



## AFRICAN ODYSSEYS

# Going to Mars: The Nikki Giovanni Project

+ Q&A with Chanje Kunda, Bianca Wilson and host Chardine Taylor-Stone

### Going to Mars: The Nikki Giovanni Project

**Directors:** Joe Brewster, Michele Stephenson  
**Production Companies:** Confluent Films, RADA Studio, Just Films  
**Producers:** Joe Brewster, Michele Stephenson, Tommy Oliver  
**Cinematography:** Greg Harriott, Alfredo Alcantara, Derek Wieseahn, Shawn Peters  
**Editing:** Terra Long, Lawrence Jackman  
**Music:** Samora Pinderhughes, Chris Pattishall  
USA 2023  
102 mins  
Digital

Contains language which some viewers may find upsetting

This life-affirming, award-winning documentary follows legendary poet and activist Nikki Giovanni, aged 80, as she looks back on her legacy and reflects on her mortality. Combining archive, personal reflection and performance, with additional contributions by Taraji P. Henson and archive featuring James Baldwin, the film recounts Giovanni's life story, from her early immersion in Civil Rights activism, through the Black Arts Movement and Black Lives Matter protests, and looks towards an uncertain future.

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In 2003, Oprah Winfrey sought out some of America's greatest poets to contribute to an issue of *OWN Magazine* dedicated to the different parts of the human body. There was a mad dash by poets to choose the heart, the brain and the skin to serve as poetic metaphor for their balladry. African-American poet Nikki Giovanni's choice best illustrates her approach to life. She chose the feet and then spun a compelling and inspirational tale using the feet of African American women to describe their struggle and ultimate triumph over oppression. This is the life work of Nikki Giovanni, using poetry, humour and satire to inspire us to think, challenge assumptions and ultimately demand equity and justice.

*Going to Mars* is a feature length documentary film in which the artist, one of America's greatest living poets, orators and social commentators, will compel audiences to laugh and cry using her poetry and biting social commentary. As a social commentator Nikki Giovanni stands toe-to-toe with the best. She has the satirical wit of a Will Rogers and the comedic timing of David Letterman. She has influenced both her contemporaries, from Muhammad Ali to Maya Angelou, as well as today's hip-hop artists such as Kanye West. She in turn demands, using a contrarian point of view, that we question our assumptions about race, gender, equity and privilege and challenges us to hope and dream for a better tomorrow.

*Going to Mars* opens in the present-day, as she walks on stage in a New York City theatre to deliver more than just her poetry. One thousand theatregoers come to hear her. Mostly they have come to listen to her personal stories of love, loss, and family. Over the course of the film we will travel through time, going back and forth from her speech to the historical events she experienced, and to current personal intimate moments – all told exclusively through her voice, both archival and current. We will experience Nikki's musings on ancient history and travel with her on a slave ship through the Middle Passage. She will share and recount emotions associated with her grandmother's pound cake then make astute connections between the Civil Rights Movement and today's Black Lives Matter movement. We will travel to Mars from the vantage point of a 17th century slave voyage. All of this in 90 minutes while laughing, crying and questioning.

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Sun 3 Mar 15:15

**Art in the Making: A Sign is a Fine Investment** +  
intro by Steve Foxon, Curator of Non-Fiction, BFI  
National Archive + **Exit No Exit + 1 in a Million**  
Mon 4 Mar 18:15

**Projecting the Archive: Dance Pretty Lady** + intro  
by Marc David Jacobs, writer and film nerd  
Tue 5 Mar 18:30

**Restored: Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde**  
Tue 5 Mar 20:45

**Experimenta: The Blue Description Project:**  
**Blue** + discussion  
Fri 8 Mar 18:15

**Filmmaking for Artists:**  
**Beginners Filmmaking Workshop**  
Sun 10 Mar 10:30–16:30 (one session)

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**Intermediate Filmmaking Workshop**  
Sun 31 Mar 10:30–16:30 (one session)

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**Chanje Kunda** is a queer poet, performance artist and filmmaker. She predominantly works as a solo artist creating content across the literary, theatre, live art and film sectors. She has presented work nationally and internationally, including at the Southbank, London, National Arts Festival of South Africa, and Harare International Festival of Arts, Zimbabwe. Solo theatre productions to date are *Blue Black Sister* 2009 (Royal Exchange), *Amsterdam* 2014 (Contact), *Superposition* 2017 (The Lowry) and *Plant Fetish* (Home Mcr) 2019. Other international representation includes selection by the British Council for IETM conferences in Romania 2017 and Croatia 2019 and Luxembourg 2023. Film short films include *Physics* for BBC Verb New Voices, *Kintsugi Gold* for DadaFest International Festival, *Toilet Roll Gate Retrospective* MIF and *Victory Is Yours* for Imperial War Museum (a call for an end to all war everywhere).

**Bianca Wilson** aka Island girl is a multi-instrumentalist and singer from south London. Focusing mainly on the banjo, their quest into music is rooted in celebrating sound as a reflection of diasporic experience; journeying through the different musical epochs of traditional music and incorporating that into their personal style.

**Host: Chardine Taylor-Stone** is an award-winning cultural producer, Black feminist activist, and writer. She was featured in *The Voice* newspaper as one of the Women Who Rocked the World in 2015, *Diva Magazine's* LGBT Power List 2016 and Buzzfeed's 'The Most Inspiring British LGBT People of 2016'. A regular on the Pride Power List, in May 2017 Chardine won the British LGBT Award for 'Outstanding Contribution to LGBT+ life'. In 2018 she was nominated by Diva Awards for LGBT Activist/Campaigner of the Year and has again been nominated by Diva Awards in 2020 for 'Unsung Hero'. A committed trade unionist she is vice-chair of the Musician's Union Equalities Committee and newly elected member of the London Regional Committee. Chardine is also a newly appointed trustee of London Black Women's Project, a specialist and dedicated organisation for Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic women and girls who have experienced violence and abuse.