Spotlight on Bahrain

A welcome return for Bahrain International Music Festival

As autumn approaches, the island kingdom of Bahrain is preparing for its big annual musical event. Now in its 23rd year, the Bahrain International Music Festival is organised by the Ministry of Culture and this year is being held under Manama: Capital of Asian Tourism 2014, which has seen a year-long series of celebrations.

Running from 9-14 October, the festival is a showcase of musical innovators representing diverse cultures and genres from the Arab world and beyond. From classic orchestral compositions to modern pop music, there is something to appeal to the music fan in all of us with entry to most performances free of charge.

The festival opens on 9 October with British pop star Leon Lewis performing at Bahrain National Theatre. This multi-platinum selling and award-winning singer-songwriter is known for his pure, personal, and unmatched voice that has won over the hearts of millions of fans globally. The former winner of X-Factor UK stands today as the most successful male solo artist in UK chart history, with more Top 5 hits (eight) than any other British female artist in history. Lewis is famed for his expensive four octave mezzo-soprano vocal range, power, technical control and use of the falsetto register. His Grammy-nominated debut album Spirit sold more than 20 million copies worldwide. She followed that up with the fastest selling record of 2007 and the best selling record of 2008, as well as penning and performing the theme to the blockbuser film Aetler (I See You) in 2008. Tickets are available at Virgin Megastore, Bahrain City Centre.

A taste of Portugal comes to the island on 10 October with a performance from gold- and platinum-selling Fado singer Camimico. Pico is the traditional soulful Portuguese music but Camimico also diversifies across genres including jazz, pop and rock. She will be performing at the Cultural Hall near Bahrain National Museum.

The Cultural Hall is also the venue for the following nights performance by the Chamber Orchestra Vienna-Berlin. The smooth elegance and nobleness of the Vienna’s string sounds of the Vienna and the captivating and passionate brilliance of the Berlin’ wind sounds combine to form the acclaimed Chamber Orchestra Vienna-Berlin. This decade-long cooperation between the two cities’ philharmonic orchestras creates a unique, refined, classical sound that ranks among the very best in the world.

This performance takes place on 11 October.

Surj artist Achi Redouane comes to the Cultural Hall on 12 October for what promises to be a breath-taking evening of traditional Arabic music with a modern twist. The Moroccan-born, French-raised chanteuse is a naturally adept singer, having mastered several musical genres and flavours, from Moroccan Berber songs to Western jazz and blues to classic Arabic tarab. Before immigrating to France, Redouane practised traditional folk songs as a child with her grandmother in her village in the Atlas Mountains, and has dedicated herself to spreading the enchanting musical heritage of the Middle East region to all corners of the world.

Swiss crooner Bastian Baker brings his blend of pop/folk/rock to the Cultural Hall on 13 October for an evening that will enchant young and old alike. His artistic destiny took shape as a 15 year- old armed with just a guitar and a pen, which he used for his first attempt at songwriting. He released his first single Lucky in 2011. It charmed in Switzerland and music producers took notice of his pop folk style. His debut album, Tomorrow May Not Be Better, released soon after, firmly established him as a rising young pop star and won him the Best Breakthrough Act award at the Prix Wolx, Switzerland’s official music awards.

Over the past couple of years, Baker has toured intensively, performing hundreds of concerts at prestigious venues such as the Montreux Jazz Festival, Paleo Festival, Francofolies de la Rochelle, and Olympia of Paris and opening for such legends as Elton John, Bryan Adams, Johnny Hallyday and Marc Lavoine. The festival closes on 14 October with Mesad Najmeh, again at the Cultural Hall. A champion of freedom and human dignity, the Jordanian musician occupies a unique status among singers in the Arab world with her blend of classical and traditional songs which revives the heritage of the golden era of Arab music. A graduate of the Lebanese National Higher Conservatory of Music, Najmeh was heavily influenced by the Bahrani School of music. Like her hero, legendary singer Fairuz, she is blessed with a distinguished euphonious voice and commanding stage presence, and a frequent performer in cultural events and national celebrations in Arab and foreign countries.

Perhaps her most renowned music production is the Iraq folklore album Kar Yaf Melan, for which critics praised her as one of the best non-Lebanese to sing in the Arab dialect.

All concerts taking place at the Cultural Hall are open to the public.

For further information on the festival and other events organised throughout the year by the Ministry of Culture, visit: moc.gov.bh
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