

Mai
Khoi



Mai Khôi

SINGER – COMPOSER – ACTIVIST

Mai Khôi is an award-winning singer, composer, and activist. She rose to stardom in 2010 after winning the Vietnam Television Song and Album of the Year awards as one of the first female songwriters in Vietnam. As a pop star, Khôi released seven albums in genres of Vietnamese pop and dance, and made regular nationally televised performances. Several years later she became increasingly uncomfortable having to submit her work to government censors and, thinking she could reform the system from within, nominated herself to run in the National Assembly elections on a pro-democracy platform. Her campaign sparked a nationwide debate about political participation and culminated in a meeting with Barack Obama in May 2016. Her activism came at a high price, however: she had her concerts raided, was evicted from multiple residences, and was detained and interrogated by the police.

Khôi's artistic transformation is evident in Mai Khôi Chém Gió, a genre-splicing dissident trio she founded in 2016 that combines protest music with free jazz and lost musical traditions of Vietnam's hill tribes. She also went on to participate in Seaphony, a project that aims to create the first pan-Southeast Asian orchestra comprised of ethnic minority musicians, as a conductor, arranger, and composer. Her current project, Mai Khôi and the Dissidents, is an eclectic and experimental jazz-ish quintet that's as likely to launch into a noisy protest song or collective improvisation as a lullaby or love ballad. She is also developing an autobiographical multimedia stage show called "Bad Activist" that combines original music, projections, archival footage, and storytelling to fiercely advocate for democracy and freedom of expression in Vietnam and around the world.

Since 2019, Mai Khôi has lived in exile in the USA. In 2019, she was a resident artist at SHIM:NYC, and in 2020, she was awarded an Artist Protection Fund Fellowship in cooperation with the University of Pittsburgh, City of Asylum, and the International Free Expression Project. Mai Khôi was an Exiled Writer and Artist in Residence at City of Asylum in Pittsburgh from 2020–2023; she has continued to reside in Pittsburgh after the conclusion of this residency.

In recognition of her work at the intersection of art and activism, Khôi has been awarded the 2018 Václav Havel Prize for Creative Dissent and the 2022 Four Freedoms Award for Freedom of Speech.

mai-khoi.com

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BAD ACTIVIST



“Bad Activist” is Mai Khôi’s multimedia autobiography—a stage show that combines original music, projections, archival footage, and storytelling to interrogate the relationship between art and activism. The story begins with Khôi’s upbringing in a country devastated by war, and follows her rise to fame as a pop star, her dangerous turn towards politics and activism, and finally her exile to the United States. “Bad Activist” features twelve of Khôi’s genre-busting songs, arranged for and performed live onstage by her band, Mai Khôi and the Dissidents. Early iterations of the show have been presented at venues in New York, Pittsburgh, Las Vegas, the Netherlands, and Germany.

Run Time: 90 minutes

Script by Mai Khôi, Benjamin Swanton, Mark Micchelli, and Cynthia Croot

Music by Mai Khôi and Ngọc Đại

Lyrics by Mai Khôi and Bùi Chát

Directed by Cynthia Croot

Music direction by Mark Micchelli

Projection Design by Aaron Henderson

Featuring Mai Khôi and the Dissidents

Mai Khôi – voice and đàn goong

Mark Micchelli – keyboards

Alec Zander Redd – saxophones

Matt Aelmore – bass and trumpet

PJ Roduta – drums

Photo Credit: Nate Guidry

Mai Khôi

PRESS

The
Economist

The Economist: “Her voice runs the gamut from whispered intrigue to full-bodied yearning... The music is designed to, and does, have a physical effect, hitting not one but several nerves. It aims to assault, unafraid to be difficult or jarring or ugly. If music alone could break chains, this would be the music to do it.” [LINK](#)

The New York Times

New York Times: “a unique amalgam of a performer” [LINK](#)

The Washington Post

Washington Post: “pop star, blackballed political candidate, democracy advocate” [LINK](#)

 REUTERS

Reuters: “an outspoken campaigner for free speech... often dubbed a Vietnamese version of ‘Pussy Riot’ or Lady Gaga because of her activism and provocative style” [LINK](#)

The Sydney Morning Herald

Sydney Morning Herald: “both a serious artist and a serious activist” [LINK](#)

AWARDS

Roosevelt Four Freedoms Award for Freedom of Speech

Václav Havel International Prize for Creative Dissent

Vietnam Television Song of the Year

Vietnam Television Album of the Year

Mai Khôi

IMAGES



Photo Credit: Eva Korinkova



Photo Credit: Nate Guidry

Mai Khôi

IMAGES



Photo credit: Jill Farrar

Mai Khôi

CURRICULUM VITAE

Residencies/Fellowships/Grants

New Music USA Creator Fund
Exiled Writer and Artist in Residence, City of Asylum (Pittsburgh)
Artist Protection Fund Fellow
Safe Haven Incubator for Music (NYC)
SafeMuse (Oslo)
AR-Safe Haven (Helsinki)

Performance Highlights

Lincoln Center (NYC)
Joe's Pub (NYC)
National Sawdust (NYC)
Dupont Underground (Washington, DC)
Pittsburgh Playhouse (Pittsburgh)
La Fenice (Venice)
WABE (Berlin)
Kammgarn (Kaiserslautern, Germany)
Malmö Konserthus (Malmö, Sweden)
Zhongshan Hall (Taipei)
Hanoi Opera House (Hanoi)
Phusa Lab (Hanoi)

Conferences/Festivals

Musicians for Human Rights Conference (Venice)
PEN America World Voices Festival (NYC)
Wave In: A BMI Festival (Las Vegas)
Jazz Poetry Month (Pittsburgh)
Basel Peace Forum (Basel, Switzerland)
REPfest (Siem Reap, Cambodia)
Migration Music Festival (Taipei)
Human Rights and Politics of Solidarity Conference (Hartford, CT)
Oslo Freedom Forum (Oslo)
Human Rights Watch Conference (Los Angeles)
ICORN & SafeMUSE Conference (Malmö, Sweden)
One World People in Need (Prague)
Revolutions & Movements Arts Festival (Washington, DC)
Oslo Freedom Forum (Taipei)
Safe Haven Conference (Oslo)
Global Media Forum (Bonn, Germany)



Photo Credit: Nate Guidry



Photo Credit: Đại Ngo



Roosevelt Four Freedoms Foundation

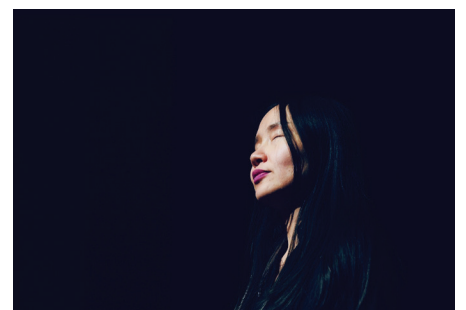


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