

Ajak Kwai announces special guests for album launch

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Since announcing the April 23 release of her fifth studio album and single of the same name, Ajak Kwai's 'Let Me Grow My Wings' has enjoyed high rotation on ABC networks and community stations across Australia, and is accompanied by a recently released clip, directed by Aaron Wilson. Touted as Australia's renowned songwoman of contemporary South Sudanese music, Ajak will perform her album live at Melbourne's Night Cat on Friday, April 23 with special guests Zimbabwe born singer/songwriter Thando, fellow South Sudanese performer on the rise, Jacki Tut (accompanied by Arik Blum) and ABC TV & radio presenter Namila Benson as MC.

With Ajak's dedication as a passionate activist for refugees in Australia, the aptly titled Let Me Grow My Wings is an eclectic collection of twelve self-penned songs which reflect her observations, influences and connections since moving to Australia in the late nineties.

Performed in English, Arabic and Ajak's native language, Dinka, the record sees Ajak honouring the traditions of her homeland, yet defying stereotype in what is best described as "modern South Sudanese rock" (credit to award-winning composer, songwriter and producer Jan Skubiszewski who mixed and performed additional instruments on five songs).

Backed by a pulsing rhythm section, piano and guitars feature throughout, with rhythmic rock gems like the opener, Love Not Bitterness (sung in English, urging people of the world to choose love over hate), Cool (Track 3 - Ajak's message to young people, sung in English and Dinka, telling them they don't need to act the fool to be cool, Life Is A Mystery - sung entirely in Dinka - in which Ajak questions why she ended up in Australia whilst so many of her people lost their lives (the final track on the album), and the album title track (Track 2) - one that Ajak says she feels closest to and is the first single off this album - in which she expresses (also in English and Dinka) her desire for the people in her community to have the same opportunities and be treated equally in Australia.

Then there are emotive ballads such as In Our Hearts (Track 7), featuring the Yogyakarta State University College of Music Choir, with a poignant message (in English and Dinka) that we are all the same, no matter what colour or race and Don't Make The Woman Cry, Ajak's dedication to women, urging suppressors to choose kindness over harm.

Says Ajak, 'My experiences in Australia inform my songs and my music. Music is a universal language – maybe one day we will forget our differences and hold the hands of one another.

'This album is a collection of those hopes and dreams for an integrated future where we are one and can share and be accepted for what my community has to offer.'

Ajak also explains, "It has taken years to complete this album, as I've kept getting distracted with my work as a community promoter and educating people at the Migrant Resource Centre, which takes me to many areas of Melbourne'.

She hopes that by taking time out to concentrate on her own art and completing this album, she will inspire people with her music and lyrics to create a more positive environment for themselves.

Let Me Grow My Wings will be available worldwide on CD and download, on all major online stores from April 23, 2021.

In addition to Ajak's band, the album's impressive credits include

Jan Skubiszewski, Nicky Bomba, Simon Lewis, Boris Conley, Chris Basile (prominent on guitar throughout), Kate Madden, Robin Mai and Aaron Wilson (who has also directed her forthcoming music video for the title track). Filmmaker and Ajak's longtime friend, Margot McDonald executive produced the project. The songs were recorded at Nicky Bomba Studios, Jan Skubiszewski's Red Moon Studios, and Simon Lewis' Panorama Studios, where it was also mastered.

In her live shows, Ajak, with her stunning, distinctive vocals fronts a four-piece rock band consisting of lead guitarist Kumar Shome, Matt Erickson on bass and Kofi Kunkpe on drums/percussion, occasionally joined by special guest musicians.

As well as being ambassador for the Melbourne International Arts

Festival, she has performed at major festivals around Australia and internationally, including Mofo, WOMADelaide, Panama Festival and the Tamar Valley, Port Fairy and Woodford Folk Festivals.

Ajak is also a popular broadcaster in Melbourne, as a presenter on TWO prominent community radio stations! On PBS, she can be heard each Monday between 1300 and 1500 AEST hosting Come Together - focusing on music that promotes love and acceptance and on bringing her community into the radio realm. On 3CR, her multi-lingual show is Ubuntu Voices (ENGLISH, DINKA, NUER, ARABIC) each Wednesday night from 8.30pm-9.30pm, giving voice to the local African community to tell their stories through music and spoken word ... challenging one-sided political narratives that deny our contribution to society and create hostility toward our community.

The single, Let Me Grow My Wings is out now, with the album release on Friday, April 23.

Let Me Grow My Wings by Ajak Kwai is released by 100 Pianos For Australia, supported by Creative Victoria and City Of Melbourne.

For more information about Ajak Kwai, check out: www.ajakkwai.com

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