

Sounds of Finland to showcase traditional kantele music with contemporary twist (with photos)

Maija Kauhanen, a specialist in traditional kantele playing, will perform together with the electro-folk band Okra Playground in the concert "The Sounds of Finland – Kantele vs Electro-folk" on November 6. The musicians aim to captivate the local audience with Finnish music that draws on the past to create distinctive soundscapes for today.

Maija Kauhanen is one of the founders of Okra Playground. The group believes in music experimentation and aspires to play with ancient Finnish music through a revolutionary approach. Fusing folk, classical, jazz, rock and electro music together with kantele tunes, they inject zest into ancient soundscapes.

The kantele, with its bell-like resonance, has a history of more than 1 000 years. With the number of strings ranging from five to dozens, the plucked instrument is highly popular in Finland. In the upcoming concert, Kauhanen will play crystal-clear kantele pieces with a rare plectrum technique while members of Okra Playground will perform traditional songs from Karelia, presenting diverse sounds to the audience.

Kauhanen, an outstanding singer, instrumentalist and composer, is a charismatic performer with an entrancing stage presence. She was also the recipient of the 2017 Critics' Spurs Award for best artistic breakthrough from the Finnish Critics' Association.

Her first solo album "Raivopyörä" (The Whirl of Rage) has received great reviews internationally. The songs unflinchingly portray the fates of various women, covering such topics as their challenging relationships, domestic violence and child brides. But there is also joy, consolation, hope and the mystery of young love to be celebrated in the music.

Okra Playground plays electro folk in which the ancient folk instruments kantele and bowed harp jouhikko coexist in a new symbiosis with modern instruments and soundscapes. With strong vocal harmonies, big sound, age-old lyrics, hypnotic beats and mystical energy, the group has been well received and praised as an ambassador for Finnish music.

"The Sounds of Finland – Kantele vs Electro-folk" is one of the programmes of the World Cultures Festival 2019 – The Nordics. It will be staged at 8pm on November 6 at the Hong Kong City Hall Theatre. Tickets priced at \$200, \$280 and \$360 are now available at URB TIX (www.urbtix.hk). For credit card telephone bookings, please call 2111 5999.

Organised by the Leisure and Cultural Services Department, the World

Cultures Festival 2019 – The Nordics is running from October 18 to November 17. For programme enquiries and concessionary schemes, please call 2370 1044 or visit www.worldfestival.gov.hk.

