Leading Afghan artists in new AKMI-curated performances in Washington, DC

Homayoun Sakhi and Salar Nader at Kennedy Center and 2016 Smithsonian Folklife Festival

Washington DC, USA, 29 June 2016 - Two celebrated members of the Aga Khan Music Initiative (AKMI) artist roster, Afghan rubab master Homayoun Sakhi and tabla virtuoso Salar Nader, will perform at the 2016 Smithsonian Folklife Festival, in Washington, D.C. as part of the Music Initiative’s long-term collaboration with the Smithsonian Institution.

The collaboration began in the early 2000s, when the then-nascent Music Initiative, a programme of the Aga Khan Trust for Culture, became the major supporter of the 2002 Folklife Festival, “The Silk Road: Connecting Cultures, Creating Trust.” AKMI also partnered with the Smithsonian to produce the 10-part CD-DVD anthology “The Music of Central Asia,” released between 2006 and 2011 on Smithsonian Folkways Recordings.

Homayoun Sakhi and Salar Nader, both of whom emigrated to the United States and now reside in California, will appear in the Folklife Festival’s “Sounds of California” programme, one of two major themes at the 2016 event, which kicks off on 29 June and runs through July 10. Sakhi and Nader will also perform in a special concert, “The Soul of Afghan Music,” organised by the Folklife Festival at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. The concert will be presented on the Kennedy Center’s Millenium Stage on 29 June at 6:00 PM., and is free of charge.

The Smithsonian Folklife Festival, inaugurated in 1967, honours contemporary living cultural traditions and celebrates those who practice and sustain them. Produced annually on the National Mall by the Smithsonian’s Center for Folklife and Cultural Heritage, the festival has featured participants from all 50 US states and more than 100 countries.

Homayoun Sakhi, the leading Afghan rubab player of his generation, has participated in many activities organised by the Aga Khan Music Initiative, including concert tours, recordings, and intercultural music projects. Sakhi is also a gifted composer who draws on his knowledge of traditional Afghan music as well as North Indian raga to compose contemporary tradition-based works. His composition “Rangin Kaman” (Rainbow) for Afghan rubab, tabla, frame drum, and string quartet was recorded for the AKMI-Smithsonian “Music of Central Asia” anthology by the San Francisco-based Kronos Quartet together with Sakhi, Nader, and frame drum player Abbos Kosimov. Sakhi is also part of the AKMI-curated concert presentation “In the Footsteps of Babur: Musical Encounters from the Lands of the Mughals.”
Tabla player Salar Nader studied from the age of seven with Ustad Zakir Hussain, one of the world’s best known tabla masters, and performs both in the rigorous classical style of North India and in a range of crossover and fusion ensembles, including his own group, Salar System. Nader is also active as a teacher, and travels several times a year to Afghanistan to contribute to the programmes of schools founded and supported by the Aga Khan Music Initiative that are striving to revitalise the transmission of Afghan traditional music.

Theodore Levin, AKMI Senior Project Consultant, whose relationship with the Smithsonian Folklife Festival goes back to 1987, will serve as a presenter for Homayoun Sakhi and Salar Nader on the Festival’s “Sounds of California” stage. Levin was co-curator of the 2002 “Silk Road” festival, where he also presented Homayoun Sakhi, then newly arrived in the USA. “Homayoun Sakhi and Salar Nader exemplify 21st-century musical cosmopolitanism,” said Levin. “They fuse a deep knowledge of and respect for tradition with a thoroughly contemporary sensibility that draws on all the myriad influences they’ve absorbed in their worldwide travels, as well as living in California, and this panoramic soundworld is brilliantly reflected in their music.”

“I’m honored and excited to be returning to the Folklife Festival,” said Homayoun Sakhi, “and I’m grateful to AKMI for supporting our participation. The festival creates a wonderful atmosphere of cultural sharing, and I’m looking forward to helping festival audiences learn about musical traditions from Afghanistan.”

For more information on the Folklife Festival, please follow the link: http://newsdesk.si.edu/releases/smithsonian-presents-2016-annual-folklife-festival-national-mall