

## Press Release

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## RomnjaJazz: The so-called "Roma music" can also do Jazz.

**On the occasion of the International Jazz Day , RomaTrial e.V. presents the artistic one-year female jazz project, which received funding from the Berlin Senate Department for Culture and Europe in 2019. It supports three musicians with Roma or Sinti backgrounds who refuse clichés of any kind.**

The RomnjaJazz project reacts to the continuing discrimination and under-representation of women in the jazz scene, especially female musicians and composers who identify as "People of Color" or have a minority background.

From February to December 2019, the jazz musicians and composers **Riah Knight, Matilda Leko and Tayo Awosusi-Onutor** will work with experts from various fields to advance their artistic development, improve their practical management skills and create an appealing image to represent themselves. The program is divided into three phases: visibility, composition and collaboration. In addition to workshops and the development of new music pieces, joint performances in Berlin are also planned. **"I think this project is really needed, not just for our community and how we occupy space in the mainstream, but also for women in the Berlin jazz scene in general. RomnjaJazz is one of many examples of women coming to the forefront in Sinti and Roma art and activism. We are many, and we will continue to rise,"** says Riah Knight.

The project wants to showcase the heterogeneity of the Sinti and Roma communities and also wants to highlight the participating artist's individual contributions to society. Therefore RomnjaJazz is also a way to counter the daily and omnipresent devaluation of Sinti and Roma. "Romnja" stands for the female plural form of the self-description. **Tayo Awosusi-Onutor says: "Many of the musical contributions by Sintizzi and Romnja are not visible to the public. Therefore I am especially happy to be part of the RomnjaJazz project together with two sisters and colleagues. I think this is a very special project. People should be curious!"**

Further information and pictures can be found at [www.romnjajazz.com](http://www.romnjajazz.com).

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## Biographies of the participating artists:

The Afro-Sintezza of German-Nigerian origin **Tayo Awosusi-Onutor** sings with a warm soul voice and delivers a cool mixture of soul, RnB, jazz and music of the Sinti and Roma. The artist's parents also have a background in Funk & Soul music, which forms the musical base of Tayo's artistic background. She had her first guest appearance already at the age of 9 with the Funky Breeze Band, the opening act of the Ohio Players, and shared the stage with the legend Chaka Khan. Tayo has worked with artists such as Ferenc Snétberger, Mariah Carey and Sarah Connor. In her live performances, she shows the diverse aspects of her music that she embodies in such a fluid and natural way.



Tayo Awosusi-Onutor  
Photo: Stephanie Ballantine

**Riah Knight** was born in Sussex, England, and is described by Berlin critics as "the blonde Amy Winehouse". As a British Romnja, she grew up in the midst of the Roma civil rights movement. Described in her own words she plays Jazz Inspired, Downtempo and Original Soul, characterized by her hot-blooded singing, her atmospheric lyrics and a hint of folk music. She has been writing and performing as a singer and songwriter for twelve years, including institutions such as Notre Dame, the British House of Parliament, the Brighton Dome and the London Roundhouse. She currently works as an actress and musician at the Maxim Gorki Theatre. She can be seen in the plays "Roma Armee" (opening play of the 2017 season) and "Yes but No" (opening play of the 2018 season).



Riah Knight  
Photo: Stephanie Ballantine



Matilda Leko  
Photo: Stephanie Ballantine

The singer and composer **Matilda Leko** grew up with the rhythms of the Balkan and music of the Roma. Born in Vienna with Serbian and Roma roots, Matilda Leko began experimenting with different music genres early in her life: from the sounds of her homeland to pop, rock, soul and jazz. She studied jazz singing in Vienna and was one of the first singers in Austria to fuse Balkan music with jazz, and one of the first to give this music a new sound. Matilda's music is authentic, transcends borders and is not limited to a single genre or direction. Her compositions are discreetly accentuated with ethnic motifs, challenging and underlining her unusual and creative improvisations. Her repertoire also includes self-composed ironic, political Viennese songs. Her voice is bluesy, soulful and very versatile, and is used like an instrument when she is improvising.