

November 10, 2010

Sonic adventure



HIGH ON HARMONY: wHOOL

wHOOL's music is unmistakably traditional, but resonates with modern influences

Date: November 17

Venue: Sir Mutha Venkatasubba Rao Concert Hall

Time: 7.15 p.m.

Modern Korea comes to the world in a whirling kaleidoscope of images — of the grandeur of the Seoul Olympics, of gung-ho K-pop artists, of the spirit of its martial art, taekwondo, and of the flavour of its pungent *kimchi*. But in the world of music, the Hermit Kingdom's native sounds have remained largely unheard.

At *The Hindu* Friday Review November Fest, wHOOL, a traditional Korean music band with an international contemporary touch will revive the sounds endemic to Korea's ancient heritage.

Melding of philosophies

Drawing from a past that has been influenced by Taoism, Buddhism and Shamanism, and instruments such as the resonant buk and the piri, wHOOL's music is a melding of these philosophies for the modern world, enriched by the sounds of the piano, electric percussion and the bass guitar.

In a sonic adventure of sorts, wHOOL, which means 'to empty and renew the mind', will take the audience through the mystic and dynamic sounds that are unmistakably Korean, yet with a modern resonance.

The band, founded by Yoon-Sang Choi in 2003, has as members Do-gi Hong, Karam Choi, Hyunsoo Kim, Dong-il Park and Halim Ryu, and played in places as far flung as Ulan Bator and Los Angeles, creating a brand of music that has traversed the borders of culture, generations and eras. Music for TV serials and films has also been part of their agenda.

The repertoire at the Fest promises music with extraordinary changes in rhythm and speed interspersed with a slow, elegant marking of time that underlines the rich culture of the Land of Morning Calm.

This concert is brought to you with the support of InKo Centre, in association with Korea Hanbaek International, Sampio and Blossom Land.

Q AND A

How is your sound different from that of other traditional Korean music groups? What do you like most about your brand of music?

What differentiates wHOOL's music from that of other Korean music groups is that it is more easily accessible and can be better appreciated by people of all ages. There is an explosive energy inherent in our music, and we try to captivate the audience audio-visually. We experiment all the time to amalgamate the merits of Korean traditional music with a 'modern' music that appeals not only acoustically but also visually.

Do you work together or individually when composing?

We get together practically every day to make music; coming up first with a 'frame' of the music we have in mind and then add to it the melodies or rhythms of each individual part. Each of us has a different musical taste and background, and we try to harmonise everyone's ideas. Sometimes, there are 'spectacular' outcomes.

What kind of response does your brand of music get in Korea and abroad? Any interesting reactions to your music?

Many young people consider traditional Korean music as unfamiliar, tedious, and even obsolete. But when they listen to our music many of them enjoy and appreciate the varied motifs and melodies. The international audience enjoys wHOOL's music because of its timbre and tone. Performing abroad has its tense moments — we are not sure about how the audience will react to a music that is utterly different from theirs. Most often, our fears are allayed — there has always been much enthusiastic dancing at our concerts.

How do you strike a balance between natural and synthetic sounds? How do you use traditional instruments to make contemporary sounds?

We think traditional Korean instruments are what make our music unique; the modern instruments support and offer stability and sophistication to our music.

Is your music influenced by other cultures?

Of course, it is. We think our music is heavily influenced by strains from across the world, especially the U.S., the U.K., Ireland, India and China.