

Angélique Kidjo Raises Voices in the Light: The artist reimagines The Talking Heads' album at The Vets

African pop star, international world-music sensation and 2020 Grammy winner Angélique Kidjo is returning to Providence on Saturday (Feb 22) to perform her reimagining of *Remain in the Light*, the landmark album by RI-conceived band The Talking Heads.

Kidjo has visited Providence before, performing in Kennedy Plaza as part of a FirstWorks event that was a precursor to PVDFest back in 2015. "People were transfixed," said Kathleen Pletcher, executive artistic director of FirstWorks. "She makes everyone want to be dancing." Kidjo has also performed at the Newport Jazz Festival in the past.

Remain in the Light, was selected because of the lyrics and themes of the songs on the album, and also because some of its more afrobeat notes hearken back to musical styles typical in Africa. The songs allow Kidjo to weave together content about gentrification and social control, modernization and the struggle around beauty standards with musical evolutions that mirror those themes. Although the album is from 1980, the themes are at least as relevant today. Hits being reinterpreted include "Once in a Lifetime" and "Houses in Motion."

Kidjo is also well known as an activist, with a focus on women's advocacy and girls' education around the world. She conducted an educational talk back as part of FirstWorks' "Raise Your Voice" series, in partnership with Classical High School, on Friday, Feb 21. The talk, and the entire series, are aimed at combining education and the arts, "Using the arts to amplify different perspectives and voices that aren't always heard, and bring them to the fore." Pletcher says, "The educational element has become the beating heart that is so important to FirstWorks - reaching over 5,000 students with a curriculum that uses the arts as a different way into subjects, topics and academics, providing a gateway to help launch classroom learning."

Kidjo is especially known for the engagement level of her live performances. "An album is like having a business card," she told Pletcher, "but what happens on stage is what I love." "That's her through and through. As electric as she is on stage, her voice literally and powerfully tells her story - she's doing far more than singing other people's songs. "The shared sense of community that happens with people in an audience can foster further conversation around some of these bigger issues," says Pletcher, explaining the larger goals behind both Kidjo's work and the series of FirstWorks performances.

Kidjo is the recipient of the prestigious 2015 Crystal Award given by the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, and the 2016 Amnesty International Ambassador of Conscience Award. She has performed with several international orchestras and symphonies including the Bruckner Orchestra, The Royal Scottish National Orchestra, and the Philharmonie de Paris. Her live show was captured at the revered Austin City Limits and made its television debut in January 2016.

Other upcoming FirstWorks artists, seeking to entertain but also strike conversation on a much deeper level, include Haitian artist Daniel Bernard Roumain, who will give a talk back about redemptions songs over Haitian food at RISD's ProvWash auditorium on February 26 at 7pm, as prelude to his violin

concert at the Unitarian Church in Providence on February 29 at 6pm, where he will perform with six local powerhouse musicians. With a presentation on the March 25 at Providence College and a conversation at RISD on March 28, Miwa Matreyek, whose mixed media video art "Infinitely Yours," is part of the Earth First series on environmental justice and "Enters your mind in a whole different way," according to Pletcher.

Angélique Kidjo's "Remain in Light," takes place on Sat, Feb 22 at 8pm. The VETS, 1 Avenue of the Arts, PVD. More info at first-works.org