



Friday, March 8, 2024, 8pm
Zellerbach Playhouse

OKAN

Elizabeth Rodriguez, *vocals and violin*
Magdelys Savigne, *vocals and percussion*
Gerson Lazo Quiroga, *bass*
Jeremy Ledbetter, *piano*
Anthony Daniel, *drums*

*This program will be performed without intermission
and last approximately 75 minutes.*

Works will be announced from the stage.

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OKAN. Photo by Ksenija Hotic.

Fusing Afro-Cuban roots with jazz, folk, and global rhythms in songs about immigration, resistance, and love, OKAN takes its name from the word for “heart” in the Afro-Cuban religion of Santería. With vocals in Spanish, Yoruba, and Spanglish, OKAN is led by the Cuban-born violinist/vocalist Elizabeth Rodriguez and percussionist/vocalist Magdelys Savigne, both Grammy and Latin Grammy nominees.

Having recently performed and recorded with Bomba Estereo, Lido Pimienta, the Halifax Symphony Orchestra, Hilario Durán, and Daymé Arocena, OKAN’s recent release *Okantomi* was nominated for a Juno Award and included on the NPR Alt Latino, *Le Monde*, and CBC Music “Best of 2023” lists, garnering critical praise from *Songlines UK*, *Billboard*, *Pop Matters*, and *JAZZIZ*.

Building on its Juno-winning sophomore effort, *Espiral* (2020), and the Juno-nominated debut *Sombras* (2019), *Okantomi* passionately advocates for freedom of expression, queer rights, and gender equality. Magdelys and Elizabeth’s mesmerizing harmonies, virtuosic musicianship, and potent lyrics—as well as their unfailing ability to connect with audiences on a deep emotional level—are earning the duo a dedicated audience worldwide.

Embracing genres that have not historically supported women artists outside of the

role of singer, OKAN co-leaders have faced many challenges. Magdelys talks about the obstacles she faced in pursuing percussion in her native Cuba and how “coming out as a percussionist” to her family was as big a deal as coming out as queer. Part of the next wave of Cuban women composers and multi-instrumentalists, Elizabeth and Magdelys bring a fresh perspective to Latin and world jazz fusion through their powerful harmonies, elevated musicianship, and provocative but playful lyrical content.

Born in Havana, Cuba, Elizabeth Rodriguez is a classically trained violinist who served as concertmaster for Havana’s Youth Orchestra. Magdelys Savigne hails from Santiago de Cuba and graduated with honors in orchestral percussion from Havana’s University of the Arts.

Official showcases at SXSW, Folk Alliance International, Mundial Montréal, Contact East, Folk Music Ontario, Pacific Contact, Ontario Contact, and Global Toronto have led to invitations to perform across Canada and the US, with stops at the Kennedy Center in Washington (DC) and the Winter Jazzfest in New York City, as well as at the Calgary, Canmore, and Mission folk festivals. Recent highlights include opening for Snarky Puppy at the Toronto Jazz Festival, and performances at the jazz festivals of Montreal and Rochester.

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