

Asia premiere of opera "Autumn Sonata" to be staged in Hong Kong in October (with photos)

The Asia premiere of the opera "Autumn Sonata", based on a work by Swedish master director Ingmar Bergman that won Best Foreign Language Film at the Golden Globes, will be staged in Hong Kong in October. Enthrallingly converted into a two-act opera, the production by renowned Finnish composer Sebastian Fagerlund adds an intense musical angst to the raw truths bared in the tale of an inharmonious relationship between a concert pianist and her daughters.

The opera is the opening programme of the World Cultures Festival 2019 – The Nordics.

"Autumn Sonata" has regularly been adapted from screen to stage but the upcoming performance in Hong Kong is the first opera converted from this cinematic classic. Music's role in the original film remains understated but it takes centre stage in the operatic rendition, for which Fagerlund has transformed close-ups and bruising mother-daughter exchanges into powerful emotional soundscapes.

Fagerlund provides an impassioned score for both orchestra and vocal stars, at the same time weaving the chorus compellingly into the drama to supercharge the brutal emotional exchanges. Intriguing staging, featuring flashbacks, parallel moments, open expanses and even spectral presences, brings further layers of meaning along with a surreal edge, playing with time and space to add universal significance to the domestic setting.

First performed in Finland in 2017, the movie-turned-opera has received wide acclaim. The Financial Times in the UK said, "Ingmar Bergman's film is brilliantly re-conceived for the operatic stage."

The story revolves around Charlotte, an outgoing pianist, who spends most of her time on tour. Brilliantly capable of pouring passion into her music, she has always been unable to relate to her children. Her elder daughter, Eva, continues to bear the mental scars of this and further miseries, including the death of her young son. After a seven-year gap, Charlotte visits Eva, now also caring for her gravely ill sister. Pulverising discussions, individual insecurities and intense emotion then emerge over the course of one night, painfully exposing old wounds.

Fagerlund, winner of Finland's prestigious Teosto Prize, is one of the most prominent European composers of his generation. His works have been commissioned and performed by numerous major orchestras and outstanding conductors and musicians all over the world. His output spans opera, chamber and solo works, among which the most significant pieces are his operas and

works for orchestra. He has been the artistic director of the RUSK Chamber Music Festival in Finland since 2013.

"Autumn Sonata" will be staged at 7.30pm on October 18 and 19 and also at 3pm on October 20 at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre Grand Theatre. The programme is performed in Swedish with Chinese and English surtitles. Tickets priced at \$220, \$380, \$540, \$660 and \$780 are now available at URBTIX (www.urbtix.hk). For credit card telephone bookings, please call 2111 5999.

A "Go Nordic!" limited-time offer is valid until September 30, offering a discount of 30 per cent off all full-price tickets on stage programmes.

Organised by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, the World Cultures Festival 2019 – The Nordics will run from October 18 to November 17. For programme enquiries and concessionary schemes, please call 2370 1044 or visit www.worldfestival.gov.hk.

