

# Yukawa

## means to me...

what Chilombo means to Jhené Aiko. When she was younger, she didn't identify with her last name, Chilombo (meaning "wild beast"), which her father legally created for their family. In time, she grew to realise its significance, as her family's name and as a descriptor of herself, of who she was becoming (over and over again). Fully embracing the poetic meaning of Chilombo, she made it the name of her third studio album and tattooed her back with her own wild beast — half-dragon, half-phoenix. The whole album reflects what owning her last name means to her — a simmering, spiritual body of beautiful, metaphorical self-reflection.

Although my last name isn't legally Yukawa (yet), her story is similar to mine in that I hadn't fully identified with my family name. My paternal grandmother, Masako Yukawa, was Japanese and her husband, my grandfather, Louis Williams, was Black. My family adopted our African American culture approximately 90% more than any Japanese traditions. We don't speak Japanese, we only know a few words. We don't know our family in Japan, or whether they even want to know us. So, Yukawa never meant much of anything to me — I mean, I was always known as a Williams. And even Williams was foreign to me as a family name since I knew it came from the slave master's family that owned my ancestors way back when. Same goes for the surnames of both of my maternal grandparents. Yukawa was the only name that I knew came from my actual bloodline, yet I couldn't even identify with it.

*Like, honestly, what's really my last name? Who am I really? And am I defined by a name? What's in a name?*

Being of three different diaspora's — African, Caribbean and Asian — born in the Americas, I felt quite a bit displaced, in a way that may be easy to overlook. I didn't have pride in my last name, my family name, thus I wasn't particularly proud of my family, nor my heritage. A lot of people like me experience this same sort of shame. But when you come of understanding age, however old that may be, you learn new-old truths. You look back and notice things that you never knew were there before. You find that thing that you always knew was missing. That turning point occurred for me when I moved from my hometown of Goldsboro, North Carolina, to culturally-rich Greensboro, NC. It was in Greensboro that I learned the true meaning of community, of tribe. I realised the powerful importance of knowing and embracing who, and where, I *actually* come from, regardless of whether or not my family or society at large does. That led to my own definition of my family's name and my own definition of myself. To me, Yukawa means claiming my family in Japan, despite them not claiming us. It means honouring my sobo, Masako Yukawa, and her reverential decision to bring us into this world, even if it would seem to dishonour her family. It means having pride in my Japanese ancestry, just as much as my Afro-Caribbean ancestry, without regard to whether native Japanese people (or anyone in general) view(s) me as Japanese. It means that I'm breathing through the abundant flow of my blood, the richness of my throughline — seven generations back, seven generations forward — and relearning the culture that's already known in my bones. *I feel it.*

## I choose to own myself as my own.

Born and raised in North Carolina, with Gullah Geechee family and ancestors from South Carolina, I'm a proud Afro-Carolinian. My spiritual path of Ifá, Kemet, Sufi, and Shinto Buddhist enlightenment is at the forefront of everything that I do, reminding me of my lineage, and the destiny that I'm here to fulfill. I have my hands in music, writing, drawing, graphic design, filmography, and almost everything else imaginable, essentially "bleeding and melting otherworldly minds of narrative" to tell stories of heartbreak, death, and rebirth. I'm most invested in working with artists who seek a more profound connection with themselves, centred in artistic, holistic and ancient healing practices. I formed a rotating artist collective, 'TLWI..' (The Love Was In...), in 2021, in order to give that work its own foundation. The emotional empowerment of women, the PoC-Diaspora, and the LGBTQIAP2S+ community is a major pillar of focus that's threaded throughout TLWI..., as well as the rest of my work. Scribing since 7, my whole life changed when I started performing my poetry and recording it over instrumentation in '15. Three years later, I would complete my first body of work, under 'The Love Was In...'. I grew to understand that TLWI.. was much bigger than me, and realised it as the artist collective that it is today, branching out into my own separate discography in '21. Since then, I've released 24 RA YUKAWA projects, with the multi-bodied XXXALKHEMEY (TAOT) being my latest.

Day to day, you might find me writing books or reading them. If not that, then I'm probably working out in my home gym. But more often than not, you're guaranteed to catch me meditating during long drives. And if all else fails, I'm more than likely watching a "witty, irreverent, quirky" movie or show... or, my favourite, doing nothing at all.