

For Immediate Release

Nikolett Pankovits Sextet & The River Voices take Hungarian folk music into the 21st Century at Carnegie Hall's Zankel Hall 7:30 p.m. Monday, May 20, 2019 with a bilingual program steeped in jazz improvisation and Latin American rhythms

Inspired by her acclaimed 2016 debut album *Magia*, Hungarian-born New York jazz vocalist Nikolett Pankovits re-imagines the haunting melodies of Hungarian folk music with a brilliant cast of vocalists, instrumentalists and arrangers, a collaboration that brings together visionary ensembles from jazz and world music. Featuring a jazz sextet, Hungarian folk trio, a vocal octet, a folk dancer, and actor Adam Boncz, the project builds upon the field research of legendary Hungarian composers such as Bela Bartok and Zoltan Kodaly, confounding stylistic expectations and melding disparate musical worlds.

The unprecedented Zankel Hall encounter embodies New York City's ongoing role as an essential creative crucible where artists from around the globe come together and develop new musical hybrids. For Pankovits, the New York scene provided an ideal forum for melding the music of her youth with her love of jazz and kindred musical currents. Working closely with longtime collaborator Juancho Herrera, a New York string wizard and arranger from Colombia, she's designed the Zankel Hall concert as a barrier-breaking event for both Hungarian music lovers and music fans drawn to creatively charged cross-cultural collaborations.

"Most of these cultural events involving Hungarian music are in Hungarian, and there's the language barrier," Pankovits says. "This evening actor Adam Boncz will recite Hungarian poems in English between the songs. We will sing in English as well so everyone can get involved with this amazing music. We're bringing together jazz singers and folk singers, with everyone kind of converging, different regions and styles, jazz, folk, classical, fusing together in different layers."

The concert grew out of Pankovits' hit production featuring Latin jazz-inflected arrangements of traditional Hungarian songs *Sad But True*, which she performed to sold-out audiences in New York at venues such as the Blue Note, Joe's Pub, the Bitter End, Club Bonafide, Rockwood Music Hall, and Lincoln Center (where the project represented Hungarian jazz musicians at the 2018 High Note Hungary Festival). After presenting the project's European debut in Spain and Switzerland last year she returns at the end of May for performances in Transylvania.

Possessing an arrestingly beautiful voice, pure, lithe, warm and alive to countless shades of loss, longing, ache, and regret, Pankovits has assembled a sextet that reflects the way that Latin American musicians are in the vanguard of expanding jazz's creative purview. The talent-laden group includes Juancho Herrera on guitar, Venezuelan trumpeter Alejandro Berti, Swiss pianist Manu Koch, Venezuelan bassist Bam Rodriguez, and Argentine drummer Franco Pinna.

Pankovits performs with both her jazz group and The River Voices, a female vocal octet featuring Laura Angyal, Reka Banyai, Kinga Cserjesi, Kata Harsaczki, Ildiko Nagy, Artemisz Polonyi, and Boglarka Goldea-Raksanyi. The group's unique repertoire incorporates elements across the five major regions in Hungarian folk music. In much the same way that the Danube River connects distinct communities in Hungary, Transylvania, and Romania, The River Voices draw on a border-crossing repertoire of traditional melodies newly imagined.

On three songs the program also features a Hungarian folk band with fiddler Jake Shulman-Ment, violist Aron Szekely, upright bassist Branislav Brinarsky (and dancer Denes Takacsy on one piece). Adam Boncz provides the connective tissue between the diverse material, rendered by the vocalists in various combinations "singing in unison, canon, a cappella, with the jazz band, and the folk band," Pankovits says. "We're coming together to create something new, and at the end everyone sings together."

Pankovits credits three of the River Voices vocalists with playing particularly important roles in gathering the material and developing the program with her. Boglarka Goldea-Raksanyi, a recipient of Hungary's prestigious Young Master of Folk Art award for her work as a folk singer, helped shape the evening's wide-angle concept. The artistic director of New York's Delibáb Hungarian Folk Dance Ensemble and managing director of the Hungarian House of New York, Ildiko Nagy is responsible for gathering much of the material via field work in rural communities. And Artemisz Polonyi was an essential part of the team honing the arrangements.

Nothing better captures the female-centric program's frisson of tradition and innovation than Nagy performing on the gardon, the only instrument in traditional Hungarian music reserved for women. She was smitten when she first heard the instrument at the age of 14 and found the source of the sound when she started to visit Gyimes, an isolated valley in the East Carpathian Mountains inhabited by the Gyimesi Csángó. Nagy spent years amidst this Hungarian minority in Romania, studying and playing with the last classic couple of Gyimesi Csangó music, gardon player Regina Fikó and her husband, fiddler Zerkula János (as well as many other traditional and revival folk musicians).

While the vicissitudes of history have left the Hungarian people divided and separated, reinterpreting the music through a New York lens puts the pieces back together, offering an embracing vision of unity that transcends time and politics.

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