

Get to know funky Ukrainian folk band DakhaBrakha

By Vanessa H. Larson April 2, 2015



DakhaBrakha is, from left, Marko Halanevych, Olena Tsibulska, Iryna Kovalenko and Nina Garenetska. (Yevhen Rakhno)

Until you hear the music, the most striking thing about funky Ukrainian folk band DakhaBrakha is the headgear. Made of coarse, black lamb's wool, the

group's towering hats evoke a faraway world of Cossacks and shepherds, dramatically complementing the traditional lace wedding dresses, thickly draped beaded necklaces and embroidered tunics that make up their costumes. The band's music — which Washington Performing Arts brings to Sixth and I on Thursday — is just as captivating.

Embrace the chaos

DakhaBrakha's sound, which the group calls "ethno-chaos," is an anarchistic reinterpretation of traditional Ukrainian folk songs blended with eclectic influences like Middle Eastern sounds and a touch of R&B. "There's nothing like it out there," says Bill Smith of Riot Artists, DakhaBrakha's North American agent. (The group's members speak very little English.)

The four musicians — Nina Garenetska, Olena Tsibulska, Iryna Kovalenko and Marko Halanevych — play a variety of instruments, including cello, piano, bass drums and darbuka, accordions, jew's harp and the didgeridoo. Even more impressive are the vocals: harmonies layered with riotous birdcalls, eerie whistles and wails, and Halanevych's falsetto, Smith says.

An experimental journey

The quartet came together in 2004 as the house band for Kiev's experimental theater company DAKH, but has only recently made inroads on this side of the Atlantic. After its North American debut at Toronto's Luminato Festival in 2013, the group gave rousing performances last year at New York's globalFEST and at Bonnaroo, with Rolling Stone singling out the band as the Tennessee festival's "best breakout."

Give and take

DakhaBrakha, which means "give/take" in Old Ukrainian, draws on a repertoire of songs that the band's three female performers — all of whom

trained in folklore and ethnomusicology — have spent years researching in rural Ukrainian villages.

Yet DakhaBrakha's thoroughly contemporary compositions represent such a departure from the original Eastern European melodies and styles that their sound can seem as unfamiliar (and intriguing) to native Ukrainians as it can for American listeners.

“It's difficult to describe what they do; you've got to see it,” Smith says. “And then people just get hooked. It's mesmerizing.”

https://www.washingtonpost.com/express/wp/2015/04/02/get-to-know-funky-ukrainian-folk-band-dakhabrakha/?utm_term=.d0d5d1d560d5