

## IAKI VALLEJO BIO.

**Iaki Vallejo is an Colombian African/Indigenous descendant singer/songwriter, performer, choir leader, visual artist, music producer, video producer and director based in Melbourne. Her multifaceted creative expression crosses disciplines and genres and manifests in many ways but is always informed by her ancestry. Her work comes straight from the heart as she draws on her African and indigenous Colombian heritage and spirit in her music and performances.**

Known for her warmth, charisma and the brio she brings to the stage, Iaki thrills audiences with her exquisite vocals and unique approach to her song writing, resulting in a nomination for The Best Intercultural Act in the 2019 Music Victoria Awards.

Her music – ‘a blend of many, many different rhythms’ – mixes many styles, fusing Afro-Colombian rhythms with jazz, french music, soul, salsa, afro-beat, funk, neo-soul and reggae. The musical vibrancy of her early life shines in powerful vocals and driven pulsating rhythms compelled by undertones of Afro jazz and funk. Her musical influences include Angelique Kidjo, Buika, and Toto la Momposina. Iaki’s songs snake and soar across mysterious earthy beats, episodes of hip-hop, intense and intimate moments and dramatic anthemic crescendos. Iaki draws on all her cultural traditions, making them her own and more – her music ranges from a playful approach occasionally touched with the best of a 60’s style Cuban lounge aesthetic, heard on the songs of her second EP *Yo Soy* to the powerfully emotional road trip of *Margarita*, with its exquisitely simple percussive arrangements.

In 2013, Iaki began working with legendary Melbourne drummer and percussionist David Jones and the two formed an intuitive and organic connection, which she describes as transformative. They met at a studio and simply started to play together:

*‘Nothing was organised – we just went for it, it felt like we’d been rehearsing for a while. We were in synch with each other, it was a spontaneous musical connection which goes deeper than any devised mechanical or technical approach; the collaboration was very powerful, and it marks my life. I discovered myself as an improviser. It was a seminal moment in my career and my musical journey.*

The intensely creative collaboration with Jones was a natural process born of the meeting of two musical sensibilities. One early improvisation session with David Jones resulted in the song *Margarita* – the song possesses a spiritual quality, resonant and full of feeling.

These improvisation sessions are remembered to this day by the musical team at the studio as something akin to magic. The collaboration with Jones resulted in Iaki’s first self titled album, Iaki Vallejo. *Margarita* and a second, *Aronde* were produced by Jones. *Ay Curura* was recorded entirely in Colombia in the traditional cumbia folclor

style, while *Mi Barrio* is an ode to the neighbourhood in Cali where laki grew up. The playful *Buscando por Ahi* is a song for women seeking Mr Right, comprising irresistible dance rhythms. Sessions were recorded in Melbourne, Australia and Cali, Colombia, culminating in a sold-out launch with an eleven-piece band at Melbourne's beloved jazz venue Bennett's Lane in 2016.

In mid-2019 laki launched a follow up to her first EP – *Yo Soy (I Am)*. This dynamic meeting of two countries saw recording sessions taking place in Melbourne, Australia, and Cali, Colombia, culminating in a sold-out launch in 2016 at the iconic bespoke jazz venue Bird's Basement.

*India soy, Negra soy* (I am indigenous, I am black) is an ode to the confluence of native American and black African cultures that came together in the Americas during the time of the Spanish colonies. As laki says

*'It's my own story. I am the result of this fusion. My own ancestors were black on one side and indigenous on the other. I am proud to carry this mixture in my veins. It enriches me.'*

*India Soy, Negra Soy* is an energetic and irresistible proclamation of identity and heritage. laki's pride in her African roots is also seen in her visual art which focuses on images of strong black people, women mostly, in everyday settings. Colourful, rhythmic and radiantly expressive, the joy in this song is contagious, with moments of vibrant Latin rhythms and silky jazzy interludes.

*'Both my music and my art talk about my ancestors and life experiences. Both are the way I express my feeling.'*

Songs from *Yo Soy* include *María se Fue* (María is Gone), the result of a collaboration with Alexis Play, renowned producer and rapper from Colombia, whose verses invariably pack a punch. The song's lyrics, penned by laki, form an outcry against the abuse of women. María embodies a woman mistreated and humiliated inside her own family unit, her story summed up with the line: 'she gave it all and in return all she got were slaps'. Nevertheless, Maria's story is ultimately one of courage as she finally decides to leave her home behind in search for freedom, choosing life over a "dead existence", as the song puts it.

The fusion of these two voices: laki Vallejo and Alexis Play (formerly part of the acclaimed Colombian hip hop group ChocQuibtown), sends out a powerful message of freedom, love and respect for women.

laki recently reunited with David Jones, along with six string bass player Evri Evidipouto perform for the Victorian Seniors Festival: *Todo Lo Tengo (I have it all)*, laki's hymn to gratitude, opens with a delicate approach, a light, almost watery percussive style, moving into more familiar robust jazz arrangements.

By the age of four, Iaki knew she was a singer. She has been performing since she was 12, when she first took part in music festivals in her hometown of Tulua and Cali, Colombia. In 1992 she won the Best Song and Performance Award at the Colombian Festival del Pasillo in the city of Aguadas.

Iaki's pursuit of music has taken her all over the world. Her international career has developed in South America, Europe and Australia. In 2000 she moved to Rome, where she collaborated with celebrated Italian Jazz pianist Arturo Valiante.

Iaki studied music at Instituto Popular de Cultura (College of the Performing Arts) in Cali, after which she attended Universidad del Valle (Valle University). She has worked with vocal teacher Cosimo Ciccone, jazz piano teacher Sharny Russell, and vocal jazz clinician Michelle Nicolle.

Iaki relocated to Melbourne in 2008 and formed the Iaki Vallejo Quintet with musicians from across the globe. *'Australia has given me lots of courage to continue my artistic career ... I have found the support of organizations and people here in Australia as nowhere else.'*

## Visual Art

Iaki is also a visual artist who works across various mediums including, videography, painting, printmaking and small sculptures. Iaki feels connected to the human figure and historical cultural narratives as they relate to the eternal human situation.

As a portraitist, she focuses on strong, strikingly saturated images of women of colour. Using the inherent qualities of each medium, Iaki communicates through the lingering gaze of her subjects and the repetitious marks that forge new surfaces. Still moments in time are arrived at through a process of struggle and flux.

Her multidisciplinary art practice continues to grow and has been performed and exhibited in Colombia, Italy and Australia. She is currently exploring the historical Latin American tradition of mural making in yet another new approach to her work.

*'I have always had the urge to use different kinds of materials, surfaces, and techniques in my work. This curiosity led me to the amazing world of printmaking, where the "surprise" element and extensive process are the protagonist. During lockdown and due to the restrictions, I was unable to reach certain tools needed in this technique, so I decided to start making Collagraphs. This technique has taken my heart because I found it humble, crafty, simple yet laborious.'*

*I use recycled and modest materials such as leaves, fabric, laces, bark and many other resources which allow me to express my concerns for mother nurture, our planet earth and my strong desire for an equal and inclusive world. The Colours of my Soul is part of a series of works I am working on to express these feelings.'*

