

# SONJA KANDELS & THE POWER OF VOICE

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Project videos on  
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## African music is in her veins.

Sonja Kandels' singing style and her idea of creating *The Power Of Voice* project (p.2) are based on her childhood experiences in Africa. With her parents working in foreign aid projects, she spent the first 12 years in Niger and Cameroon. There, she developed a great curiosity for African tradition and a strong devotion to the music of the Pygmies.

After studying arts and jazz music in Germany, she began performing as a jazz singer. For her music projects and workshops, Sonja has been granted several scholarships from the German government, some of which led her back to Africa in order to work with musicians in Senegal and Cameroon or to study the Baka Pygmies in the rain forest between Cameroon and Congo.

Today, her artistic work as a singer and bandleader is a multifaceted, dynamic fusion of African music and modern jazz, far beyond stereotypical folk or drumming groups.

*"Besides my love for African music, I am always touched by the impartial hospitality of the people and by the way they are connected to nature and spiritual life. This built my picture of Africa much more than the common images of famine, catastrophe, and war. My music shall not only entertain, it means 'thank you', and it is an acknowledgement to many African people who became close friends and who taught me a lot about life. It is an appeal to show great*

*respect to African culture and look beyond the cliché."* — Sonja Kandels

With the greatest ease, Sonja is singing in English, French, or Portuguese, in Kisuaheli, Ewe, Baka, or Woloff. And when all these languages are not sufficient to express her feelings, she sings in her own fantasy language, using her voice as an instrument and reproducing the whole ethno-sound in a natural way.

In June 2011, Sonja Kandels went on tour to West Africa with a new band. She performed at the Jazz Festival St. Louis and the CCF Dakar. After sold-out concerts in Germany 2011-2013, the Sonja Kandels Band played the first *Jazz im Schlosshof-Open Air* with guests from West Africa. Ever since, the Schlosshof Open Air became a constituent part of the culture scene in Northrhine-Westphalia.

## Sonja is accompanied by:

**Hans Luedemann**, "one of the great piano players in jazz" (Radio HR, Hessischer Rundfunk), or as praised by Jazz Podium Magazine, "one of the most sophisticated and expressive European piano players." In varying formations, he is on tour around the world and playing with Jan Garbarek, Toumani Diabaté, and Aly Keita.

Over many years, **Stefan Rademacher** has been calling attention through his bass playing for the great Billy Cobham. Due to his unique sound, he advanced to one of the most reputed bass players in Germany.

With his electric and acoustic basses he has been performing with George Duke, Don Grusin, Gary Husband, Randy Brecker, Lee Ritenour, Chaka Khan a.o.

**Christian Thomé's** multifaceted and colorful drumming remains incomparable. German newspaper WAZ praises his subtle backing and calls him "a real genius when it comes to using filigree, often electronically sublimated sound dots."

On stage, Sonja is welcoming guests from Africa like balafone player **Aly Keita** (Côte d'Ivoire), jazz trumpeter **Terrence Ngassa** (Cameroon) or percussionist **Papli** (Togo).



She recorded 2 CDs with Minor Music Records, *Fortunes Arrive* and *God Of Laughter*, featuring African musicians **Felix Sabal-Lecco**, **Guillaume Jurami**, **Baba Gallé Kanté**, **Samba Sock**, and **Aly Keita**.

A new recording "Pygmyzonia" is scheduled for 2014/2015.

In 2005, Sonja has been granted a governmental stipend for her newly founded choir project,

## The Power Of Voice.

Since then, Sonja has been teaching African singing to more than 1,000 children in two to three-month workshops and performing with them on Jazz Festivals (Viersen Jazz 2006 and 2007, Jazz Rally Dusseldorf) and on international conferences (Africa Forum of the German President, One World Village Berlin, European Union-Africa conferences).



*“The power and the magic that emanate from African singing are based on the oneness of voice, body, and movement, an aspect that is mostly ignored by European singers and choirs up to the present day. With my work, I want to give young people an understanding of it and also make this tangible and usable for our choirs and singers here.”* — Sonja Kandels



*“Dear children, with your musical performance you have shown us, how much interest, enthusiasm, and joy can accrue from working with other cultures.”* — Horst Köhler, German President, Africa-Forum 2007

### One hundred children performing African songs

The Power Of Voice is a European-African choir project set up and conducted by Sonja Kandels, who also is a certified teacher for music and arts. In every project, she brings together up to 100 children, students or school classes, teaching them the art of performing African music. During two to three months,

the group learns about singing styles, body percussion, rhythm and dance, as well as basics about tradition and culture.

*“In Africa, there is no separation between everyday-life and music, dancing, and singing. Everything comes together and what seems to result in a special cultural happening is actually just about cooking, hunting, or storytelling about a wedding or a funeral. Hence, both singing and dancing have a deep spiritual meaning for African people.”* — Sonja Kandels

As soon as the young participants learn to sing and dance the rhythmical songs in African languages, their facial expression, gestures, and body movements become very strong and vivid.

Although many songs are sung in dialects, they learn these very fast by heart. Most words are easy to pronounce and sound very close to the actual feeling or meaning of the word. Since the lyrics and stories of these songs are based on all-day or simple emotional situations, the students easily identify themselves with its contents and soon discover their very own way of expressing moods and thoughts by singing these African tunes.

Due to the strong rhythm in African music, which offers the young singers a structure to lean on, they quickly learn how to move their bodies.

The songs usually have one or two lead voices. Having learned about the meaning of the lyrics, some may even dare an own spiritual and soulful expression with their



voices. By alternating roles from singing a lead voice to immersing in and merging with the choir, the young singers gain courage and feel the importance of the community, eventually experiencing the choir as one powerful voice.

In some songs, Sonja offers time or sequences for free improvisations like imitating the sounds of animals or African instruments or in order to find individual ways of expressing feelings.

*“Learning to use variations of a musical theme is the first step towards the heart of jazz music, namely the improvisation. Here, it is often surprising to see how fast many children learn to pick up a theme, paint it their own way and – then again – blend in the community.”* — Sonja Kandels

Those who are already into music will recognize many elements that are used in our popular music, in hip-hop and rap, funk and soul and in dance. African music is the ancestor of many modern forms. By realizing this - one can see it in the children's eyes - African culture suddenly becomes familiar and loses any strange or alien touch.

Some of the participating singers have different migration backgrounds. Experiencing a strong community that is based on cultural aspects we all share offers a chance for everyone to become aware of one's own background - and at the same time become curious for the unknown and foreign.

The lively workshop atmosphere will culminate in a public choir



performance, where all participants will be singing a repertoire of 10 to 15 songs, supported by musicians from Sonja's Band.

The Power Of Voice choir has recently performed on jazz festivals in Germany, on international meetings and conferences, state receptions for African statesmen and schools throughout Germany.

**Sonja Kandels is offering the choir project to schools and universities and to choir conductors around the world.**