

Exclusive Interview With The Great Singer/Songwriter Senaya

Written by Patricia Turnier

Monday, 04 October 2010 18:58



Exclusive Interview With The Great Singer/Songwriter Senaya

Written by Patricia Turnier

Monday, 04 October 2010 18:58

The young and radiant [Senaya](#) was born under the Senegalese sun, in the capital city of Dakar. Very proud of her roots, she considers herself as originating from both Senegal and Guadeloupe. Her father is a Senegalese businessman and her mother hails from Guadeloupe. She works in the medical field and also has a beautiful singing voice. Senaya's parents are also both passionate lovers of music. The artist, mother to a young daughter, has lived in several countries: Guadeloupe, France, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, and since 1996 she lives in Montreal, Canada. Her many trips have developed in her a large capacity for adaptation and rich life experience. Senaya enjoys her vast cultural heritage. She carries within her "Afro-Caribbean" roots, as well as her grandmother's Indian origins. Senaya is a lover of cultural diversity with a wide openness to the world. Senaya wears many hats: she is a self-taught songwriter, composer and interpreter. Her songs are inspired by the cultural mosaic which surrounds her. She sings salsa, zouk, blues, acoustic soul, Caribbean jazz, and R&B, among other styles. This artist became the first Black woman in Quebec to receive the prize of Interpreter of the Year at the 35th International Song Festival of Granby (the most important francophone festival in North America) in 2003.

[Senaya](#) collaborated with Steven Tracey, former producer for [Corneille](#). In this way, Steven Tracey became the executive producer of Senaya's first album, "Garde la tête haute" – "Keep Your Head Up High". This CD of 13 tracks was launched on August 23, 2005, with the prestigious Quebec record company Audiogram. It was produced in collaboration with Sonny Black and Wesley Louissaint. The first successful track was "Garde la tête haute" – "Keep Your Head Up High". The lyrics are profound and touching. The artist delivers a message of hope. She stands out by her charisma and the quality of her lyrics.

On June 26, 2009, she interpreted a song in honour of the deceased Aimé Césaire. Senaya is one of the most brilliant and most articulate young artists of our day. This singer possesses a divine talent and is gifted in languages. She speaks **seven** different languages: **Creole, Wolof, Spanish, Italian, French, English and German**

Exclusive Interview With The Great Singer/Songwriter Senaya

Written by Patricia Turnier

Monday, 04 October 2010 18:58

. She radiates an openness of mind and a universality which allows her to reach a very large public. Senaya, a citizen of the world and ambassador without borders, gives generously of herself in concert. She sings with her heart and has all the advantages of being able to conduct a great and lengthy international career. We met Senaya in Montreal, where she sang a few songs from her album during our interview.

Conversation held in the fall of 2008 with Patricia Turnier, LL.M. (Master's degree in law), Editress-in-Chief of Megadiversities. This interview has been published also in Europe and Africa (in 2009).

[Interview translated from French by Murielle Swift, BSc., MEd.]

P. T. At what age did you begin to develop a passion for music and when did you decide to make it your career?

S. I cannot say for certain at what age this passion began to develop, but I am able to mention that music was always a part of my environment and my life, through my parents and particularly, my older sister. They sang so many tunes. My mother would often hum around the house. My father plays guitar. It wasn't his profession, but he would play this instrument for fun. I would see my parents dancing in the living room to the tune of Miriam Makeba and the music of that era. For myself, specifically, I did not decide at a certain age to become a singer. However, at the age of eight I began writing songs and poems on various topics: life, love, etc.

When I started my studies at Schoelcher University in Martinique, I began writing songs at a more professional level with my student friends. I was part of a small singing group at the time. People started telling me that I sang well. I did this mainly as an amateur, even though I did win a small contest in 1980. I took my vocation more seriously when I arrived in Montreal. I started gaining greater experience in music and on stage. At the time, someone was looking for a back vocalist for a local singer. Things were starting up for me. In this way, I met musicians, [singers](#), and others in the industry. I was having problems with the record label at the time. I was giving concerts, but nothing else was taking shape. This situation brought us to create, in 1997, a group called Sun Roots, comprised of the musicians I had met. This allowed me to evolve and make headway professionally by perfecting my vocal technique and my musical knowledge. I am self-taught, I never attended a special institution to learn music. Rather, I obtained stage experience, therefore practical training. I enjoy this experience and I respect it. From the year 2000 onwards, I truly began to make it my career.

Written by Patricia Turnier
Monday, 04 October 2010 18:58

At the time, I was doing some interpretation and I began composing by writing texts. We sang in Creole, in Douala, in French and in Spanish. It was truly diverse, particularly because there were three people from Cameroon in our group. We sang as often in Quebec as we did in other parts of Canada. This allowed me to become stronger on stage. I learned to perfect my vocal presence, among other things.

P.T. Did you ever record your performances in order to analyse yourself by watching the footage?

S. Yes, most definitely. We had VHSs and DVDs of all our concerts and it was in this way that we evolved, by observing our non-verbal language, which communicates many messages. The stage is really something else; you have to practically throw yourself off a cliff.

P.T. You have to bare your soul.

S. Indeed. I learned how to do just that. We each had very different experiences. Some were more experienced than others. Sometimes, this type of situation can create disparities and conflicts. But in spite of that, it was a wonderful experience which allowed me to perform many times in various festivals and in other venues. It allowed me to better understand myself, to grow spiritually, to put myself out there, which gave me opportunities to share all of this with the public. In 2000, I decided to leave the group for various reasons. We were having difficulty in finding a direction, in making decisions as a group. There are times when you just have to leave. So when I left, I tried finding my own way. In 2001, I performed in concerts. I explored different styles of music to see which one I wanted to focus on. I also wanted to discover who I was musically. I was receiving various offers but I was not able to truly recognise myself in them. I was supposed to be present at the Granby Festival in 2001, which I finally ended up not attending at the time, which I believe was a wise decision. I wasn't ready yet and I believe that if I had attended in 2001, the events of 2003 would not have taken place [laughs].

2003 was a very special year. I met a guitarist, Wesley Louissaint, of Haitian origin. He had just arrived in Canada. I offered him hospitality. We enjoyed putting our artistic talents together during our jam sessions. Increasingly, things were falling into place for me. I had the opportunity to perform in acoustic concerts, which I found very interesting. A woman in that milieu suggested that I participate in the author-composer nights at the Escogriffe on Saint-Denis street, Sunday evenings. Acoustic sound was very new to me. Normally, I was supported by my band. At the Escogriffe, all I had was a guitar and percussion. I was discovering this new universe. It was a beautiful opportunity for me and I asked Wesley to accompany me. In this way, we began composing songs together which we would present on

Written by Patricia Turnier
Monday, 04 October 2010 18:58

Sunday evenings. The public's response was positive. It was a real success. We took the tunes of Soul Creole, Umjala, Mwen Té La , and Il faut pas with the arrangements of that time. I was getting hooked on the acoustic style.

P.T. Which artists have inspired you over the course of your life?

S. Wow! There are so many and they are all so different: most definitely Miriam Makeba, Whitney Houston, Stevie Wonder (a true genius in my book), Celia Cruz, and others. I have eclectic and diverse tastes when it comes to music. I love world music. In fact, everything inspires me; I have a great artistic curiosity. I love going toward other cultures and discovering them. I have always lived in this way. I have never lived my life with barriers. I love music of different eras, for instance going back to the 1950s with Billie Holiday, Louis Armstrong, Miles Davis, etc. Their music and their stories as well have inspired me.

P.T. You are often compared to Corneille by being called the female version of Corneille. What do you think about that?

S. I find that normal. As a new artist, one often tries to find references. I think I am simply myself. Certainly there are similarities in terms of the work done on francophone soul and its production. Steven Tracey was Corneille's producer. Sonny Black was one of Corneille's co-producers and, consequently, we automatically make certain associations because an important part of the team surrounding this artist was also present in my album. I have nothing against people making references but not to the point of my being called the female version of Corneille. I don't like that too much because it can give the impression that I don't have my own personality, which is definitely not the case. Certain people interpret this as meaning that I don't like Corneille. This is completely false. I am his number one fan. Actually, this is not exactly the case [laughs] rather, I am one of his number one fans! I really enjoy his first album and what he represented there. I raise my hat to him. It is not easy to make people groove to francophone soul. The beat, the rhythm, is much easier to manage in English. Hats off for being able to make the French language groove! Respect! We must be able to respect our peers. Just as well, if Corneille was able to reach part of his dreams. It does not take anything away from anyone to admire the success of another and to respect him. There are people who believe that it takes something away from them, but this is not at all the case. Great job, Corneille!

P.T. You have already mentioned in the past that you feel obliged to choose between

Written by Patricia Turnier
Monday, 04 October 2010 18:58

your Guadeloupean and your Senegalese heritage. How did you learn to deal with that, and could you tell us about the influence your cultural mix has had on your songs?

S. When we are young, people tend to compartmentalise us. They always wanted me to choose, regardless of their own origin. I found this hurtful and irritating. Certain people even accused me of lying because my answer did not satisfy them. These people judged me, dissected me and decided who I was in order to place me in a labelled box. Choosing an identity would cause me to reject or to deny the other part of me. In my heart, I consider myself as much Senegalese as Guadeloupean. We could also speak at length on the significance of the Senegal and the Guadeloupe identities.

P.T. In each culture, there exist various “sub-cultures”.

S. Yes, exactly. For instance, we cannot say that all Senegalese or Bangladeshi are the same. I'm sorry, but things are not that simple. By the way, I have also met people who told me that if I didn't sing in Wolof, I was not Senegalese. Others told me that if I didn't sing in Creole, I was not from Guadeloupe. I'm sorry. Even if I sing in French, I represent Guadeloupe with my whole soul. In my album, “Garde la tête haute” – “Keep Your Head Up High”, I sing in Creole. And when I do, I think of my mother. For me, Guadeloupe is connected to my mother and she also represents my childhood memories. This has influenced my music as well as Senegal and Africa even if I do not sing in Wolof on the album. We must be able to perceive the subtlety in all of this. The word Creole represents the mixing of cultures which is part of me and is transposed into my songs.

P.T. How have your many trips and the other languages you speak had an impact on your music?

S. They have brought me an openness of mind. Languages represent something very natural for me. Since my early childhood, I have been travelling. In my own family, we see mixing. My grandmother comes from India. For me, the mixing of cultures is completely normal and I never had to think about it. This reflected itself naturally in my music. I had to stop and think about it for my first album in order to explain my journey.

P.T. In 2003, you received a prize at the Granby festival. I know how important this

Written by Patricia Turnier
Monday, 04 October 2010 18:58

event was for you. Could you tell us about it?

S. Granby was wonderful! Before performing in this city, I had spoken about it with Wesley. We sent in a demo. It all started with a preselection. I was aiming for this because it was very important to me. I knew that this was the most important francophone contest in North America where the biggest Quebec singers, such as Isabelle Boulay and Lynda Lemay, perform. I told myself how incredible it was to be judged by peers of such professional caliber, who can provide such an assessment of quality. I knew that other professionals in this field would be present, such as broadcasters for Spectra, people from the Montreal International Jazz Festival, the Francopholies, etc. It was clear to me that participating in this event could only be an enriching experience. I knew I was going to take something away from this experience. I was hoping to obtain a professional opinion about my artistic work. Another thing I found interesting: when someone is selected for this contest, they are hosted by a family. I had the opportunity of living with a beautiful family. At first, we presented our material to three judges who are in our field (author-composers, etc.). We presented Soul Creole, Umjala, as well as a song which did not appear on the 2005 album, entitled "La misère" – "Misery", a tune which I adore. We went through every other step after that. At the preliminary finals, I was not allowed to bring my musicians with me. I found myself in the category of interpreter instead of that of author-composer-interpreter (where Wesley could have been included, since I had written songs with him). I was the only one in the interpreter category to present my own compositions. Normally, in this category, we sing others' songs. I was not permitted to bring my own musicians; I had to use those from Granby, but I was able to adapt. The instrumentalists were very kind. My family was with me to support and encourage me: my mother, my sister (from France), and others. My father was not there but he was present in spirit. Finally, it was decided that I was the winner. I told myself, "WOW" at that moment. It was incredible, and I was very proud. I appreciated it a lot. I was given 9000\$ as the winner, of which I gave 4000\$ to Wesley. After that event, I tried to produce my own album.

P.T. In the Spring of 2006, you were nominated at the prestigious Juno Awards in the category of French album of the year. What did this represent to you?

S. This represented enormous pride for me. It was the first year in which the Juno awards had changed their selection criteria. The jury had to choose the French album of the year based on artistic quality rather than according to sales. They were looking at the qualitative rather than the quantitative aspect. I was very proud because I told myself that artistic quality is even better, particularly for someone who is just starting their career in this domain. We were very happy with this nomination. I attended the Juno awards with the producer, my sister who is my manager, Wesley and Sonny Black. The three co-producers (of which I am one) were therefore present. We were there with the hopes of winning but as far as I am concerned, it was already a victory regardless of the outcome. At the Juno awards, we performed at a lounge and it was

Written by Patricia Turnier
Monday, 04 October 2010 18:58

wonderful. It was a superb and beautiful experience.

P.T. How does it feel for you, knowing that you are as popular in the Anglophone as the Francophone milieus in Canada?

S. It makes me feel good and confirms what I've always said: communication is not about language, but about human beings, simply put. As I mentioned before, I do not set up roadblocks. For me, it is normal to switch from English to French and vice versa. Speaking to a person who is Portuguese, Italian, French, or whomever is completely natural to me. Either way, music at first represents a form of communication without borders. Anglophones or allophones who have attended my concerts were moving to my music which spoke to them, even though I was not actually speaking their language in my songs. They are interested in what I give off on stage. An Anglophone, who attended one of my concerts, came up to me afterward to tell me that she felt inspired to learn French after having heard me. I am not here to make demands when it comes to language; I believe we must take people as they are and not irritate them. In fact, the only thing I truly stand for is the human aspect. Whether Hispanic or other, music represents a universal language which reaches everybody. The fact that I speak several languages helps me establish a contact with the public, when I want to make comments between songs, for instance. I will not, however, start explaining a song. I have never done that. I have been all over Canada and Anglophones have told me that they did not understand my lyrics, but this did not keep them from enjoying the music. They enjoyed my energy. For me, this is the miracle of life, knowing that communication does not use language.

P.T. It is deeper than words.

S. Exactly.

P.T. In observing the course of your life, we see that you are a woman with a good head and stoicism. You have tried to produce your own album (which you had started mentioning during this interview) and have earned the right to speak up in several arenas. What brought you to make these choices?

S. After my experience in Granby, I wanted to be independent by self-producing my album, "Garde la tête haute" – "Keep Your Head Up High" in 2005. I later met Sonny Black with whom

Written by Patricia Turnier
Monday, 04 October 2010 18:58

I collaborated. At the time, I eventually realised that producing is a lot of work (for instance, in raising funds through various means).

P.T.▯ These tasks take time away from the art.

S. Exactly, you understand the issue. Managing all of this was taking away a lot of my time. I still continued to manage certain aspects of production, even while delegating tasks. After five songs, I was approached and was told about Corneille's producer. They asked if I would be willing to work with him. We must not delude ourselves; naturally, when talking about Corneille, it's definitely a bonus.

P. T. The producer has proven himself.

S. Exactly. We met, and he detailed his conditions to me. We signed a contract. We started working on the title of the album, and so on. In the meantime, as producer, he obtained a licence from Quebec. AudioGram decided to join in. In this way, Steven Tracey signed a licence with this record label and I signed a contract with Level Music, the label of my producer. In France, he signed a licence contract with M6 Interactions. For Belgium, he finalised a contract with EMI. Steven Tracey was therefore my executive producer and I remained the author-composer of the album. I wanted to be the co-producer of the CD by collaborating with Sonny and Wesley. This allowed each of us to bring in our own worlds. The sharing of our vision brought about the album of 13 songs. For the second CD, which will be launched in 2009, I feel ready to be the only producer.

P.T.▯ Your most successful track was “Garde la tête haute” – “Keep Your Head Up High”, considered a social hymn.▯ The lyrics of this song are truly inspiring.▯ Could you share with us some of the most touching comments you have received from the public concerning this opus?

S. It is true that this song is like a hymn. I found it touching that people of diverse nationalities (from Senegal, France, Quebec, etc.) were arrested by this song. I was told the song was vibrant, joyful, and that it gave them hope. Others told me they had the impression that I was speaking to them personally through this song. This comment often came up, from people of all ages (from 4 to 70 years of age) and of all social classes. I was told, “I feel that you are talking

Written by Patricia Turnier
Monday, 04 October 2010 18:58

about my own life”.

P.T. You reach a lot of people.

S. I suppose so. The tunes which seemed to have touched people the most are “Garde la tête haute” – “Keep Your Head Up High”, and “Soul Creole”. The first actually did become a hymn, particularly on Radio Africa Number 1 in France. This song was in first place for four months. I was interviewed by one of Africa Number 1’s great hosts, Robert Brazza. It was a live interview conducted here during the Vues d’Afrique festival. Fans have told me that this song helps them persevere in life. People I don’t even know come up to me in the street and tell me, “Keep your head up high”. It makes me laugh [laughs] and deeply touches me.

P.T For them, it is a message of hope and of pride. It allows them to express their inner well-being.

S. Exactly. We keep our head up high in spite of our trials. Overcoming challenges or having tried in life is already something important. For this reason we can keep our head up high. What happened in the past does not necessarily determine what will take place later on. It is never too late.

P.T. We sense your spirituality in your lyrics. Could you tell us about the message you communicate in your song, “On s’en fout” – “We Don’t Care”?

S. There definitely is a certain spirituality. I do nothing without God. I believe in God. I think it was the philosopher Pascal who said that it doesn’t cost anything to believe in God. In fact, it’s free. I believe in God and every people give him the name they want. I am spiritual. It is important to me; we are all part of a universe. The song “On s’en fout” – “We Don’t Care” reflects an important theme, as far as I am concerned. Everyone speaks well and says what should be done. But few people actually practice what they preach. I’m speaking of individuals in power who make decisions. Usually, the common people do what they can with what they have. “On s’en fout” – “We Don’t Care” describes the indifference of people to human misery. There are people who do not feel it matters to them. We all have difficulty in understanding that God has given us a planet and everything that takes place on it affects us automatically. We are all connected. We cannot say, for instance, that Canada or any other country is separate, because it is part of a whole. We therefore cannot allow ourselves to feel indifferent by saying that just because a phenomenon takes place in Thailand, we are not affected. Why does it not

Written by Patricia Turnier
Monday, 04 October 2010 18:58

affect you? It does affect you. We are all responsible for this planet.

P.T. Martin Luther King said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”.

S. Exactly. There are many people who flee their responsibilities and their duties. Among my fans, there are those who have talked to me about it. Some have told me that my songs are good, but that they don't really like the ones that talk about misery. And yet, I often held back when it came to writing lyrics. I could have said much more on the topic. Understand, however, that I am not trying to sound preachy. But I believe that it is still important to express oneself as a witness. I have eyes, ears and sensitivity. I do not exclude myself in all of this; my goal is not to judge others. I am speaking to all of us in my songs. I do not understand it when someone says that they do not want to see any suffering. Must we cover our faces? It bothers me when people shut off the television and delude themselves into thinking that suffering does not exist. We are part of a whole and it is too easy to separate ourselves.

P.T. Recognising that there is a problem brings about responsibility. For this reason, some people would rather pretend to not see anything.

S. That's right. I would also add that certain people like to adorn the facts. I do not make light of or exaggerate suffering. I do not have the time for that and I do not understand why we must dilute facts. I actually find that it would be disrespectful. Do we need to embellish images of misery to tickle the ears of certain people? Poverty is not beautiful, I am sorry to say. It does exist and I find it important to talk about it. It may seem raw to some but as far as I am concerned, ignoring this situation is even worse.

P.T. Your album stands out by its Creole flavour. You also write in Guadeloupe Creole. Tell us about your song, “Mwen Té La”, and of the public's response to it.

S. “Mwen Té la” is definitely the song for Creolophones. This song was treated differently, in the technical sense. The voice is much more present. Mwen Té la is a love song. We could be listening to this Caribbean song on a beach, with a mandolin. When I write in Creole, something else develops. Indeed, every language I write in brings something new out from me. Each language possesses its own rhythm and universe. Mwen Té la is also a sad song, even though it is a love song. Creole is the language of my mother and she is the one I see

Exclusive Interview With The Great Singer/Songwriter Senaya

Written by Patricia Turnier

Monday, 04 October 2010 18:58

whenever I sing this song. She loves this song, as well as the others on the CD. Mwen Té la was very well received by the public. Everyone finds something in it for themselves, I believe. There are other songs that reach a greater number of people, such as “Garde la tête haute” – “Keep your head up high”. “Soul Creole” is very personal because it talks about me, and in spite of this it also reached many people. “Mwen Té la” is also very appreciated by non-Creole speakers. I translated the song into French on the album so that people could understand the lyrics, and bring down some barriers.



P.T. We notice in your album an unmistakeable interest in communicating a message of hope to the public, as well as a call to greater tolerance and heightened social consciousness to improve our world. You defend many values in your songs. To what extent is it important to be engaged in your compositions?

S. It is essential for me. Without wanting to repeat myself, I did hold back a lot. Perhaps I shouldn't have, but I have no regrets when I look back. What was important for me was not to sermonise or to give the impression that I was pointing fingers at others while excluding myself. I had studied the issue carefully and wanted to compose direct literature. I did not want to embellish; I wanted everyone to be able to understand, by using every-day language.

P.T. So it is important for you not to be pretentious.

S. Yes, exactly. I want people to be able to catch my message. It is important for me that a four-year old child be able to sing my songs. For me, it all starts at a young age. I want to provide substance to the new generation. In fact, many children are present at my concerts.

P. T. That fact is very revealing and demonstrates that the lyrics are healthy for them.

S. This is indeed what I'm aiming for. It makes me proud to know that my lyricism speaks to them. The values of joy and hope I weave into my songs are fundamental to me. Remember that I also have a daughter and it is important to me to give something to her generation. It is part of education. We can actually educate in several different ways. Music represents a very interesting medium in this sense. It must be done, however, without sounding pretentious or moralising. In this way, I consider myself an engaged artist and an activist. More precisely, I see myself as a humanist. Human contact is important for me, a fact which I try to remind the people around me of. This is how barriers are broken down. Unfortunately, it is often not the human values which are encouraged but rather materialistic values, appearances, that which is superficial. I sometimes feel overwhelmed when I consider the lack of depth. Again, I do not exclude myself from this. It is also important that I be able to look at myself in the mirror. I ask myself how we can foster these human values. I do it through my songs. As far as I am concerned, I cannot notice things and remain silent. The situation in Darfour, for instance: it is not talked about anymore and this is alarming. There are still people dying over there. It is important for me to share with people. Everything starts with universality, and in this way, we will be able to save humanity.

I would also add concerning my songs that I do not wish to be a simple singer. My music is actually too rhythmic for that. As I mentioned before, I held myself back in my first album, but this will not be the case for the second CD. There are those who said they do not want to hear about suffering. Others believe that Senaya does broach the topic of suffering, but also talks about hope. The responsibility to improve situations comes down on each of us. We must believe that just because we were elected as president, for instance, we are not responsible anymore. Each of us can give wholeheartedly, at our own level, in our own way, for instance by recycling or in other ways.

I think it is important to make donations honestly. When doing it in a self-serving way, we can become frustrated if we do not receive anything in return. For myself, I try to be authentic in my lyrics. I don't act as a different character when I am on stage. Besides, I don't have time for that. I live through my art truthfully. For me, being engaged, means first and foremost to be humanist. Simply put, it means to be.

P.T. The great metropolis of Montreal had chosen you as the official spokesperson for the first edition of the summer festival "World weekends" in 2006. What experience did this honour provide?

S. It was wonderful. When one is asked to be spokesperson, it is because we believe that this person will be able to fulfill this mandate well. It means addressing the media and all the official

Exclusive Interview With The Great Singer/Songwriter Senaya

Written by Patricia Turnier

Monday, 04 October 2010 18:58

authorities working on these world weekends. I worked with Montreal's city hall. I know people were satisfied. This event was something which I felt was important, and which resembled who I am. I was honoured to be chosen for the first edition of this festival, which is ongoing. I do not accept any responsibility which does not resonate in my heart or which does not respect my values. The "World weekends" festival represents the different cultures found in Montreal, and artists of all types, particularly in music, and of all origins. It was important that they be represented during the festival. This resembled me since I am originally from several different cultures. I am also very close to different cultures.

P.T. Also in 2006, you sang at the Senegalese cultural days in Canada. How important was this event in your eyes?

S. It was a great source of pride for me because it had been ten years since I had last been in Senegal. As far as I am concerned, it represents a certain recognition, since I know that Senegalese are very proud of their own. I toured in Senegal at the end of 2006. Even though I don't sing in Wolof, they know I am Senegalese, and that I won at the Granby festival and received a nomination at the Juno awards. For them, it was wonderful, and it was obvious that I should be part of the Senegal cultural days. In Montreal, the celebration took place at the beautiful Delta hotel. This event allowed Senegalese to further discover my work and my music. I was very touched to be considered one of them. I am part of that country, of the Senegalese culture and of the Diaspora. When we are recognised by our own (be it by people from Senegal or Guadeloupe), it means a lot. I am glad to be part of these people groups. I am also glad to be recognised by people in Quebec since I have been living here for about ten years. I am also touched to be appreciated by the French in France, since they are also part of my culture. I actually possess French nationality.



P.T. On June 26, you sang at the Alizé Club in Montreal as an homage to the distinguished Aimé Césaire. What was your experience of that event?

S. Allow me to explain how that came about. I was approached by Moïse Mougnan, editor (Grenier Editions), one month before the event. He explained his project of wanting to honour the great Aimé Césaire. He thought it was important that Quebec also honours this remarkable man. Césaire has influenced many Quebec poets. Moïse wanted to know what I thought about such an event and whether I wanted to be part of it by participating on a committee. As far as I

was concerned, I thought it was a fantastic idea. For me, Césaire was a very respectable man, a revolutionary, an activist in his own way, and a humanist. Césaire and Senghor are among the men who have greatly inspired me. These people have allowed me, precisely, to keep my head up high. I confided to Moïse that I was actually hoping for my second album to honour Césaire and Senghor. I also had to think about the language I wanted to use to present them. I would have liked to meet Aimé Césaire. It was unfortunately too late to meet Senghor. I told Moïse that it was no coincidence; everything fell into place. I was therefore part of eight people on the Aimé Césaire committee, which would also eventually want to distribute booklets of this fiery writer to schools and CGEPS. Every year, on June 26, we will celebrate Aimé Césaire day all over Quebec. On June 26 2008, we decided to honour him through various capsules. For the first time, the Premier of Quebec was solicited by a citizen, Moïse, to share thoughts on Aimé Césaire. This had never happened before. This event was broadcast live on June 26. It was a very special and wonderful time. At the moment, we are working on a DVD where various sports, political and artistic personalities will share their views. Citizens also provided their comments. Each one made their contribution concerning their opinions on the broad themes surrounding Aimé Césaire, such as the *négritude*. The DVD will also contain the music I created, as well as various musicians. I had to think about the angle I would use in composing this music. I also wanted to make reference to Senghor. Moïse helped me by reminding me of a poem Senghor wrote about Césaire, who had also written a poem about Senghor. Moïse sent me these poems. I told myself that instead of writing something new, why not simply let Césaire and Senghor's voices be heard. From this perspective, I set the poem by Senghor, entitled "To Aimé Césaire: letter to a poet", to music. At first, it was a challenging task. Making Senghor groove is quite an exercise [laughs]! I had to go to the Notre-Dame Basilica in Montreal to compose and to be inspired. It was important for me to do something good which resembles Césaire, while respecting my own approach and my artistic direction. I also wanted young people to appreciate the song, because it is in this way that the poet will stay alive. Young people listen through dance so it was important for me to be able to make them groove while listening to lyrics about Césaire. This represents my artistic orientation. I also wanted to add a Creole flavour. So I combined percussion, Zouk, Soul, R&B and guitar. To top it off, I added a chorus which was my written contribution. The song "To Aimé Césaire: letter to a poet" will be part of my next album.

P.T. Speaking of which, I was also about to ask you if you had any new projects you could share with us.

S. My new project is my second album which will be launched ideally in 2009 at the latest. I want to spread my wings: see France, Europe, Africa and the Caribbean. I was able to sell 17 000 copies of the first CD single in France without any promotional work. I told myself that it might be good to remind people of who I am with my new album. It would be a way to resituate people who knew me by "Garde la tête haute" – "Keep Your Head Up High" and "Soul Creole". My songs have been widely circulated in Africa and in the Caribbean but no one has ever actually seen me. Inshala, may your article be the beginning of that visibility [laughs]! We will

Exclusive Interview With The Great Singer/Songwriter Senaya

Written by Patricia Turnier

Monday, 04 October 2010 18:58

want to pursue the promotion overseas, which had started with the first album. The difference now is that I am the producer, along with my sister who is my manager. I am surrounded by a small and supportive team. This will allow me to later concentrate myself solely on the artistic aspect.

P.T. I see that autonomy is very important to you. Do you consider yourself a businesswoman?

S. Certainly, I am a businesswoman, but also a producer and an artist. I increasingly believe that the artist must be aware of the production and business aspects. It is less and less true that a singer should be limited to simply the artistic side of things. Anyone who is truly intelligent will not be able to do everything, unless they are crazy. We have to see the various aspects of involvement. We can still be an artist while keeping an eye on the business and production side of things. It is important to be surrounded by good people and to know how to delegate according to people's abilities. I consider myself an entrepreneur in the artistic field. Art represents work. Sometimes, we see it as a superficial field, but it is actually daily work. Every day I use my instruments to perfect myself.

P.T. The artistic world is far from being superficial. It is essential, since it provides pleasure in life.

S. Indeed.

P.T. Finally, may we know, Senaya, what your real name is?

S. [Laughs] My real name? It is simply Senaya. [Laughs]

P.T. Thank you, Senaya, for having shared with us your rich life story!

Exclusive Interview With The Great Singer/Songwriter Senaya

Written by Patricia Turnier

Monday, 04 October 2010 18:58

Selection from the song “Garde la tête haute” – “Keep Your Head Up High”, a message of hope and inspiration

**It's crazy, a funny kind of life, I'll give you that
Not easy to understand
It's a passion, foolishness
Which you hang onto with reason**

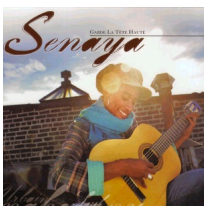
**You have known many failures
Received many refusals
Cleared away many liars
Mastered many follies
Today, you doubt yourself
You remain stuck in your bubble
But above all, don't forget!**

**Keep your head up high, regardless of your path...
Keep your head up high, regardless of your tomorrow...**

Senaya (2005)

[Lyrics translated from French by Murielle Swift, BSc., MEd.]

www.myspace.com/senaya



Exclusive Interview With The Great Singer/Songwriter Senaya

Written by Patricia Turnier

Monday, 04 October 2010 18:58

Senaya's CD, "Garde la tête haute" - "Keep Your Head Up High", available on amazon.ca and .fr

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZAMSYzc1OL0>