program to a conclusion. It is no secret that Vivaldi was a man possessed of enormous creative energy, which he channelled into his compositions. Indeed, in the course of his life, he composed some 500 concertos. His G minor Concerto op. 3/2 belongs to a cycle of twelve concertos entitled *L'estro armonico* (The Harmonic Passion). Despite its small-scale scoring, Vivaldi gave it the full complex treatment that he employed in his major instrumental works. The solo instruments pass their cues from one to another and form a multi-layered entity. In the original work two solo violins compete with one another, while in Spark's version there is an ecstatic dialogue between the recorders and the violin; what's more, from time to time, the cello leaves its continuo role to become a passionate adversary to the violin. In view of the huge enjoyment of those performing his music and the great complexity of his orchestration technique combined with his perfectly crafted art of suspense, it is hardly surprising that Vivaldi was viewed throughout Europe as a pioneer in the field of music and is acknowledged to this day as the unchallenged master of the Italian high Baroque.

## LA VOIX DOUCE

*La voix douce* (The gentle voice) recalls another form of longing, one less filled with bitter-sweet languishing than the retrospective melancholy type. Introduced by the buoyant Rigaudon from Maurice Ravel's neo-Classical *Tombeau de Couperin*, Erik Satie's angels (*Les anges*) seem to float on high accompanied by simple chordal piano sounds. Satie's usual, minimally structured style promises a brief pause, of returning to one's inner core, in the midst of a loud, racing, roaring world.

And suddenly we find ourselves bang in the middle of 1930s Paris, for when it comes to

longing, Kurt Weill's *Youkali* has to be part of the plot. Composed for his opera *Marie Galante*, which he wrote while in exile in France, this chanson with its passionate tango rhythm conjures up an unattainable island of longing: *Youkali*, an imaginary land of dreams, hope, happiness – that is ultimately mere utopia.

A tango by Russian-born Lev Ljova Zhurbin strikes a very different note. His *Tango Heavy* of 2007 sounds brash and seething just under the surface.

Gabriel Fauré's *Au bord de l'eau* then provides the antithesis. The first of the Three Songs op. 8 tells of luxuriating in the moment, of just letting oneself and one's thoughts float along. Imitated in dreamy manner by the cello, the song lines float along the babbling wave movements in the piano and create an idyllic picture of shared moments of nonchalance and love.

Finally, Léo Ferré's *Ecoutez la chanson bien douce* (Listen to the very soft song) calls on all facets of yearning: Paul Verlaine's lyrics combine melancholy, pain and suffering together under an elated umbrella of optimism: "Take the song's compassionate message to heart!".

## AUF SCHWINGEN DER NACHT

"Only he who has known longing knows what I am suffering," wrote Johann Wolfgang Goethe and so it is the German language that illustrates the dark side of yearning, of suffering, of pain, up to and including a death wish.

Act 3 begins in dark mood with a piece by the British minimalist composer Michael Nyman, best known for his soundtracks to films such as *Gattaca* or *The Piano*. *Vermeer's Wife* was also written as part of a soundtrack, to Peter Greenaway's *A Zed & Two Noughts* of 1985. In their repetitive structure, the compositions of



Nyman exude a decidedly atmospheric mood which has since influenced the entire course of Minimalist Music – the term having been coined by Nyman himself in the 1970s.

*In der Fremde* (In a foreign place) is part of Robert Schumann's Liederkreis op. 39, written after poems by Joseph von Eichendorff. The song tells of an emotion that is highly topical today: homelessness. The lyrics which open the song cycle are from Eichendorff's novella *Viel Lärmen um Nichts* (Much ado about nothing). Schumann arranged the guitar accompaniment to the song of the beautiful woman, told as part of the story, in a sequence of arpeggios. Clara Schumann is said to have told Eichendorff that his lines only came alive when her husband set them to music. Things get interesting in the second verse: "How soon will that quiet time come?". The lyrical first-person narrator has a sense of melancholy yearning for a final resting place in the "lonely forest", which seems, in a romantically imaginary manner to promise redemption. In the arrangement by Spark pianist Christian Fritz the piano accompaniment is expanded by adding continually circling cello figures that seem to follow a different beat. Violin, cello and piano come together in the course of the work to form a dense soundscape in which the listener is in danger of losing their orientation, while the recorders imitate and elucidate the motifs from the vocal part in wafts of mist.

The 18th-century anonymous German folk song which follows is also about death: *Ich hab die Nacht geträumet* (I dreamed last night), set by numerous composers including Johannes Brahms, Max Reger, Hugo Distler and Wolfram Buchenberg. Daniel Koschitzki's arrangement, which captures the fearfulness of the dream in minimalistic, oscillating, static arpeggios, exudes a special instrumental timbre thanks to the use of the slide whistle. With this special type of recorder, the pitch is achieved not by means of covering tone holes but

by a pull rod – not so dissimilar to a trombone, but at the other end of the dynamic spectrum. Flapping movements with the free hand over the instrument's mouthpiece produce a permanent vibration and whirring that sounds a bit like a singing saw. The rosemary tree in the narrator's dream is the harbinger of an impending loss; the bush, frequently used to adorn graves, is often used figuratively to portray death.

From the poem's last verse it is not such a leap to Rammstein, the German rock band which, since it was formed in 1994, has been making friends and foes like hardly any other group in the genre. The song *Seemann*, made famous above all by the 2003 cover version by Nina Hagen and Apocalyptica, was included in the program at the request of Valer Sabadus. The arrangement by Spark cellist Victor Plumettaz is based strongly on the original and its peaceful prevailing mood. In the course of the song his urgent, pulsing instrumental structures provide the perfect underlay for Valer Sabadus's dramatically cultivated melismas, in which he cleverly expands and elevates the original melody with Baroque ornamentations. The final echoes of the program's third section ebb away into the dark night with the hardly optimistic words of the lonely, abandoned mariner – "At the end I'm left alone. Time stands still and I am cold."

## DREAM AND DEVOTION

*Dream and Devotion* is the title of the last act, bringing the joint program of Spark and Valer Sabadus to a close. This is about longings that are at the root of all dreams. This does not necessarily apply only to dreams during sleep, but also to dreams in day-to-day life – a musician's dream to be heard and to attract an audience to listen, or many people's dream of a less polluted world and of working together for the sake of the planet. Martin Luther King expressed this form of longing when he made his famous "I have a dream" speech. The second word, devotion, refers to the total commitment required in order to make space for these dreams. The most wonderful day-dreams, the great longing for one's own voice to be heard or for a better world, are in vain if we do not use up all our passion and dedication to fulfill them.

Chiel Meijering, born in Amsterdam in 1954, can boast some 1000 works to his name, and is one of the most frequently played composer from the Netherlands. The Dutchman has been branded something of an "enfant terrible" as a result of his penchant for unusual work names, such as *I've Never Seen a Straight Banana*, *I Hate Mozart* and *Alzheimer Opera*. His compositional style mixes elements of pop music as well as input from jazz; he also incorporates classical music tradition alongside avant-garde elements. He was one of the first composers to write new works especially for Spark, including the 2007 piece *Dreams*. Stylistically it's very difficult to pigeon-hole this work. Meijering adventurously balances it between a number of styles, lively and melancholy moods, fast and calm tempi. A thoroughly unexpected inter-sequence provides a lightning-fast, surreal change of location – the sort of scene-change you could only encounter in a dream.

The next piece takes us from the dream world to a more devotional sphere. Spark cellist Vic-

tor Plumettaz's *Scotch Club* references a special location: Aachen's Scotch Club is acknowledged worldwide as the first dance club where, in the late 1950s, a DJ spun discs. What better home to unleash a dance mood with such sounds?

There is a fine line between enjoyment and abandon, as witness the English synth rock group Depeche Mode. *One Caress* takes us yet again to the dark side of longing. "Just one caress from you (girl) and I'm blessed", according to their lyrics. But that caress leads not to the light but straight into darkness. "Lead me into your darkness" – the narrator gladly follows the stylized "redeemer" into uncharted darkness.

Daniel Koschitzki's *Closer to Paradise* is a sort of conclusion to the program, because in a way it revives the universal concept of longing. It is in all of us, surely: a desire for the place that promises the truth, that will "raise our spirits" – a yearning for paradise. What does this place mean to us? Everyone has to find their own answer to that question.

Klara Schneider, Oktober 2019  
Daniel Koschitzki, Mai 2020



*"Augeletti, che cantate,  
Zefiretti che spirate,  
Aure dolci intorno a me,  
Il mio ben dite dov'è!"*

*"Komm in mein Boot  
Ein Sturm kommt auf  
Und es wird Nacht.  
Wo willst Du hin?  
So ganz allein  
Treibst Du davon.  
Wer hält Deine Hand,  
Wenn es Dich  
Nach unten zieht?"*

*"Oh girl,  
Lead me  
Into your darkness.  
When this world  
Is trying its hardest  
To leave me unimpressed.  
Just one caress  
From you  
And I'm blessed."*

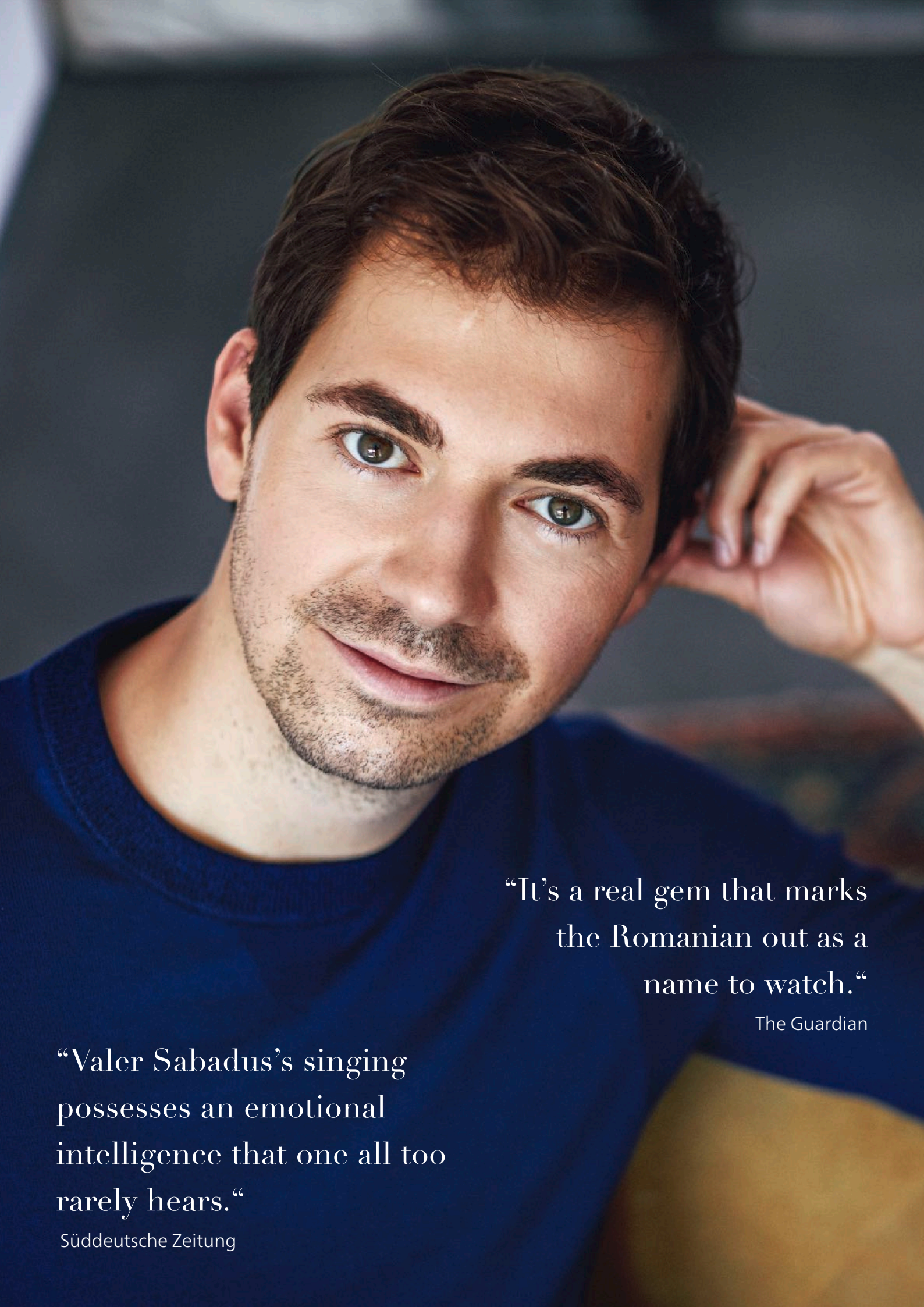
*"Just close your eyes  
And dream.  
This much is really true.  
Just close your eyes  
And dream.  
Your dream  
Might come true..."*

*"Aus der Heimat  
Hinter den Blitzen rot,  
Da kommen  
Die Wolken her.  
Aber Vater und Mutter  
Sind lange tot,  
Es kennt mich  
Dort keiner mehr."*

*"Youkali,  
C'est le pays de nos désirs  
Youkali,  
C'est le bonheur,  
C'est le plaisir,  
Mais c'est un rêve,  
Une folie,  
Il n'y a pas de Youkali."*

*"Ich hab  
Die Nacht geträumt  
Wohl einen  
Schweren Traum.  
Es wuchs  
In meinem Garten  
Ein  
Rosmarienbaum."*





“It’s a real gem that marks  
the Romanian out as a  
name to watch.”

The Guardian

“Valer Sabadus’s singing  
possesses an emotional  
intelligence that one all too  
rarely hears.”

Süddeutsche Zeitung



# ❧ VALER SABADUS ❧

With his crystal-clear, androgynous voice Valer Sabadus belongs in the top flight of the world's best counter-tenors. For over a decade now, he has been a popular guest on stages at the leading opera houses and concert halls worldwide as well as at internationally renowned festivals. In addition to the great opera roles of his fach, he has enthralled audiences and critics alike with his imaginatively conceived Lieder and aria recitals or as soloist in cantatas and oratorios. He has also received wide acclaim for his concept albums, some of which include world premiere recordings. "What counter-tenor Valer Sabadus delivers in terms of natural sound and coloratura skills at dizzying heights is simply staggering," concludes *Der Spiegel* magazine, while the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* describes his timbre as "incredibly dramatic, crystal-clear, ultra-controlled and lyrically exquisite." Sabadus regularly works with outstanding ensembles and orchestras from the international early music scene, including the Akademie für Alte Musik Berlin, the Basel Chamber Orchestra, the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra, Concerto Köln, Hofkapelle München, Lautten Compagny, Musica Alta Ripa, Nuovo Aspetto, Accademia Bizantina, L'Arpeggiata and Il Pomo d'Oro. That said, the singer is perfectly able to shine in trans-genre, interdisciplinary and intercultural projects – such as alongside rapper Samy Deluxe, world music artist, composer and singer Dima Orsho, the Turkish Pera Ensemble or together with The Classical Band Spark. In 2020 Valer Sabadus was awarded the prestigious Handel Prize of the City of Halle.

## EARLY SUCCESS

Valer Sabadus's international career was charted early on. He began vocal studies with Prof. Gabriele Fuchs at the age of 17 at the Munich College of Music and Drama, graduating with distinction in 2013 in the music theatre master class as a member of the Bayerische Theaterakademie. He made his debut back in 2009 under the baton of Riccardo Muti at the Salzburg Whitsuntide Festival in the staging of Niccolò Jommelli's *Demofonte* and was a member of the cast that performed the opera at the Ravenna Festival and at the Opéra National de Paris. He was highly acclaimed as Sesto in Günter Krämer's staging of *La Cle-*

*menza di Tito* at the Mozart Summer Festival in Schwetzingen, as Ruggiero in Antonio Vivaldi's *Orlando furioso* and Endimione in *La Calisto* by Francesco Cavalli at the Frankfurt Opera. At the 2011 Handel Festival in Halle he took the title role in *Rinaldo* for the first time, together with Lautten Compagny Berlin. Other engagements have taken him to the Cologne Opera playing the title role in Johann Adolph Hasse's *Leucippo*, to the Staatsoper in Berlin, Semperoper Dresden and several times to the Opéra Royal de Versailles. Johann Adolph Hasse's *Didone abbandonata* was a pivotal experience in the singer's career; the opera was recorded in 2011 with the Hofkapelle München and Michael Hofstetter.

## INTERNATIONAL BREAKTHROUGH

Sabadus's international breakthrough came in 2012 with his outstanding interpretation of Semira in Leonardo Vinci's opera *Artaserse* at the opera houses in Nancy, Lausanne and Cologne, Vienna's Theater an der Wien, the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Opéra Royal de Versailles and at the Concertgebouw in Amsterdam. The opera was also recorded and released on CD and DVD and awarded many prizes. In the same year, he was awarded the German Record Critics' Prize for his solo CD *Hasse Reloaded* (Oehms Classics). Yet another big international success in his biography was his role as Menelao in Francesco Cavalli's rediscovered opera *Elena* at the Festival d'Aix-en-Provence. In 2013 he gave his brilliant debut in the title role in Stefan Herheim's staging of Handel's *Serse* at the Deutsche Oper am Rhein. In 2015 and 2016 he received countless accolades at the Handel Festival in Karlsruhe for his title role of *Teseo*. He gave yet another outstanding role and venue debut in September 2015 under the direction of Claus Guth as the Emperor Nero (Nerone) in Claudio Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea* at the Theater an der Wien. In 2016 and 2017 Valer Sabadus turned his attention to compositions by Monteverdi's pupil Francesco Cavalli and made his debut in Cavalli's early Baroque operas as Giuliano in *Eliogabalo* and the title role in *Giasone* at the Opéra National de Paris, the Grand Théâtre de Genève and the Dutch National Opera in Amsterdam. In January 2018 he guested several times at the Opéra National de Paris as Angel in Claus Guth's staging of Handel's oratorio *Jephtha*. In September 2021 Sabadus will take the leading role of Nerone in a new stage production of Monteverdi's *L'incoronazione di Poppea* under the dramatic and musical direction of Ivan Fischer, with performances at Festival Vicenza, the Grand Théâtre de Genève and at Müpa Budapest.

## WORLDWIDE CONCERT CAREER

In addition to his busy opera schedule, the concert and oratorio repertoire is dear to the young counter-tenor's heart. Sabadus regularly gives lieder and aria recitals at renowned festivals, including the Handel Festivals in Karlsruhe and Halle, the Ludwigsburg Festival, Rheingau Musik Festival, Musikfest Bremen, Dresden Music Festival, Lucerne Festival, Schubertiade Hohenems and Schwarzenberg, Styriarte Graz and the Festival of Early Music in Innsbruck. He has performed as soloist in the philharmonic halls of Berlin, Essen and Cologne, the concert halls in Dortmund, Berlin and Vienna, at the Frauenkirche in Dresden, the Laeishalle Hamburg, Liederhalle Stuttgart, Chapelle Royale de Versailles, Cité de la Musique Paris, Palais des Beaux-Arts Brussels, and at the Auditori in Barcelona. In the 2019/20 season he received much praise for a portrait cycle at Cologne's Philharmonie. In addition to concert tours throughout Europe in 2019, he also made highly successful debuts in Japan and Russia.

## HANDEL PRIZE

In 2020 Valer Sabadus was awarded the Handel Prize of the City of Halle. This award marked a highlight in his career and means a great deal to the singer personally. After all, the Halle-born composer has been a constant companion throughout his career as singer and artist, and he has enjoyed a mutually beneficial collaboration with the Handel Festival in Halle for many years.

## WIDE SPECTRUM

Valer Sabadus's varied discography ranges from the early Baroque works of Claudio Monteverdi and Francesco Cavalli through Italian sacred and opera music to the contemporary works of Enjott Schneider. His solo releases as an exclusive artist for SONY Classical



have placed him in high regard. Those releases include the album *Caro Gemello* featuring famous arias of the two great castrati Farinelli and Metastasio, and his *Bach & Telemann Arias* released in February 2021 with Sabadus singing well known arias by the two famous German Baroque composers, accompanied by the Basel Chamber Orchestra. Several exciting collaborative programmes with Ensemble L'Arpeggiata are documented by CDs on the ERATO Warner Classics label, including the acclaimed crossover project *Händel Goes Wild* (2017) and *La Lyra d'Orfeo* (2019) – an album of early Baroque Italian music by the compo-

ser Luigi Rossi. Trans-genre and interdisciplinary programs with rapper Samy Deluxe, the Pera Ensemble, Syrian singer and composer Dima Orsho, and with The Classical Band SPARK document the singer's wide and diverse musical spectrum. In April 2022, the album *Closer to Paradise* based on the eponymous performance program by Sabadus and Spark was released on the Berlin Classics label. Valer Sabadus has won a number of important record prizes, including an ECHO Klassik Award in 2012 and 2015, and the ICMA's Young Artist of the Year – Vocal 2013 Prize.

“Counter-tenor Valer Sabadus has now so refined his singing skills that his voice has gained a degree of authenticity such as to make audible even the slightest emotional reactions of Baroque opera characters in long arcs of melody, showy yet controlled outbursts or in precisely measured vibrato.”

Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung



“A genuine classical music phenomenon not unlike Yo-Yo Ma or the Kronos Quartet, but even more vital.”

American Record Guide



From left to right: Stefan Balazsovics (violin, viola), Christian Fritz (piano); Andrea Ritter (recorder), Daniel Koschitzki (recorder, melodica), Victor Plumettaz (violoncello)



# SPARK - THE CLASSICAL BAND

Spark re-thinks the classics. The quintet places Bach, Vivaldi, Mozart and their peers in a fresh new context, forging links with the sounds and lifestyle of the present day. Classical at heart, outwardly wilful, inquisitive and nonconformist, the five musicians pitch their tent on the open ground between classical works, minimal music and avant-garde. With enthusiasm and abandon, styles are mixed and a galaxy of sonic options is explored – given that their well-stocked arsenal of instruments offers over 40 different flutes, violin, viola, violoncello, melodica and piano. No one piece is like the next, and yet they all bear the original, unmistakable fingerprints of the ensemble. Founded in 2007 and acknowledged in 2011 with an ECHO Klassik Award, the group has played its way into the vanguard of the young creative classical scene. The quintet is now well established at the world's biggest venues and festivals – whether in chamber performances, exciting collaborative projects or in a solo role with orchestra. The group is cherished by its fans above all for its thrilling, highly energetic live performances, which see the five talented musicians getting physical on stage with ebullient vitality and the pulsating power of a rock band. Together they present music that ignites passion. Together they spark.

## SHUFFLING AND SHARING OF ERAS AND GENRES

Spark's exceptional programs catch the zeitgeist with their rapid cuts and intuitive shuffling and sharing of different eras and genres. This opens up classical music to a younger audience. Ballet music by the young Mozart is juxtaposed with modern techno sounds, Handel motifs are sequenced, Mendelssohn gets a face-lift in avant-garde folk-tinged tones. The Wiener Zeitung speaks of "refreshing soundscapes wrapped up in a concept that defies convention." Yet, nothing is there for the sake of being there or added out of sheer striving for effect. These are craftspeople who work with precision and expertise, while adding

that indispensable dash of joyful experimentation. This is classical music for the here and now, played by musicians who embody their own message. "These artists preserve all the complexity of the classics," writes the Süddeutsche Zeitung, "they simply change the context and demonstrate their belief that pop music is just as much part of our cultural heritage as the classical tradition." DIE WELT calls Spark a "top-notch band" and the Dutch newspaper de Volkskrant places Spark among the few ensembles "that have the potential to convincingly combine influences from pop and dance with classical music." The American Record Guide sees Spark as "a genuine classical music phenomenon not unlike Yo-Yo Ma or the Kronos Quartet, but even more vital."

## MODERN COMMISSIONS

Alongside clever arrangements of classical masterworks, Spark focuses on contemporary music, working with a string of internationally recognized composers. Such leading lights as Johannes Motschmann, Chiel Meijering, Kenji Bunch, Kamran Ince, Roger Wanamo, Jonne Valtonen, Lev Ljova Zhurbin and Sebastian Bartmann have created works specially tailored to Spark, written to do justice to the broad sound spectrum and consummate virtuosity of the group. The band's own compositions broaden the range of the ensemble and promote the status of its five musicians. They see themselves not as mere exponents of an already finished work but as artists who profile themselves on all levels as creative and inventive individuals. They represent a new sense of identity within a young generation of classical musicians who are redefining their approach to the classical tradition.

## AT HOME ON THE STAGES OF THE WORLD

Many notable concert venues have hosted Spark, among them Wiener Musikverein, Konzerthaus Berlin, the Elbphilharmonie, Cologne Philharmonie, Alte Oper Frankfurt, Munich's Gasteig, the Philharmonie in Essen, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, London's Barbican Centre, Gran Teatre del Liceu Barcelona, the Flagey in Brussels, the National Concert Hall of Taipei, the Shanghai Oriental Art Center, the Schleswig-Holstein Music Festival, the Rheingau Music Festival, the MDR Summer of Music, the Mosel Music Festival, Heidelberg Spring Music Festival, the International Handel Festivals in Göttingen and Halle, the Dutch classical open-air festival Wonderfeel, the Belgian Festival Musiq'3, the Gent Festival van Vlaanderen, La Folle Journée in Nantes, as well as Tokyo and Warsaw. In July 2019 Spark was invited by the German Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier to perform at a state reception

held in honor of the Irish President Michael Daniel Higgins at the president's official residence, Schloss Bellevue in Berlin. For some years now, the quintet has also been performing regularly as a solo group with orchestras, playing premieres of works specially written for Spark and orchestra. The ensemble has given concerts with the London Symphony Orchestra, WDR Funkhausorchester Köln, Frankfurter Opern- und Museumsorchester, the Residentie Orkest in The Hague, Nederlands Kamerorkest, Württembergisches Kammerorchester, Folkwang Kammerorchester and Südwestdeutsches Kammerorchester.

## THRILLING COLLABORATIONS

Unusual collaborative projects bring Spark together with other mavericks on the classical music scene. Together with the world-famous countertenor Valer Sabadus the group developed a concept that was acclaimed by audiences and critics alike: the *Closer to Paradise* program, which transformed yearning into an exceptional audio experience – from Handel arias to covers of songs by Rammstein. Outside of the traditional classical environment and among colleagues from other branches of music, Spark's radical new approach to classical music has aroused great interest. Beatboxer and Supertalent finalist Robeat contributed feisty beats to the Spark number *Harde Puntjes*. Jazz singer Kitty Hoff let Spark's sounds underpin her rendition of the folk song *Ich hab die Nacht geträumet*. And Berlin DJ Emanuel Satie put out Spark's *Candybox* in a compelling remix. So it is no surprise that the Classical Band is a welcome guest in jazz clubs, at rock and pop festivals and on alternative platforms – like the Reeperbahn Festival in Hamburg, Stuttgart's Theaterhaus, Tollhaus Karlsruhe, the Ulmer Zelt, E-Werk Erlangen, Café Hahn in Koblenz, Kulturufer Friedrichshafen and in Berlin's wickedly famous techno club Berghain. Whenever time permits, Spark



can be found in schools and youth centres too, notably in association with the Rhapsody in School project. The classical music consumer of tomorrow is a figure the group aims to get to know and understand today.

## AWARD-WINNING ALBUMS

September 2010 marked the release of the Classical Band's debut album, *Downtown Illusions*, which captured the urban melting-pot in an intoxicating sound experience. *Musik-Woche* called the album "one of the year's biggest surprises" while Audiophile Audition spoke of a "radically new face for chamber music and classical in general." The album grew into an indie hit, rising to Number 1 in Amazon Germany's classical charts. 2011 saw Spark awarded an ECHO Klassik Award for *Downtown Illusions* in the category "Classics without borders". The CDs *Folk Tunes*, *Wild Territories*, *On the Dancefloor* and *Be Baroque* along with the live album *Facets of Infinity*, which Spark released as a soloist group together with the Frankfurter Opern- und Museumsorchester under the direction of Sebastian Weigle, enhanced the ensemble's reputation as a trendsetter on the classical music scene. With their recordings, the group has been nominated for numerous awards, including the German Record Critics' Prize and the OPUS Klassik, among others in the categories "Classics without borders" (2018), "Innovative concert experience of the year" (2020) and "Ensemble of the year" (2021). Spring 2022 saw the release of Spark's latest album, their collaborative project *Closer to Paradise* with countertenor Valer Sabadus. Almost all the works on the record have been arranged, reinterpreted or newly composed by the group members. The album spent several weeks in the top 10 of the German classical music charts and was included in numerous critics' best lists. The studio albums of the band are complemented by various live recordings for radio and TV, notably by German stations ARD, ZDF,

3sat, SWR, NDR, WDR, HR, BR, rbb, Deutschlandradio and Radio Bremen, and by Radio 4 Nederland, NPO Nederland, Radio Classique, Radio Musiq'3 and NHK Tokyo.

## CLASSICS WITHOUT BORDERS

Remarkably, Spark highlights a thoroughly controversial instrument: the recorder. The group's founding members Daniel Koschitzki and Andrea Ritter, both winners of first prizes at major international solo competitions in London and Montreal, play the instrument with such verve that the "kiddie tooter" stereotype is blown away and sent into orbit with their very first notes. "Seldom have we heard recorders as rhythmical, as expressive, as frenzied as this," enthused the *Südwestpresse* about the two flute players. They are ably supported by violinist Stefan Balazsovics, cellist Victor Plumettaz and pianist Christian Fritz – three brilliant partners who share their desire for new forms of expression and give a face to Spark's vision. Together, these five young artists conquer the stage with a motley crew of instruments ranging from the 10-inch sopranino recorder to the two-metre-tall sub-bass, from the classical piano trio to the exotic timbres of modern keyed flutes, a melodica and a slide whistle, plus spontaneous vocals. That is Spark's way of reinventing itself from one piece to the next. Surprise is the key. Listeners around the world respond to this skilful blend of tradition and trends, and they like Spark's message: Good music knows no boundaries!

“I keep searching and pondering  
And looking and wandering  
To get closer  
To where my senses arise  
Closer to paradise.”

from *Closer to Paradise* by Daniel Koschitzki



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