



KBAQ INTERVIEW BY JANE HILTON JULY 8, 2010

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JANE HILTON: If you like Béla Bartók, Bobby McFerrin, Alison Krauss, Anonymous 4 and the Bulgarian Women's Choir, then you might like *moira smiley & VOCO*. That's the recommendation of online record distributor, CD Baby. I'll take it a step further: If you like thought provoking vocals with an organic creative edge and 100% heart, you'll love *moira smiley & VOCO*.

moira smiley & VOCO perform this Friday at 7:30pm, July 9th at the MIM. Moira shares a bit about VOCO and the upcoming concert.

MOIRA SMILEY: My focus has been a lot on the human voice as an instrument and I'm so pleased that they're bringing VOCO to the MIM because there's an emphasis on all these incredible instruments that we make, but we also have this instrument inside of us, called Voice.

I've been singing with harmony groups all of my life but at the same time, I've been a classical pianist. I went from my New England background into the Midwest where I studied at one of the greatest, I loved the university that I ended up at, Indiana University. There it sort of seemed possible to start fusing my classical background as an arranger and a composer with the background in folk singing I had as a kid. And so VOCO is this sort of this combination of my work as a composer and an arranger, with the wish to be very visceral in my performance. VOCO is the exploration of old music with a new sensibility and a love of arranging but a love of improvisation in a performance context.

JANE: Moira has also sung and recorded with several noteworthy, early music groups including Paul Hillier's Theatre of Voices, Fretwork and the Duvet Collective. VOCO is strongly based in folk roots but it's also informed by early music.

MOIRA: I would say a lot of us get into early music because we're classical musicians that want to have a little bit more (laugh) creative freedom in some ways or that we're kind of nerdy and we like how music and history interact. If you're gonna do something with a song this old, you should really know as much as you can about where it's coming from. It just gives you this sense that if you do that, you're going to be that much more creative when you add your own two cents.

JANE: A VOCO audience might be treated to a Serbian folk song, an American shape note hymn or even, Bela Bartok.

MOIRA: Bela Bartok, I'd say, is one of the biggest influences on my life. I grew up playing his music, quite a lot as a young pianist and started to imitate his style, when I was like, 12, 13, I started writing pieces to be like Bartok. And so when a few years ago I decided to bring that more into what VOCO was doing and to arrange, I've started out with the Mikroskosmos for the piano, arranged those piano pieces for the ensemble of VOCO. And it's just sort of gone on from there.

JANE: The women of VOCO aren't typical classical musicians; they are comfortable improvisers. Each VOCO performance employs different types of improvisational styles. They might even ask you to join in.

MOIRA: We try to have the audience interact with us, I give the audience parts in the song, usually just a small loop of material, and then we'll interact with them, either with songs that we already do know, or we'll make up a song on the spot.

JANE: So every performance is completely unique?

MOIRA: Yeah, at least in a couple of tunes, yeah. Yeah.

JANE: Moira Smiley and VOCO perform at the Musical Instrument Museum this Friday July 9th at 7:30pm. In addition, VOCO launches the MIM Artist Residency program, with a workshop and demo on Saturday July 10th at 2pm, free with museum admission. For more details, visit KBAQ.org.

For Performance Today on KBAQ, I'm Jane Hilton.

