Time to Shed Our Skins
by Fiona Hayhoe-Weiland

Photo: Phillip Ramakers

“It’s time to shed our skins, not just confess our sins, it’s time to shed our skins, to feed the hunger within, for the paradise we have lost…” - Kira Kaipainen

Nils Kercher and Kira Kaipainen are life partners and unique world musicians who take listeners on multidirectional journeys. Their music simultaneously draws listeners out into the stark realities of our greater world, while also drawing them inward into the dazzling potentials of the human spirit. Theirs is a music that believes deeply in our fundamental interconnection, and the capacity we have to heal together. They embody the messages of their music in every aspect of their lives. It is this authenticity perhaps, that gives their music wings, allowing it to touch and inspire thousands across the world. Based in Bonn, Germany they both weave multiple traditions into their work.

Nils grew up with extensive training in western classical music, and as an adult was profoundly influenced by his travels in West Africa where he had the rare chance to study a variety of instruments and train with different masters. He holds a special place in his heart for the kora, the 21-stringed West African harp whose beautiful form, and distinct mellow sound, immediately arrest the eyes and ears of his audiences. He melds this spectrum of influences into his very own, yet universal language of music. His main instrument is perhaps his own voice, that carries a special force and transparency of its own.

Kira Kaipainen studied dance with artists from the National Ballet in Guinea and Mali. She loved to dance with the women in remote villages of the area. She has an intuitive gift for language and a deep capacity for perceiving what lies underneath the surface of things. It’s Kira who writes the poetic, soulful lyrics for most of Nils’ songs.

In the music they create together, the intensely personal mingles with the political, and universal truths are gleaned from local realities. Many of their themes have a raw intensity to them, and yet at the same time are infused with lightness, confidence and hope. Their latest music video, Time to Shed Our Skins, is a beautiful example of this.

The Backstory in Nils and Kira’s own words:

We had planned to do a video for this song this September and as it turned out this was the time after heavy floods in our area. Close to where we live, thousands of people had lost their homes and more than 200 had died. So for many people this was a personal trauma and shock. We were used to seeing catastrophes in countries far away, now the
many layers and aspects of such events manifested right next our home.

As these events were very much connected to the theme of the lyrics of "Time to Shed Our Skins," we had the spontaneous impulse to include and process some of them in our music video. We decided to break a taboo and bring music and dance into the midst of the devastation.

The feeling of shock in the atmosphere of the area was palpable. Yet, somehow it felt just right to use the power of music and dance to break through the invisible field of trauma and paralysis surrounding the place.

Doing this was just a drop in the ocean. We knew that the people affected would still have to go through the difficult journey of mourning their loved ones, or rebuilding their homes. But adding our drop felt like the right thing to do. And it was transformative for both of us to inhabit that space and do what we could to move the energy there, rather than doing what is mostly regarded as "appropriate behaviour"-- keeping a respectful distance and conforming to the sad, subdued mood that is palpably in the air.

After the release of the music video we received many letters from people who were very touched by this unconventional and simultaneously life-affirming way of facing reality. We heard from viewers who live in the area and had experienced the flood firsthand, as well as viewers from completely different parts of the world.

Anybody who has been to Western Africa knows that even in the midst of very poor or quite hopeless circumstances there is a readiness to share and go through emotions of joy or loss as a community together and thus keep the life energy moving and also helping the individual to heal.

But our modern civilisation has become a culture of isolation. People don’t often know how to share emotions and aliveness as a community. Sometimes one could think that the lockdowns that have been happening now everywhere in the world are in some ways a symbol or the outcome of our underlying mentality.

In the face of all of the challenges we face as humanity, our deepest wish is to share music and dance with all kinds of people, from all walks of life.

Below is the music video, its lyrics and a link to a special upcoming circle with Nils and Kira:

**TIME TO SHED OUR SKINS**

There was a warning

like there always is

the one you walk over

with the part of you

that plays the three monkeys
and wakes up one day

seeing hearing feeling
the fallen bricks
of a house
wanting to be built
seeing hearing feeling
the fallen bricks
of a home
made of seedlings
and tender wishes
sprouting underneath
the heavy rains
the heavy rains
there was a warning
a warning
there always is

Just blame it on the snake
if you need someone to hate
Just blame it on fate
it’s not us at any rate
who leave the trash behind
for the snakes to come will find
who's out of their mind
Will she rescue us next time?
will she rescue us this time?

There was a warning
like there always is
the one you walk over
with the part of you
that plays the three monkeys
and wakes up one day

seeing hearing feeling
the fallen bricks
of a house
wanting to be built
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the heavy rains
the heavy rains
the heavy rains
there was a warning
there was a warning
there always is

It's time to shed our skins
not just confess our sins
it’s time to shed our skins

to feed the hunger within

for the paradise we lost

it’s here we need her most

it’s here

lyrics by Kira Kaipainen

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Join a special circle with Nils and Kira this Sunday, "Music Born from Life’s Hidden Heartbeat," and hear stories, music and reflections from their journey! More details and RSVP info here.