

Angélique Kidjo

Since Angélique Kidjo first burst onto the global scene over four decades ago, her music has provided a powerful transmission of pure unfettered joy. In the last few years alone, the Africa-born artist has amassed a host of accolades proving her immense cultural impact, including winning the 2023 Polar Music Prize, landing on Time’s illustrious 100 Most Influential People list, and taking home a Grammy for Best Global Music Album for 2021’s *Mother Nature* (a feat that earned her Guinness World Record for most Global Music Album awards won at the Grammys, with five prizes to date). On *HOPE!!*, Kidjo offers up a revelatory body of work affirming her as a truly essential artist—one whose unbridled joy serves as a unifying force, a conduit for healing, and a much-needed antidote to despair in troubled times.

“I started singing when I was six years old, and I’m grateful every day that I still get to live my passion and do what I love with my life,” says Kidjo, who hails from the West African nation of Benin. “At the same time I know that many people struggle to find joy, especially when there’s so much to worry about in our world today. With this album I wanted to put some fire back in people’s hearts, and show how much we need that joy and hope to keep our humanity going.”

The 18th album in her widely acclaimed discography, *HOPE!!* pushes forward with the generation-spanning collaborative approach Kidjo previously embraced on *Mother Nature*—an album that featured a stacked lineup of young artists from genres like Afrobeat, dancehall, and hip-hop and quickly drew praise from the likes of Pitchfork (who lauded it as “a feast of the most sublime sounds found in the Black diaspora”) and The New Yorker (who noted that “Angélique Kidjo is a towering figure of cross-cultural music”). This time around, Kidjo teamed up with fellow luminaries like global superstar Pharrell Williams, Nile Rodgers (the legendary Chic guitarist and producer), and Diane Warren (a 17-time Oscar nominee who’s penned songs for Whitney Houston, Mariah Carey, and Rihanna), as well as such eclectic musicians as The Cavemen (a Nigerian highlife duo), PJ Morton (a singer/songwriter and longtime Maroon 5 member), and French pop icon Florent Pagny. Made with producers like Shizzi (a Nigerian musician who’s worked with Fireboy DML, DaBaby, and Meek Mill), French jazz musician/composer Philippe Saisse, fast-rising Nigerian producer Louddaaa, and more, the result is a groove-heavy and galvanizing album that boldly transcends genre while endlessly showcasing Kidjo’s larger-than-life presence and captivating voice.

Dedicated to Kidjo’s late mother, *HOPE!!* emerged from a period shaped by grief and renewal. While mourning her mother’s passing, Kidjo found herself sustained by the very spirit of joy that had always defined her mother’s presence. “My mother used to tell me that hope is the bedrock of our existence,” says Kidjo. “She believed our purpose in life is to spread hope. When I lost her, that belief became something I had to hold onto. If you have hope, you can overcome anything.”

In a formidable opening statement, *HOPE!!* kicks off with “Bando”—one of three songs created with Pharrell Williams, who joined forces with Kidjo after inviting her to perform at his Grace

For The World concert in Vatican City in 2025. Featuring Pharrell and multi-platinum rapper Quavo, the blissfully buoyant track takes its title from a slang term for “abandoned house” and speaks to our capacity to soar beyond circumstance and ascend to extraordinary heights. “I wanted that song to open the record because it shows that, no matter where you start out in life, the sky is the limit as long as you have hope,” she says. Revealing the depth and potency of their musical chemistry, Kidjo’s collaborations with Pharrell also include “No Stopping Us” (an exhilarating declaration born from their conversations about the future of social change and the indomitability of collective action) and “For Me” (an irresistibly upbeat number she refers to as “an anthem for Africa,” featuring background vocals from The Gap Band’s Charlie Wilson).

A Grammy nominee for Best Global Music Performance, “Sunlight To My Soul” fully embodies the irrepressible spirit of *HOPE!!*. Written by Diane Warren, the wildly uplifting track brings Kidjo’s force-of-nature voice to a full-hearted expression of gratitude and love—an element echoed by the exuberant harmonies of the Soweto Gospel Choir, a world-renowned South African group who contributed to several songs on *HOPE!!* and first performed with Kidjo at a 2003 benefit concert hosted by Nelson Mandela. “In the same way that we need the sun to live, we need the caring warmth of love to keep us going,” says Kidjo. “Whether it’s the love you feel for your mother or child or brother or partner, that love gives us strength in every way.”

An album deeply informed by the wisdom passed down from Kidjo’s elders, *HOPE!!* inhabits a soulful intensity on songs like “You Can”—a delicate outpouring penned for her daughter Naïma Hebrail Kidjo, who recently told her mother, “I have to come to terms with the fact that the world you promised me won’t happen.” On “Aye Kan,” Nigerian artist Ayra Starr lends her silken vocals to a hypnotic meditation on the urgency of open and honest communication in a world rife with conflict. Meanwhile, on “Big Heart” (co-written with Shungudzo, a Zimbabwean-American singer/ songwriter), Kidjo presents a multilingual rallying cry calling on others to live with compassion. “Shun and I wanted to write a song that celebrates the big hearts of women around the world, and we included a phrase that my mother often said to me: ‘Kindness is a bulletproof vest,’” she explains. “At a time when so many people in power have no moral values, we need to teach our children the value of kindness and opening our hearts to everyone.”

As *HOPE!!* unfolds, Kidjo’s limitless musicality also manifests in the funk-leaning effervescence of “Oyaya”—an unstoppably feel-good track featuring Rodgers’ majestic guitar work and the mesmerizing vocals of Brazilian singer/songwriter IZA, who delivers her lyrics in Portuguese and English. On “Fall On Me” (a duet with PJ Morton), Kidjo shares a soul-soothing contemplation of the cycles of nature and the restorative power of love, graced with the lush violin melodies of up- and-coming musician Angelina Sherie. A Grammy nominee for Best Global Music Performance, “Jerusalema” arrives as a symphonic interpretation of South African DJ/producer Master KG’s global hit, created by Kidjo for the reopening of the Notre-Dame de Paris cathedral in 2024. Later, on “Malaika,” *HOPE!!* closes out with an undeniably moving rendition of Kidjo’s 1992 song—her mother’s favorite, reimagined here with a philharmonic arrangement by Derrick Hodge and guest vocals from Florent Pagny (who

delivers a French adaptation of the lyrics). “My mother always told me she wanted me to sing that song for her when she died, but at the funeral I couldn’t even make it through the first verse before I collapsed,” says Kidjo. “It would make no sense to pay tribute to my mother without that song, and it felt like the perfect way to end the album.”

Crafted alongside many of Africa’s most electrifying musical voices, *HOPE!!* also includes collaborations with French-Congolese singer Dadju (on “Superwoman,” an impassioned tribute to the resilience of women worldwide), Tanzanian musician Diamond Platnumz (on “Kakua,” a spellbinding ode to the sense of profound possibility inherent in the birth of every child), and Nigerian-American singer/songwriter Davido (on “Joy,” a rousing track infused with the rich textures and intricate rhythms of Afrobeats). On “Nadi Balance,” Congolese legend Fally Ipupa and The Cavemen pair up with Kidjo for a euphoric reflection on cultivating peace by offsetting external pressures with inner truth. And on “I’m On Fire,” The Cavemen join in again for a full-tilt dance number fueled by frenetic beats, combustible guitar riffs, and ferocious horns (courtesy of Kokoroko’s Sheila Maurice-Grey). “‘I’m On Fire’ is my defiance song,” says Kidjo. “It’s me telling the world that I’m not slowing down—and that until I take my very last breath I’ll keep fighting for our humanity, because that’s what I was born to do.”

Indeed, Kidjo has passionately devoted herself to humanitarian work all throughout her career—an undertaking that’s included launching her own charitable foundation, Batonga (an organization dedicated to fostering the education of adolescent girls on the African continent), as well as advocating on behalf of children all over the world through her work as a UNICEF goodwill ambassador. Over the years, she’s earned recognition as one of the 100 most inspiring women in the world (The Guardian) and the most influential woman in Africa (Forbes), in addition to winning the admiration of such prominent cultural figures as musician/actor/civil-rights activist Harry Belafonte, who commended Kidjo for “using her work and growing fame to change the way the world perceives Africa.” With her countless achievements also including winning the 2016 Ambassador of Conscience Award from Amnesty International, Kidjo celebrated 40 years of music and activism with a star-studded special performance at London’s Royal Albert Hall in fall 2023.

As the latest offering in a catalog that’s continually shown the transformative power of music, *HOPE!!* solidifies Kidjo’s legacy as a visionary artist whose sense of purpose has only grown stronger over time. “Sometimes it feels as though the world is losing hope at such a rapid pace that it’s endangering our humanity,” says Kidjo. “With all the music that I create, I want to show that anything and everything is possible—and that despite what the political rhetoric might have us believe, we are all deeply connected. My hope is that these songs bring happiness to everyone, but also remind them that we were all put here to help and love each other.”