



# MISS KNIFE AND HER SISTERS

## INTERVIEW WITH MISS KNIFE, ANGÉLIQUE KIDJO, DAKH DAUGHTERS

**Your love for songs, and for French songs in particular, has guided Miss Knife for the past thirty years.**

**Olivier Py:** From show to show, from opera to operetta, from cabaret to concert, songs, which are definitely not a minor art, seem to contain a depth only the French spirit could reach. Each song is a world on its own, a miniature book, a burst of sadness or laughter which explores our existence in the world. Collected backstage at the theatre, in the repertoire written specifically for Miss Knife and those cross-dressing nights, or in the classic repertoire, they always allow for a kaleidoscope of emotions. Yet to serve them one has to give oneself to them without restraint, to bare one's intimacy even more than with great arias and beautiful monologues. Songs have this *je-ne-sais-quoi* which, together with the love for music and language, leads them to the very height of French art. All my songs are about disillusioned love and about the harshness of the work of artists. "An Artist's Life", "I Hear Your Voice", "The Suicide's Tango", or "Life is Short" all speak of a nostalgia that refuses to become pathetic. When love is gone and you have to go on stage, when all that's left is the bitterness of music and songs, that's when you get to the heart of this art unlike any other. After years on the road, travelling from one theatre to the next, sometimes wearing an extravagant drag queen outfit, sometimes a simple black suit, I've never been happier than when sharing the stage with artists and singers I'd just met.

**What is your relationship to Angélique Kidjo, with whom you'll share the stage on 26 July?**

Angélique and me, it's a great story; I fell madly in love with the artist, but also with the woman. She's a firework of vitality, of life. Spending a single day with her is enough to leave you energised for three weeks! She also helped me musically; we sang together in New York, it was a beautiful adventure. Angélique can sing French songs (her interpretation of Édith Piaf is admirable), jazz, and Beninese songs equally well. She has this desire to break down borders—which works with me, since I'm a hybrid individual, without gender or specialty, even if I've had a great adventure with the opera. It's always beneficial to make the inflexible more flexible.

**You're performing as Miss Knife, this time accompanied by a symphonic orchestra instead of her traditional jazz band...**

When you have an orchestra, you need a conductor, which creates a very different relationship than the one I can have with a jazz quintet. A quintet made up of soloists sometimes makes me feel like I'm standing among other singers. What determines the experience with the orchestra to me is first and foremost this human connection with the conductor.

**How do you—you and your double—feel about gender having become such an important topic of discussion and preoccupation?**

It's an incredible feeling after thirty years with Miss Knife. When I set out on this adventure, there was almost a stigma attached to it; to sing dressed as a woman was extremely scandalous, it could even lead to violence. I think I started singing dressed as a woman because I wasn't brave enough to sing with my own face. It was a big help. Nowadays, there's a part of admiration, and I feel like I was a pioneer in that regard. To perform as Miss Knife everywhere in France and throughout the world was a real political adventure, because there was a real prohibition against it. A cross-dressing cabaret act, it was scary and transgressive; programmes like *RuPaul's Drag Race*, which have since become extremely popular, didn't exist back then. It was scandalous. Today, families come to see Miss Knife. It's a great source of joy for me.

Interview conducted by Gaspard Kiejman, published in issue #15 of *Lettre des concerts de Radio France*.  
Additional material for this interview will be published in July - Stay tuned!