

Saturday, November 17, 2012, 8pm
Zellerbach Hall

Angélique Kidjo



Alexei Hay

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| Angélique Kidjo | <i>vocals</i> |
| Dominic James | <i>acoustic & electric guitar</i> |
| Daniel Freedman | <i>drums</i> |
| Magatte Sow | <i>percussion</i> |
| Itaiguara Brandão | <i>bass</i> |

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Jed Root

GRAMMY AWARD-winning singer **Angélique Kidjo** is one of the greatest artists in international music today, a creative force with twelve albums to her name. *Time* magazine has called her “Africa’s premier diva.” The BBC has included her in its list of the continent’s 50 most iconic figures. In 2011, *The Guardian* listed her as one of their Top 100 Most Inspiring Women in the World, and *Forbes* ranked Ms. Kidjo as the first woman in their list of the Most Powerful Celebrities in Africa.

Ms. Kidjo offers a banquet of rare musical treats in her first live album, *Spirit Rising* (2012). Recorded in Boston during a PBS concert at station WGBH, and also available on DVD, it showcases Ms. Kidjo amid a line of special guests that includes Josh Groban, Dianne Reeves, Branford Marsalis, and Ezra Koenig, singer-guitarist of the rock band Vampire Weekend.

Add to that the dancers of the Tony Award-winning Broadway musical *FELA!*, the Kuumba Singers of Harvard College, the Borromeo String Quartet, a trio of young horn players from Berklee College of Music, and a world-class rhythm section led by the versatile bassist Christian McBride. “I’m so happy when I’m on

stage,” says Ms. Kidjo. “Being on stage is what makes every singer-songwriter’s life worth it. Singing in the shower is only for yourself. But if you write and perform music for other people, you also have to be able to make them part of the music. The audience gives me energy, so I have to give it back. If I kept it, I wouldn’t be able to sleep for two days.”

Her 2007 album *Djin Djin* featured collaborations with such luminaries as Peter Gabriel, Carlos Santana, and Mr. Groban. In 2010, Ms. Kidjo shared the stage with Alicia Keys, John Legend, and Shakira for the FIFA World Cup Opening Ceremony in Johannesburg, South Africa. *Oyo* (2010), featuring Mr. Legend, Bono, and Ms. Reeves, demonstrated the measure of her maturity with a deeply introspective reflection on the events that had brought Ms. Kidjo to that point.

Born in the West African country of Benin, raised in the busy port city of Cotonou, Ms. Kidjo was surrounded by a multihued world of music, dance, and art—from the rich sounds, rhythms, and storytelling of traditional Beninese culture to the far-ranging fascinations of international pop, rock, blues, Latin music, and jazz. Add to that the blessing of parents who honored creativity, who supported Ms. Kidjo’s artistic goals unconditionally, encouraging her to give free rein to the talents she began to reveal as a child.

“Without music I don’t think I would have had the adolescence and the childhood that I had,” she says, recalling that she was just six years old when she first appeared on stage.

Expressing those talents to the fullest, drinking in all the music around her, transforming it all into a uniquely personal vision, Ms. Kidjo became a highly visible international artist while she was still in her twenties. Between 1972 and 1989, Benin was run as a Marxist state under Mathieu Kérékou, who took over in a military *coup d’état*. Ms. Kidjo was forced into exile in order to avoid imprisonment. Her friend and mentor Miriam Makeba was a constant source of guidance. “Miriam Makeba was the African role model that I needed. She left Africa and went to America, she was really the pan-African

artist, and I needed somebody like that. She’s really the person behind my choice of life of being a singer.” Throughout the 1990s and beyond, Ms. Kidjo has performed globally, winning honor after honor, all the while using her visibility to campaign for women’s rights, provide educational opportunities for girls, and support environmental initiatives.

In addition to being a prolific songwriter, Ms. Kidjo is a tireless campaigner for women’s health and education in Africa, and a UNICEF international Goodwill Ambassador. “When your history is not written, you count on storytellers and traditional singers in Africa to tell you who you are, what your family’s about, and what is going on in your society. This is what I do with my music, because I am a witness of my time.”

In 2006, Ms. Kidjo founded the Batonga Foundation, a nonprofit organization that provides African girls with a secondary-school and higher education. From its beginnings in Benin, Batonga has expanded its activities to encompass Cameroon, Ethiopia, Mali, and Sierra Leone

Ms. Kidjo performed for the Nobel Peace Prize ceremony and concert in Oslo in December 2011.

“Music is one,” says Ms. Kidjo. “I’ve tried my entire career, my entire life, and I will continue trying until I die, to let people realize that music is for everyone. It’s not a matter of language, it’s not a matter of color, it’s not a matter of where you come from. It is the only thing, really basically, where everybody can come together and make a conversation.”