



WALLIS BIRD & SPARK - THE CLASSICAL BAND

VISIONS OF VENUS

*A GENRE-BENDING CONCERT
EXPERIENCE FEATURING FEMALE
COMPOSERS IN CLASSICAL
MUSIC, AVANT-GARDE,
JAZZ, INDIE ROCK, ART POP,
WORLD MUSIC
& SINGER-SONGWRITER*

Berlin-based Irish rock star Wallis Bird and Spark, the Classical Band - one of Germany's leading formations of the young creative classical music scene - join forces in a genre-bending concert experience that embraces a whole millennium of female artistry. Running the gamut of sounds and styles, the six musicians offer a 360-degree view on the rich and colourful universe created by visionary women from Medieval times until today. Women are celebrated in all their complexity – as mothers, muses, lovers, sisters, dreamers, sirens, fighters and voices of the heart and mind. This extraordinary collaboration of Meteor Music Award and German Music Author's Prize winner Bird and ECHO Award winner Spark offers highly playful and imaginative *Visions of Venus* – served with ultimate commitment, lots of passion and a must-hear individual note.

*HILDEGARD
VON BINGEN*

*FRANCESCA
CACCINI*

*MARIA THERESIA
VON PARADIS*

CLARA SCHUMANN

AMY BEACH

*GERMAINE
TAILLEFERRE*

BILLIE HOLIDAY

CAROLE KING

JONI MITCHELL

JANIS JOPLIN

ELENA KATS-CHERNIN

KATE BUSH

ENYA

TORI AMOS

BJÖRK

ANOJNI

SANDIE WOLLASCH

WALLIS BIRD

A THOUSAND YEARS OF INDESCRIBABLY FEMININE SOUNDS

Reframing Bird's powerful voice in the unique, stripped-down arrangements of the classically routed band Spark, this program ensures a special sound experience not only for fans of the famous Irish singer-songwriter or the popular chamber quintet, but for any curious listener open to the unheard and the unexpected.

Archaic Medieval melodies by Hildegard von Bingen melt into an indie art song by Icelandic singer Björk, a Renaissance ground by Francesca Caccini is juxtaposed with hits by Kate Bush and Tori Amos, timeless tunes by icons such as Joni Mitchell, Carole King and Janis Joplin are commented by impressionist soundscapes of French composer Germaine Tailleferre or the mesmerising minimal structures of contemporary Australian composer Elena Kats-Chernin. Last but not least, Wallis Bird is adding her very own spices to the project with her own songs that reflect womanhood and bow to her sisters in mind, some of whom were well ahead of their time in words and actions.

As a whole, the program features works by female composers of different colours and origins from eight countries on three different continents. The pieces are taken from five different centuries, spanning a period of nearly a thousand years.

Bird and Spark met by coincidence at a state reception at Bellevue Castle in Berlin, hosted by German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier for the Irish President, Michael Daniel Higgins, in the summer of 2019. As one of the most prominent representatives of German-Irish relations in cultural life, Bird was among the invited guests, while Spark was giving a private concert for the illustrious crowd. Spark's classical rendition of techno music, *On the Dancefloor*, not only evoked standing ovations of the two presidents but also took Bird's breath away. It was there and then, that the idea for this cooperation was born.

Considering Bird's admiration for female singer-songwriters – especially for Joni Mitchell – and Spark's increased interest in female classical composers, it didn't take the bunch of musical rebels too long to get to their subject: Outstanding works by female artists throughout the centuries – captured in the vision of Roman goddess Venus. Seen as an embodiment of womanhood, her image seemed like the perfect frame for this exceptional musical journey.

VENUS

(/'vi:nəs/, Classical Latin: /'wenʊs/; genitive Veneris /'wɛnɛrɪs/) is a Roman goddess, whose functions encompassed love, beauty, desire, sex, fertility, prosperity and victory.



VISIONS OF VENUS

MOTHER

Hildegard von Bingen (1098-1179)
Björk (*1965)

O Virtus Sapientiae
Oceania

MUSE

Amy Beach (1867-1944)
Anohni (*1971)
Clara Schumann (1819-1896)
Wallis Bird (*1982)

A Mirage
Daylight And The Sun
Lov'st Thou For Beauty?
Odom

SIREN

Maria Theresia von Paradis (1759-1824)
Francesca Caccini (1587-1640)

Sicilienne
Ciaccona

LOVER

Billie Holiday (1915-1959)
Tori Amos (*1963)
Kate Bush (*1958)
Wallis Bird

Now Or Never
Cloud On My Tongue
Babooshka
Home

INTERMISSION

DREAMER

Elena Kats-Chernin (*1957)

Fast Blue Village

VOICE OF HEART AND MIND

Sandie Wollasch (*1972)

Janis Joplin (1943-1970)

Joni Mitchell (*1943)

Believer

Mercedes Benz

Big Yellow Taxi

WARRIOR

Germaine Tailleferre (1892-1983)

Wallis Bird

Larghetto

Dr. James Barry

WOMAN

Wallis Bird

Enya (*1961)

Carole King (*1942)

Wallis Bird

Woman Oh Woman!

Only Time

A Natural Woman

Visions

Wallis Bird – vocals & guitar

Spark – The Classical Band

Andrea Ritter – recorder

Daniel Koschitzki – recorder & melodica

Stefan Balazsovics – violin & viola

Victor Plumettaz – violoncello

Christian Fritz – piano

WALLIS BIRD

For over a decade, Irish singer-songwriter Wallis Bird has captivated audiences around the globe with her passion, temperament and musical force. Having played over 800 shows across Europe, the US, Australia and Asia so far, she's garnered a large and loyal following that loves her explosive mixture of Irish folk, rock and pop. In her songs, always wearing her heart on her sleeve, she reflects on personal experiences just as vividly and astutely as she campaigns for women's and transsexual rights, against racism and injustice, for acceptance and constructive conflict resolution.

Bird has won several international awards, including two Irish Meteor Awards and the prestigious German Music Author's Prize - a national award chosen by composers and awarded to their peers. She has also received nominations for the 2019 International Folk Music Award and the Irish Choice Music Prize. Her irrepressible energy on stage is one of her trademarks; even the Irish Times once noted it could *"kickstart an entire economy"*. In 2016, she played a 12-hour free gig in aid of refugee charities, even finding enough strength to play an encore!

*"IT'S HER
HUMOUR AND
HER BOLD
HONESTY THAT
MAKES BIRD SO
SPECIAL."*

THE GUARDIAN



*“INCREDIBLE... THAT’S WALLIS BIRD: POP STAR, BALLADEER,
WORLD MUSIC POET. PIGEONHOLE AT YOUR PERIL.”*

THE ARTS DESK

Even in the pandemic years of 2020, Bird didn't lose her fighting nature. Starting in June 2020, she began her Retrospective Sessions, in which she performed each of her six albums virtually in six monthly concerts streamed live from six completely different venues in Berlin – ranging from the daily spa Liquidrom to the football stadium of 1. FC Union Berlin: Via livestream, even in lockdown, Bird has proven once more that she is unstoppable touching fans all over the world with her music and her being.

Visions of Venus with Spark, the Classical Band, is not the first project that leads Bird to classical music territories. 2019 saw her cooperating with the RTÉ Concert Orchestra for the show *A Woman's Heart Orchestrated*, where she interpreted songs by Eleanor McEvoy and Joni Mitchell in a more classical setting. Teaming up with her Irish colleagues Eleanor McEvoy and Maura O'Connell for the occasion, this special project was presented at four sold-out concerts at Dublin's National Concert Hall and the National Opera House of Wexford.

Since 2012, Wallis Bird has been residing in Berlin.

FACT CHECK

- *Born in 1982 in Meath, Ireland, as the second youngest of seven children*
- *Studied songwriting at Dublin's Ballyfermot Rock School and at Pop Academy Mannheim, Germany*
- *Album Releases: Spoons (2007), New Boots (2009), Wallis Bird (2012), Architect (2014), Home (2016), Woman (2019)*
- *Concerts across Europe, the UK, the USA, Australia and Asia – i.e. at Montreux Jazz Festival, Oxegen Festival, Frequency Festival, Rock En Seine, Lowlands, Pukkelpop, SWR3 New Pop Festival, Southside Festival, Eurosonic Festival*
- *Meteor Music Award in the categories “Hope for 2009” (2009) and „“Best Irish Female” (2010)*
- *German Music Author's Prize in the rock / pop category*
- *Voted among Ireland's Top 10 'Best Musicians' by Irish Hot Press Magazine in March 2021*

SPARK

- THE CLASSICAL BAND

"A TOP-NOTCH BAND!"
DIE WELT

"A CLASSICAL MUSIC PHENOMENON
NOT UNLIKE YO-YO MA OR THE
KRONOS QUARTET, BUT EVEN MORE
VITAL."
AMERICAN RECORD GUIDE

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

“ONE OF THE FEW ENSEMBLES THAT HAVE THE POTENTIAL TO CONVINCINGLY COMBINE INFLUENCES FROM POP AND DANCE WITH CLASSICAL MUSIC.”

DE VOLKSKRANT

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.

Acknowledged with an ECHO Klassik Award in 2011, 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.

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, the final movement of a Vivaldi concerto is replaced by Dutch minimal music, Bach enters into a thrilling dialogue with Berio and the Beatles.

Alongside clever arrangements of classical masterworks, Spark focuses on contemporary music, working with a string of internationally recognised composers, such as Johannes Motschmann, Chiel Meijering, Kenji Bunch, Kamran Ince, Roger Wanamo, Lev Ljova Zhurbin and Sebastian Bartmann. 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.

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. 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". Their subsequent album releases *Folk Tunes*, *Wild Territories*, *Facets of Infinity* and *On the Dancefloor* enhanced the ensemble's reputation as a trendsetter on the classical music scene. In the fall of 2020, SPARK released their sixth CD, *Be Baroque*, featuring the quintet's very personal adaptations and re-interpretations of works by Bach, Handel, Vivaldi and their contemporaries.

Listeners around the world respond to this skilful blend of tradition and trends, and they like Spark's message: Good music knows no boundaries!

FACT CHECK

- *Founded in 2007 by five students of Karlsruhe's University of Music*
- *Album Releases: Downtown Illusions (2010), Folk Tunes (2012), Wild Territories (2015), Facets of Infinity (2017), On the Dancefloor (2018), Be Baroque (2020), Closer to Paradise (2022)*
- *Winner of an ECHO Klassik Award (2011); nominated for Opus Klassik Awards in the categories "classics without borders" (2019) and "innovative concert experience of the year" (2020); on the shortlist for the German Record Critics' Prize (2019)*
- *Appearances at classical venues, such as Wiener Musikverein, Elbphilharmonie, Concertgebouw Amsterdam, London's Barbican Centre or Shanghai Oriental Arts Centre, but also on alternative platforms – i.e. at Reeperbahn Festival Hamburg, Zelt-Musik-Festival, Kulturufer Friedrichshafen and in Berlin's techno club Berghain*
- *Collaborations with the London Symphony Orchestra, WDR Funkhausorchester Köln, Nederlands Kamerorkest, Countertenor Valer Sabadus, Jazz singers Kitty Hoff and Sandie Wollasch, Beatboxer Robeat and DJ Emanuel Satie*

THE WOMEN

BEHIND THE VISIONS



TORI AMOS (*1963) is an American singer-songwriter and pianist, known for her rough, uncompromising sound language. The songs of the classically trained musician draw on a broad range of influences from avant-garde, classical and world music to hard rock. Her complex lyrics often focus on such topics as sexuality, feminism, politics and religion.

Cloud On My Tongue – the song featured in this program – deals with emotional dependency, misinterpreted as love. It tells the story of a woman who fell for a seductive man who turns out to be a womanizer. Saying that she's in “circles again” repeatedly emphasizes the difficulty of breaking free from an unhealthy relationship.



ANOJNI (*1971) is an English-born singer, composer and visual artist who works and lives in the USA today. One of the most prominent transgender artists of the international music scene, she used to be the head of the famous chamber pop formation Antony and the Johnsons, before starting a solo career as Anohni. Among her trademarks are her melancholy ballads and her trembling falsetto voice.

Her song *Daylight And The Sun* describes the moment when the first rays of the sun reach the earth, comparing it to a passionate kiss: “You gave me this, your fire becomes a kiss.”



AMY BEACH (1867-1944) is widely considered one of the most respected and acclaimed American composers of her era and the first successful female composer of large-scale art music from the USA. She was most popular for her songs of which she wrote about 150.

A Mirage, based on lyrics by Bertha Ochsner, portrays a misty mountain scenery at dawn. Wrapped in Impressionist sounds, the song exudes an atmosphere of bittersweet lamentation.



HILDEGARD VON BINGEN (1098-1179), also known as Saint Hildegard, was a German Benedictine abbess, writer, composer and philosopher. She is one of the best-known composers of sacred monophony, as well as the most recorded in modern history.

The chant *O Virtus Sapientiae* – in English *O Power Of Wisdom* – refers to one of the most precious virtues of human mankind. It is surrounded by a timeless aura of power and mysticism – just like its famous author.



WALLIS BIRD (*1982) is one of the most acclaimed Irish singer-songwriters of the present day. Her style draws influences from a large variety of genres, combining elements of traditional folk music, blues and funk with a rock sound. Her songs are carried by her expressive, soulful three-octave voice, which ranges from mystically smoky to rocky roaring.

Five of Bird's songs have been chosen for this program: *Home* is a very intimate folk ballad, addressing love and the willingness to start a new life for it. *Odom* deals with the physical aspects of falling in love, the sheer addiction to another person's presence, while *Woman Oh Woman!* is a powerful declaration of love from woman to woman. *Dr. James Barry* tells the story of 19th-century Irish woman, Margaret Ann Bulkley, who lived her whole adult life as a man to pursue a career as a military doctor and surgeon. This would have been impossible, had she confessed to her real gender. Last, but not least, *Visions* is Bird's take on female empowerment as well as her personal reflection of the sound universe she has stepped into with this project.



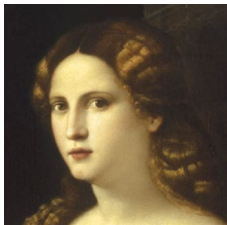
BJÖRK (*1965), one of today's most successful Icelandic artists, has developed a highly unconventional sound language at the intersection of pop, trip hop, electro, classical and contemporary art music. The New York Museum of Modern Art held a full-scale retrospective exhibition dedicated to Björk in 2015.

The song *Oceania*, which Björk performed at the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, turns the singer into Mother Ocean who gave birth to all life on our planet – humans included. This elemental connection is thematised through numerous metaphors, for example the salty human sweat.



KATE BUSH (*1958) has established her reputation as an icon of art pop in a career that spans five decades. Her eclectic and experimental musical style, unusual lyrics and literary themes have influenced a diverse range of artists. While her first albums are shaped by her ethereal soprano, she's singing with a dark alto voice on more recent releases.

Babooshka, one of Bush's most famous songs, is all about love and hate. It chronicles a wife's desire to test her husband's loyalty, ultimately leading to a meeting of him and her in disguise. Not knowing it's his own wife, he's reminded of his wife when she was younger and more amorous.



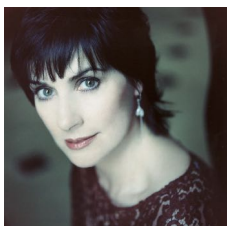
FRANCESCA CACCINI (1587-1640), one of the radiant female figures of the Italian late Renaissance, left posterity a true treasure trove of secular and sacred cantatas and songs as well a large number of instrumental works. She was also a gifted singer, resulting in the nickname "*la cecchina*", which means songbird. Her stage work *La liberazione di Ruggiero* is considered the oldest opera by a female composer.

In the *Visions of Venus* program, Spark and Wallis Bird are playing a wild re-interpretation of Caccini's popular *Ciaccona* from her collection *Il primo libro delle Musiche*.



ELENA KATS-CHERNIN (*1957), knows no borders, neither in a geographical nor in a stylistic sense. Born in Uzbekistan, the composer and pianist moved to Germany for her studies and finally ended up residing in Australia. Today, she's regarded as one of the most famous female contemporary composers of the world with a multifaceted oeuvre ranging from large-scale operas and ballets to intimate chamber pieces.

In this program, Spark is performing Kats-Chernin's *Fast Blue Village* – a very energetic, ever pulsating minimal music piece.



ENYA (*1961), an Irish singer, songwriter and record producer, has risen to international fame with a style that mingles pop music with elements of Celtic folk, classical and new age. She is Ireland's best-selling solo artist to date.

In her song *Only Time*, time itself is characterised as an omniscient entity, that reveals all truths. It was prominently used in the media coverage of the September 11 attacks.



BILLIE HOLIDAY (1915-1959) can undoubtedly be called one of the greatest American jazz singers of all time. She was known for her strong vocal delivery and improvisational skills. Besides interpreting the hits of her time, she also composed her own songs, some of which paved their way to today's repertoire of all-time jazz standards.

*Holiday's **Now Or Never**, an upbeat swing song, is a passionate appeal to a lover to finally turn an affair into a solid bond or to leave for good.*



JANIS JOPLIN (1943-1970) was an American singer-songwriter who sang rock, soul and blues music. Her powerful mezzo-soprano vocals, her electric stage presence and not at least her early tragic death made her a legend of the hippie era.

*Her song **Mercedes Benz** holds up a critical mirror to consumer society and has lost none of its topicality – even 50 years after it was written.*



CAROLE KING (*1942), an American singer and composer, is the most successful female songwriter of the latter half of the 20th century in the US, having written 118 pop hits on the Billboard Hot 100. Many of her songs have become evergreens, adored and played by generations of musicians.

*A **Natural Woman** was co-written by King and Gerry Goffin. It was composed for none other than Aretha Franklin and became one of Franklin's signature hits. What might at first be seen as a song about a woman just feeling appreciated by her partner has transcended to a hymn of a deeper meaning over the years - one of empowerment and self-love.*



JONI MITCHELL (*1941) has frequently been called the most important and influential female recording artist of the late 20th century. The Rolling Stone Magazine called the Canadian „one of the greatest songwriters ever“. Influenced by folk, pop, rock, classical and jazz, Mitchell's songs often depict social and philosophical ideals as well as her feelings about romance, womanhood, disillusionment and joy.

***Big Yellow Taxi** mainly deals with environmental concerns, but in a wider sense also with taking things for granted and then missing them when they're gone.*



MARIA THERESIA VON PARADIS (1759-1824), an Austrian pianist, singer and composer, went blind at an early age, but nevertheless had an amazing career both as a pianist and as a composer. Unfortunately, most of her works – including several operas – have been lost.

The Sicilienne in E-flat major is probably her best-known piece. It was among the works to be performed at the wedding of Prince Harry and Meghan Markle in 2018. The version of Spark and Wallis Bird is a re-imagination of the piece written by Spark's cellist Victor Plumettaz.



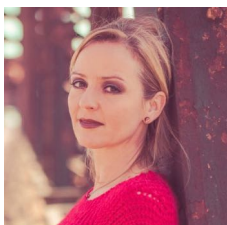
CLARA SCHUMANN (1819-1896) was a German pianist and composer. Regarded as one of the most distinguished pianists and prominent female composers of the Romantic period, her legacy as a strong and independent woman of the classical music era still lingers on today.

Lov'st Thou For Beauty is a calm, deeply romantic song about the search for the true reason to fall in love with each other.



GERMAINE TAILLEFERRE (1892-1983) belonged to the famous composers' collective Les Six, joining George Auric, Louis Durey, Arthur Honegger, Darius Mihaud and Francis Poulenc as the only woman of the group. The French woman had an enormous creative output and has written numerous operas, symphonies, song cycles, choral works and all sorts of chamber music. It is said that she did not stop composing until a few weeks before her death at the age of 91.

Spark has made a quintet arrangement of her *Larghetto* for solo piano as part of the *Visions of Venus* journey.



SANDIE WOLLASCH (*1972) is a German singer and songwriter. Swedish jazz icon Nils Landgren, who she has frequently collaborated with, has called her a free spirit, "a woman who knows what she wants and takes what she wants". After being a member of the well-known group Triband from 2005 to 2012, she has since followed solo paths with her unmistakable voice and her own songs.

Believer is an emotional ballad that sees the singer fleeing from the darkness of the world into the arms of her lover: "When I'm with you, I'm a believer."

*“I DON’T KNOW WHAT I AM DOING
BUT MY CONFIDENCE TELLS ME OTHERWISE
FROM THE FIRST WAKING MOMENT
I’M CONSUMED BY PLEASURE IN YOUR EYES
WOMAN OH WOMAN
WOMAN OH WOMAN
I’M YOUR WOMAN
YOU ARE MINE”*

from Woman Oh Woman! by Wallis Bird

www.wallisbird.com

www.spark-the-classical-band.com

Editing & Layout: Daniel Koschitzki

Photos of Wallis Bird: Jens Oellermann

Photos of Spark: Gregor Hohenberg