

Asia+ Festival's concerts by Kinan Azmeh fuse Arabic music with classical and jazz elements (with photos)

This year's Asia+ Festival has invited Kinan Azmeh, a core member of Yo-Yo Ma's Silk Road Ensemble and an award-winning clarinettist and composer, to perform in Hong Kong for the first time in November. He will be joined by percussionist John Hadfield and five emerging local musicians in a pair of concerts that showcase a broad range of music. The events are presented by the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau and organised by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department.

Born in Syria and now based in the United States, Azmeh is widely acclaimed for his genre-crossing repertoire that blends Arabic music with Western classical and jazz influences. His work has been hailed by The New York Times as "intensely soulful", describing him as a "virtuoso". In 2017, Silk Road Ensemble's "Sing Me Home", which he contributed to, won the Grammy Award for Best World Music Album. Within the album is his composition "Wedding", in which he also appeared as a clarinettist.

Azmeh has performed in many major venues around the world, such as the Bastille Opera House in Paris, Berliner Philharmonie in Berlin and the United Nations General Assembly in New York. In the upcoming Hong Kong concerts, he will perform four compositions of different styles, which will express emotions that are universally shared. "The Fence, the Rooftop and the Distant Sea" portrays the composer's longing for his hometown, while "Ibn Arabi Postlude" exalts love and freedom, which he deems as sacred as religion. Another piece, "In the Element", depicts Azmeh's state of bliss as he becomes one with the natural environment he is familiar with. Lastly, "Suite for Improvisor and Orchestra" is his contemplation of the intriguing correlations between the composed and the improvised.

Besides sharing the stage with Hadfield are the five local musicians, namely violinists Nina Wong and Sammi Chan, violist Martin Kuo, cellist Kelvin Lee, and double bassist Evette Chiu. Part of this programme was performed to critical acclaim for Azmeh's collaboration with the London Philharmonic Orchestra in London Southbank Centre last year.

"Concert by Kinan Azmeh" is one of the celebratory programmes of the 35th anniversary of the Hong Kong Cultural Centre. It will be staged at 8pm on November 22 and 23 at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre Studio Theatre. Each performance will be followed by a meet-the-artist session. Tickets priced at \$260 and \$400 are now available at URBTIX (www.urbtix.hk). For telephone bookings, please call 3166 1288; or use the mobile ticketing app "URBTIX". Besides the concert, a composition and improvisation workshop, with tickets priced at \$200, will be held on November 20 at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre Administration Building's Podium Workshop. Azmeh will also coach Hong Kong

Academy for Performing Arts students in a clarinet masterclass on November 21 at the Academy's Recital Hall. Members of the audience are welcome to view the class for free. For more details, please visit asiaplus.gov.hk/2024/en/concert-by-kinan-azmeh.

The second Asia+ Festival is running from September to November, highlighting the arts and cultures of nearly 30 Asian and Belt and Road countries and regions. Apart from stage programmes, there are also thematic exhibitions, an outdoor carnival, film screenings, outreach activities and more, numbering over 100 in total. For programme enquiries and concessionary schemes, please call 2370 1044 or visit asiaplus.gov.hk/2024/en.

