



### **Maya Cunningham Biography (Long)**

Maya Cunningham is Lead Vocalist and Director of the Grandmother Project. Hailing from Washington DC, she is one of the most exciting of the new generation of jazz singers. She creates energy when she sings with impassioned vocals and cutting interpretations. Called a “talented young singer” by Village Voice jazz critic Gary Giddins, her vocals combine the elements of fiery soul, blues and be-bop jazz phrasing.

With a dazzling smile and an electric persona, Ms. Cunningham arrived on the New York City jazz scene in the early 2000s, giving a whirlwind of performances around the city. She has been a featured vocalist at venues like Jazz at Lincoln Center, and on national tours with well - known jazz musicians, including Wycliffe Gordon, Ali Jackson, Stephon Harris and Rodney Whitaker. Combining the improvisation and phrasing of the many early jazz singers who have influenced her, she reinterprets standards, new songs and her own compositions with an original style that is all her own. Her shimmering five octave range all at once floats into the stratosphere of the rarified coloratura and then swoops back down into gut - bucket soul power. She is also a painter, quilt maker and composer, having penned over fifty songs.

She conceived of the Grandmother Project through the inspiration of the bold and brilliant African – American women who have shaped her as a vocalist, scholar and artist. With the voice, the pen, the sewing needle and the brush, her name sake Maya Angelou, Mildred Taylor, Gloria Naylor, Billie Holiday, Abbey Lincoln, Faith Ringgold, Carmen McRae, the Quiltmakers of Gee’s Bend and many others have influenced Ms. Cunningham’s music and art.

Ms. Cunningham holds a Bachelors of Music degree in jazz studies from Howard University and a Master of Arts degree from Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College. She is also a scholar and is currently pursuing an MA/Phd in Ethnomusicology with a focus on African – American and West African music at the University of Maryland, College Park.

**[www.GrandmotherProject.com](http://www.GrandmotherProject.com)**

Sheldon Cunningham, Manager

Maya Cunningham, Director and Lead Vocalist

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She was inspired to create Grandmother Project by the bold and brilliant African – American women who have shaped her with the voice, the pen, the sewing needle and the brush, like Maya Angelou, Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Abbey Lincoln, Faith Ringgold, Carmen McRae and the Quiltmakers of Gee’s Bend, Alabama. Ms. Cunningham is a graduate of Howard University and Aaron Copland School of Music at Queens College with undergraduate and graduate degrees in jazz studies. She is currently pursuing an MA/Phd in Ethnomusicology with a focus on African – American music at the University of Maryland, College Park.

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