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AGBU Debuts the International Musical Collaboration HOKIS Before a Sold-Out Audience

Students from The Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin & AGBU Nork Children's Center and The TUMO Center for Creative Technologies Perform at New York City Center

On October 28, the AGBU-sponsored musical spectacular HOKIS debuted at the renowned New York City Center before a sold-out audience. A highlight of the AGBU 89th General Assembly Weekend in celebration of the organization's 110th anniversary, the performance showcased the talents of over 70 young dancers, musicians, acrobats and technology students from the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin & AGBU Nork Children's Center and the TUMO Center for Creative Technologies in Armenia. Invited to New York especially for this performance, the students represent some of the most cutting-edge talent in digital and performing arts in Armenia, pushing the limits of what is conventionally understood as Armenian art.

The story of HOKIS is an allegory for the Armenian nation told through the lives of two young lovers who begin together, are torn apart and are then triumphantly reunited. The brainchild of creative director Patrick Malakian, a noted French Armenian producer,

HOKIS was brought to life by performance director Grigor Khachatryan and choreographer Arman Julhakyan, who trained the performers for months in preparation for their debut. “What the show is about is to say that we are one: it’s not about the diaspora and Armenia; it’s not about children from Armenia and children from the diaspora. HOKIS is about bringing people together from all over the world,” said Malakian.

HOKIS featured the awe-inspiring skills of three groups from the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin & AGBU Nork Children’s Center, known for its excellence in the performing arts, and three groups from the TUMO Center for Creative Technologies, recognized for its superb technology curricula.

From the Children’s Center, the audience was treated to the talents of the Acrobatics Ensemble, acclaimed aerialists who dazzled with their daring, high-flying feats; the Narek Dance Ensemble, world-class dancers rigorously trained in modern, jazz and classical along with traditional Armenian dance; and the Percussion Ensemble, an all-male group who thrilled with their eclectic sound and rhythmic innovation.

The three groups from the TUMO Center were comprised of Decibelle, an all-girl quintet music production team who debuted their songwriting, vocal and instrumental skills for the first time at HOKIS; Pyramidz, TUMO’s electronic music ensemble that creates innovative compositions inspired by electronica masters like Flying Lotus and Gramatik; and TmbaTa, a vocal group that prides itself on original pieces and modern arrangements of traditional Armenian songs.

“I was really impressed by the artistry of the HOKIS performers, especially their mixing of old and new elements—there were even musicians playing the groovebox and using modern instruments to remake Armenian music. When you go to an Armenian show, it’s usually either music or dance, but I liked how HOKIS decided to present us with different elements, including acrobatics. I hope these performers will have a great career, because, of course, they represent the future,” said AGBU Young Professionals (YP) Lyon Rhône-Alpes chair Viken Kojakian. HOKIS Committee member Sossy Setrakian echoed Kojakian’s sentiments: “The HOKIS performance was a true expression of our people’s artistic talents, and AGBU’s dedication and long-term commitment to nurturing them. I am honored to have had the opportunity to take part in showcasing the love, dreams and aspirations of the Armenian nation through the HOKIS performance.”

The student performers were joined by three special guests, dancer Seta Paskalian-Kantardjian, the founder and artistic director of the Shushi Dance Ensemble; dancer Arsen Sargsyan, former soloist of the National Ballet of Armenia; and mezzo-soprano Solange Merdinian, co-music director of the New Docta International Music Festival. All of the sets for HOKIS were designed by the Ardēan Design Studio, a collective of young designers that emerged from a TUMO workshop in 2014. The studio harnesses the talent and creativity in Armenia to create a new visual narrative that fuses Armenian cultural heritage with the new technologies of the 21st century. Led by designer, architect and founder of Ardēan, Vasken Brudian, the students create products ranging from scarves and tablecloths to leather goods inspired by intricate Armenian patterns.

“HOKIS is a testament to the vitality of Armenian arts and the importance of encouraging the creative potential of our youth both in Armenia and across the diaspora. AGBU prides itself on its array of youth programs and is grateful to have the opportunity to expand its impact through partnerships with institutions like the Mother See of Holy Etchmiadzin and

the TUMO Center for Creative Technologies. The extraordinary talent showcased in HOKIS assures us that the Armenian people will continue to prosper culturally and artistically well into the future,” said AGBU President Berge Setrakian.

Established in 1906, AGBU (www.agbu.org (<http://www.agbu.org>)) is the world's largest non-profit Armenian organization. Headquartered in New York City, AGBU preserves and promotes the Armenian identity and heritage through educational, cultural and humanitarian programs, annually touching the lives of some 500,000 Armenians around the world.

For more information about AGBU and its worldwide programs, please visit www.agbu.org (<http://www.agbu.org>)