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Celtic music artist Loreena McKennitt: a contemporary travel writer performs in Taormina

Sigonella Celtic music buffs will be happy to hear that internationally acclaimed Canadian songwriter and harpist Loreena McKennitt will be performing on Wednesday, June 24 at the Greek Theatre in Taormina as part of the annual "Taormina Arte" Music Festival. This will be the only concert in Italy of her "2009 Mediterranean Tour" that will also take her to Morocco, Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Israel, Lebanon and Hungary.

Loreena is not just a musician but a "travel writer." Loreena is the direct 18th century northern European aristocrats who embarked on long journeys throughout Italy and southern Europe in search of the essence of Western civilization's art and culture. Listening to her music is like traveling back in time to an ancient world of romance, mythology, poetry and mystery.

The Signature: You became popular in Italy as a New Age artist in the 1990s. What does the "New Age" movement mean to you today?

LM: "Well, I think that, at the time, there were different meanings for the term New Age. In North America, it was less "categorized" than it was in Europe and therefore I believe that a lot different connotations. Today's music industry is facing a collapse and I think that the terminology of the music categories is applying less and less. There is a kind of anarchy going on. I've been always bewildered by the term New Age. In the US and Canada, New Age music is primarily a kind of music you would have in the background to create an ambience, an atmosphere.

My inspiration comes mainly from examining the history of the Celts.

The Signature: How did you first become interested in the Celtic music and culture?

LM: I was born in a town located in the middle of the Canadian prairie. I grew up listening to North American folk music such as Joony Mitchell, Joan Baez, Judy Collins, Simon & Garfunkel and Leonard Cohen. It all began in 1978 in Winnipeg when joined a folk club whose members were from Scotland, Ireland and England. When I first heard Celtic music, I was instinctively drawn to it and I felt I just wanted to play that music myself. So I started learning the Celtic repertoire while I was also working in film and musical theatre. Finally I decided I'll wanted to do that as a career. I wanted to be a performer. Music choose me rather me it.

From 1985 to 1990, I continued to work in the film industry but, in the meanwhile, I developed a Celtic repertoire. It was in 1985 when I wrote "Parallel Dream" that I started writing my original Celtic music material.

The following year, I attended an extensive exhibition in Venice on the Celtic culture and, at that time, I realized that there was much more history there than I was aware of. That was a sort of a turning point which drew me towards becoming rather a traveler writer that a traditional Celtic music performer. From that point on, I started traveling and researching in a way that resembles more closely traveler writers who write books. But instead of writing books I'd put the synthesis of my researches into musical documents.

The Signature: Have you travelled a lot around Italy during those researches? Have you ever been to Sicily?

LM: I usually travel to Italy at least once a year. I have lots of great friends in Tuscany. When I was researching "The Book of Secrets" I visited several monasteries and archeological sites in that area. As for Sicily, I met with puppet maker Mimmo Cuticchio from Palermo because I was very interested to try to create a piece connected to him and his work i.e. the history of the puppets and some of the stories that they tell.

The Signature: Sicily has been a "melting pot" of cultures and religions for centuries and your music seems to be in well inspired by many civilizations. Do you believe that it is possible to promote peace and brotherhood among all cultures, religions, languages and nations through music?

LM: Yes, I do. I believe that there is something in the musical medium that can relate to people. It's almost like sports games, people from different cultures and religions get together and enjoy sports. Music can be like a conduit for people coming together, but also the lyrics and the story or the background of the music can be a way to convey information. One of the most important things to remind people of our age who are engaged in fundamentalist stance is that there have been many examples in the course of history, including Sicily, Spain, Turkey etc., that showed how religious communities did cohabit.

The Signature: What are your future projects?

LM: After the collapse of the music industry throughout the world, the staff of my independent small label and I want to pause to examine how we want to move ahead in the future. In Northern America, there are almost no music stores anymore!

The Signature: Can you tell us about your last work "An Ancient Muse"?

LM: With that project, which began in 2003, I met my curiosity over the fact that the Celts have been in Delphi in Greece and I also travelled to Turkey where there are still Celtic archeological sites. I heavily focused my research on Greece and Turkey but I was also interested in the ancient Caucasian mummies of Urumchi in China which are considered as the precursors of the Celts. The "Ancient Muse" is a musical document that reflects the geography and the history of what I examined in those countries.

The concert will begin at 9:30 p.m. Tickets cost €46 and €28. For more information and tickets contact Box Office 095-7237343 (www.ellesse.it) or Ticket One 0932-931 / www.ticketone.it).

Canadian songwriter and harpist Loreena McKennitt's concert, taking place on June 24, is one of the must-go concerts of the upcoming annual Taormina Arte Music Festival that will be held this summer at the Taormina Greek Theatre. This will be the only concert the world-renowned Celtic music artist will play in Italy during 2009. Loreena's distinctive music blends world, folk, Celtic and Mediterranean sounds.

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