

A musical epic

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Swiss review : the magazine for the Swiss abroad**

Band (Jahr): **40 (2013)**

Heft 4

PDF erstellt am: **09.08.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-906661>

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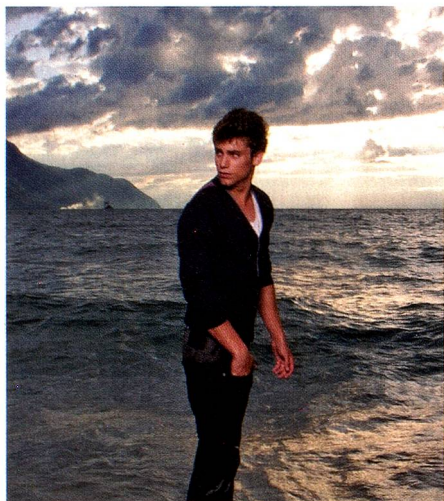
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A musical epic

With his catchy brand of folksy pop, Bastian Baker has taken Switzerland, France and Belgium by storm. The former ice hockey player from canton Vaud is highly driven and is preparing to launch his second album "Too Old To Die Young". An interview on the shores of Lake Geneva with a young singer-songwriter who possesses remarkable maturity.

By Alain Wey



Bastian Baker by Lake Geneva

He is a winner, applying the mentality of an elite sportsman to a musical career, and he is also extremely talented. Bastian Baker has all of these attributes and more. In less than two years, the 22-year-old Vaud-born artist has established a reputation extending well beyond Swiss borders. An outstanding on-stage performer, the singer-songwriter began a tour of France and Belgium in March which runs until November. In the autumn he will release his second album "Too Old To Die Young" which was recorded in the UK and mixed in New York. With over 70 concerts and other big performances in 2012, he has gained a wealth of experience. Passing through Switzerland in June after a concert in Moscow, the former ice hockey player opened up on his astonishing rise while sitting at a table on a terrace overlooking Lake Geneva. Humour, verve and a sharp wit underlie the tremendous positive energy which this musician effuses.

From the ice-hockey rink to the stage

"It feels like I've always been a musical artist," reveals Bastian Kaltenbacher. At the age of five, he was singing R.E.M. songs in the bar at the restaurant in Lausanne owned by his father Bruno, who was a professional ice hockey player. He listened to the music his

parents liked, including Led Zeppelin, The Eagles, The Beatles and The Rolling Stones. The budding musician grew up in Villeneuve (canton Vaud) where he was a member of his school choir. He began playing the guitar at the age of seven at the same time as ice hockey. He recalled: "I attended classes for five years at the academy of music. At the time, I was a poor student because playing music other people had already produced frustrated me. I wanted to compose my own music." Nick-named "Kalti" on the ice, he learned his trade as an ice hockey player during an eight-year spell with Monthey (canton Valais) before joining Fribourg-Gottéron and then Lausanne in the NLB. He explained: "I finished playing at the end of the 2010-2011 season when I was with Martigny and Visp." One month later, he was on stage at the Caprice Festival in Crans-Montana (canton Valais). "All of my ice hockey friends had come to see me perform. It was a smooth transition."

A big gamble turned his life upside down. He was invited to record a song at a studio in Paris in February 2011. The folksy pop track entitled "Lucky" became a hit on the radio in just a few weeks in Switzerland and opportunities began to open up. He said: "It really began to sink in while I was driving. I was on the radio after Rihanna. It was an incredible feeling. I said to myself: 'I've got to make the most of this opportunity because this is incredible.'" In July, he released his album "Tomorrow May Not Be Better" which he wrote between the ages of 15 and 19. In the first week of its release, the album reached third spot in the Swiss charts. He played at the Montreux Jazz Festival not on stage 1 or 2 but on the off stage in the open air outside the auditoriums. He remarked: "It was one of my best concerts because I was on the stage where I had been a spectator every year since the age of two."

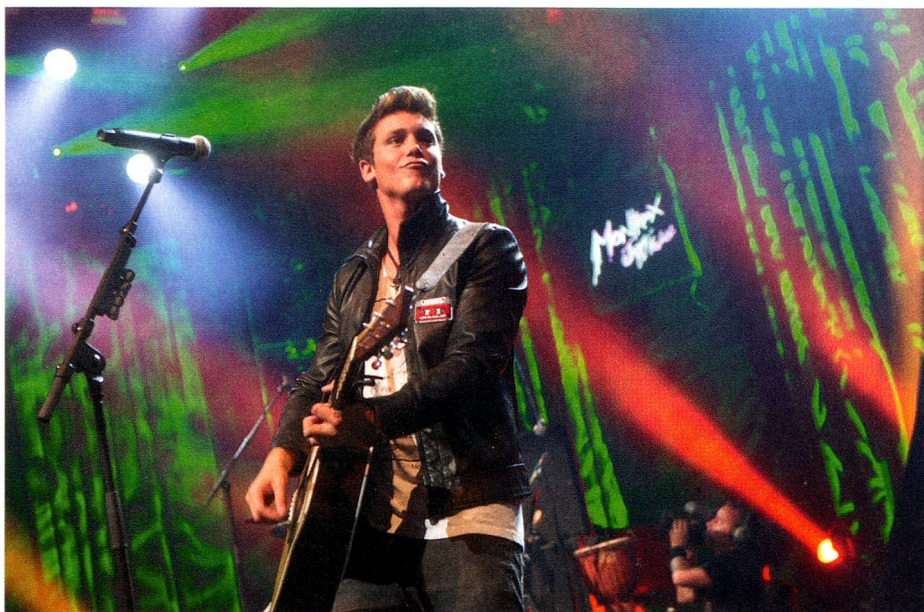
A lucky man

Was "Lucky" a prophetic track? He said: "It's just a way of expressing my gratitude because I am aware that I have been lucky throughout

my life - I've got an extremely cool family, enjoyed my time at school and have good friends. I've also got this gift of music." 2012 began with a bang. In March, he won the Swiss Music Award for the best newcomer. This occasion revealed something that would become one of Bastian Baker's trademarks. He performed guitar-vocals alone on stage in front of an audience of thousands at the award ceremony in Zurich's Hallenstadion. He has repeated this type of performance on many occasions as the support act for international stars. He played before 13,000 people at the Roxette concert in Zurich and 30,000 when Johnny Hallyday visited the "Stade de Genève". He has never experienced stage fright. He explains: "I've never suffered from it because I try to prepare myself beforehand. I adopt an analytical approach. What is stage fright? Anxiety. What is anxiety? Fear of the unknown because you don't know what is going to happen. If you tell yourself that what you are doing right now will be nothing more than a memory tomorrow, everything will be OK." The conquest of Switzerland was under way and momentum was gathering. The show became professional and he never stopped touring. In 2012 he performed at the Auditorium Stravinski at the Montreux Jazz Festival. His appeal was such that he was invited to take part in the French version of the hit show "Dancing with the Stars". He has been welcomed with open arms in France, performing at legendary venues such as l'Olympia and La Cigale in Paris. He revealed: "We have worked really hard on the live performances. On one occasion, I was a real tyrant with my band. I locked them in the room and we played the songs over and over again until we'd perfected them. We all had an eye on leaving Switzerland and going further afield. We have a light show with video projections behind the stage. I've been able to take my show where I've wanted."

Increasingly far-flung destinations

"Good evening, Brussels!" The crowd roars in the concert hall of the Orangerie du



Performing at the Stravinski Auditorium in Montreux

Botanique in the Belgian capital. Bastian Baker's song "I'd Sing For You" entered the top half of the Belgian charts in spring 2013. He has been playing concerts in France and Belgium since March. By visiting Germany, Moscow, New York and Los Angeles, the Vaud-born singer is making his ambitions clear. He says: "I would love to break through in Russia because it's a musical market that nobody cares about in Switzerland. Nobody wants to pursue a career in Russia. That's what appeals to me – I would like to be able to say that I'm playing a stadium in Moscow. Besides the prestige of success in France, achieving popular success in somewhere like Russia or China is a very attractive prospect."

Second album – "Too Old To Die Young"

Bastian Baker's second album "Too Old To Die Young" will be released on 27 September in Switzerland and on 7 October in France and Belgium. He recorded it with top musicians from the English-speaking world in twelve days in Brackley on the outskirts of London at the home studio of Jamiroquai's pianist, Toby Smith. "I like to work quickly. I like to seize the moment. I don't redo an album four times if I'm not happy with something. You have to maintain a certain degree of spontaneity which must come across in the recording." He then flew to New York in June to mix the album with Mark Plati, the former guitarist of David Bowie who has also collabo-

rated with The Cure, Robbie Williams and Natalie Imbruglia. "I've come of age. In two years, I've had the opportunity to get to know many artists and to discover lots of new ways of working. My second album is more mature with more sophisticated arrangements." The style is eclectic, from acoustic ballads featuring the cello to elements of heavy rock. He remarked: "The first album was very autobiographical, raising many questions. This time I think I'm more of an observer of life. There are still some autobiographical elements but above all lots of imaginary situations." The track "Earrings On The Table" tells of a magical love story, the beginning and end of which are symbolized by a pair of earrings left lying on a bedside table. The song "Never In Your Town" is about a man who lives on a boat and is liberated from the notion of passing time. "I reveal that I'm not a fan of New Year because I don't like the idea of being stopped in time and things being frozen." The first single "79 Clinton Street" was inspired by Bastian Baker's trip to New York and hit the airwaves in June.

A solution-oriented state of mind

The musician explained: "I've made lots of progress in many areas. Everyone around me has developed too. You must not forget that we are a team that performs a trade. My manager is not essentially a manager and the same goes for my producer. As for myself, I'm an ice hockey player. My band members are friends that I've known since the age of 15. It's excellent for the live performances because it produces real energy – there's a genuine osmosis." Bastian Baker is aware that he has changed, not in the sense of allowing success to go to his head but in terms of development. "All of the questions I asked in the tracks on my first album... what was all that about? I found the days short. What drove me mad was having a routine, a tedious existence. I didn't see any way out. It felt like I was floating or drifting. Over the past three years, I've spent more time focusing on solutions than problems. Just a small change in my outlook has opened up new horizons. Today, I'm always full of enthusiasm and positivity."

www.bastianbaker.com