

JONATHAN DESEAN NICHOLS Kokayi Danladi



Saturday, January 16, 2016 at 10:00 am

Fellowship Chapel • 7707 West Outer Drive • Detroit, MI 48235
Rev. Mayowa Reynolds, Officiating

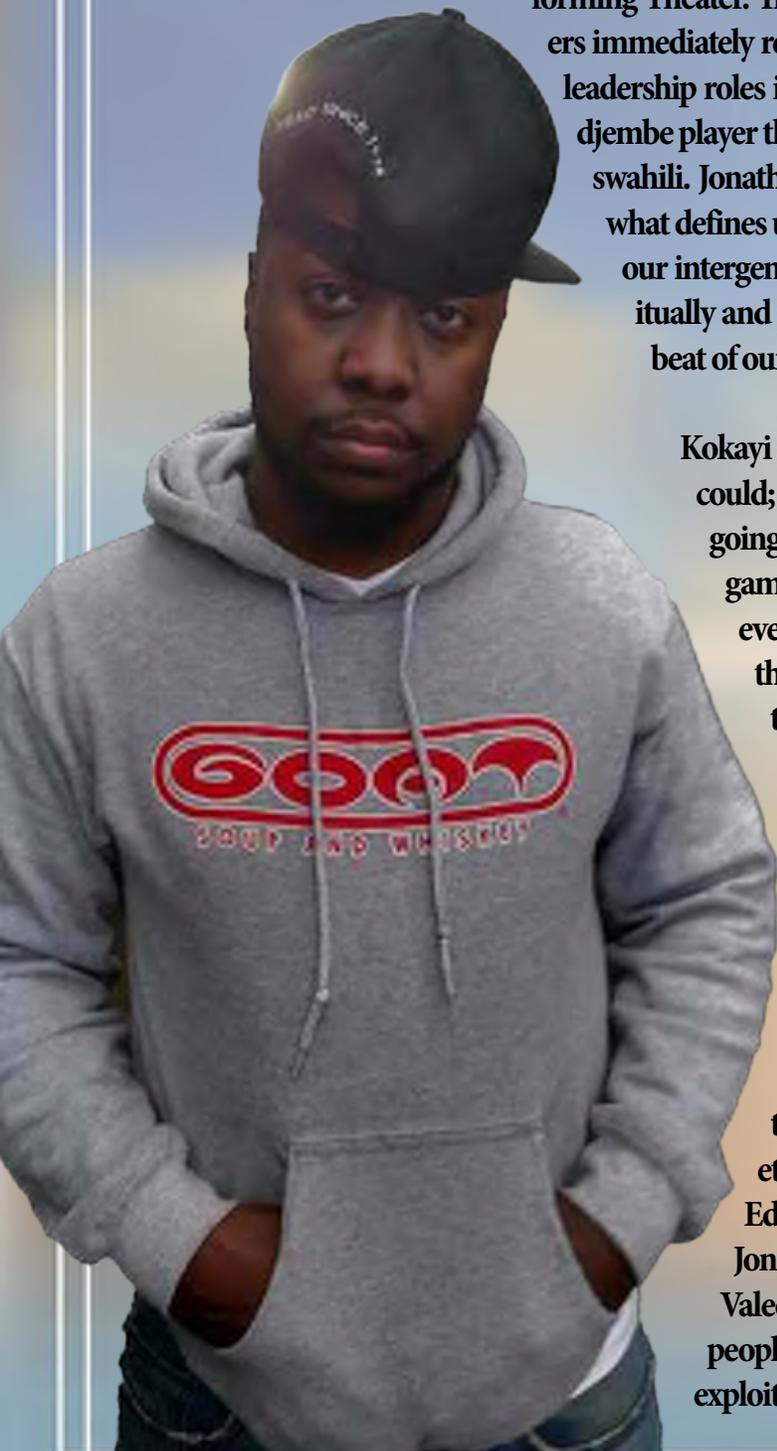
MAN IS A STAR ON THE STAGE OF THE UNIVERSE.

Jonathan DeSean Nichols (Kokayi Danladi) was born to Denise Talibah Smith and Jerome Nichols on January 13, 1986 in Fort Bragg, NC. Raised in the MotorCity, Jonathan built his reputation as being passionate, humorous, protective, loyal, honest and hardworking and he continued to strengthen these attributes positively impacting friends and family. While living on the Eastside of Detroit, Kokayi faced many life forming experiences which served to mold Kokayi's sense of integrity, strength, deep love for life and desire to heal communities of color across the diaspora.

Jonathan began attending Aisha Shule/ W.E.B DuBois Preparatory Academy at age 7 where he learned the craft and immediately fell in love with West African percussion. He became a member of Djembe Fola and the Pyramid Performing Theater. Trained by world renowned master drummers, his first teachers immediately recognized the musical genius in him and allowed him to take leadership roles in performances. By age 11, Kokayi traveled as a professional djembe player throughout Michigan. Djembe means "to gather the people" in swahili. Jonathan applied the knowledge that for Afrikan people rhythm is what defines us and informs us of our cosmology, our beingness. Rhythm is our intergenerational cadence and allows us to be insync psychically, spiritually and physically with all realms of existence. The drum is the heart-beat of our culture.

Kokayi spent invaluable time with his immediate family as often as he could; he would insist on family movie nights, hours of giggling while going down memory lane, spontaneous bbq's and all night board games. Asthma proved to be a challenge to Jonathan's health however it never held him back. Through martial arts, basketball with the bros, gymnastics and swimming, he sought to outgrow anything that stifled his capabilities to have a full- uninhibited life. Jonathan never failed in defining his own reality and destiny.

Kokayi was both an exemplary student and teacher. He was very creative, intelligent and hardworking in the classroom. He enjoyed learning and had a propensity for justice and fairness. While at DuBois Prep Academy he discovered his love & gift of architecture. He interned at Varner & Associates Architecture Firm one of the only African American firms in the midwest. He was inducted into the National Honor Society, won numerous OACES (Organization of African Centered Educators & Students) national and local science fair awards. Jonathan won the MLK Essay scholarship award, and graduated Valedictorian Class of 2004. Inspired by his desire to connect the people and find tangible solutions to urban issues of oppression and exploitation.



Kokayi left Detroit to attend Howard University School of Architecture in Washington, DC. While in DC, he became lead drummer and musical director of NSAA African Dance. Affectionately called Mr. Nichols by Howard Middle School students while teaching English he also was sure to instill principles and challenged students to think critically. Throughout college not only did Kokayi study diligently, he had a strong work ethic as he worked several jobs at a time to cover his own educational expenses. Building a network became his greatest ally during this time. He was a very proud and active member of organizations Phi Sig and G.O.D.. Utilizing rap, spoken word and freestyle ciphers with his friends in dorm rooms, initially for fun he quickly gained a vision for cultivating liberation for the people through his multi-genre music. Almost everyone received a “affectionate” nickname from Kokayi, his humor knew no bounds nor stopped at our comfort zones. This different and consistent display of affection teaches a philosophy that when we step outside our comfort zones, we heal via laughter and embrace our true, unique and highest selves.

After graduating with a Bachelors in Architecture in 2010, he journeyed to West Africa where he taught English and implemented an Architecture Design curriculum as a SABS fellow in Dakar, Senegal. While in Senegal, Jonathan spent hours at a time writing and galvanizing other musicians aimed to produce self-recorded music with only a microphone and a laptop as he embarked upon a path of self reflection and kujichagulia (self-determination) reconnecting with his cultural heritage in new and evolved ways.

Upon returning to the states, Jonathan immediately went to working to improve his community starting with his immediate family and through Akoben Warriors Society and Sankofa Leadership Society. His volunteerism included ushering a group of young men into manhood, that included his younger brother Jumoke. He added Danladi to his stage name as a mutual respect for the amazing growth that occurred during the rites training both for himself as well as the younger brothers. Danladi means born on Sunday.

With unwavering support, Kokayi moved to Denver, CO in 2013 to ensure that his life partner completed graduate school. His spirit quickly connected with artists in the community and within just two short years he co-created a group known as Black Lash. Under his leadership Black Lash toured throughout the region. He confidently performed as a solo artist, holding dear to tradition and ritual no matter the demographic of his audience by opening shows with libations and using cultural concepts in his lyrics. Kokayi became a founding member and facilitating artist for Creative Strategies for Change, a grassroots non-profit whose mission is to mobilize arts and education for social justice. He devoted his time and energy to humbly provide for his family in Denver and Detroit and was dedicated to his life’s work of leading community change through his music. He frequently performed with Cloud Kickers International as a contributing artist.

Kokayi was a man of intergenerational connectedness, he touched the lives of the youth, his peers, mwalimu (life teachers) and elders. We are assured Kokayi will be welcomed and embraced by many great ancestors that are mentioned throughout his music: Mary & John Daniel, Lilly & Jethro Nichols, Baba Nkomo, Baba Rashidi and others. May we never forget the work of our ancestors and that by calling their names, their legacy live on.

Kokayi made his transition on Sunday, January 3, 2016, ten days before his 30th birthday. He is survived by his mother, Denise Talibah Smith; his father, Jerome Nichols (Baba Rashad Alaji); his siblings, Shimekia Nichols, Imari Alaji, Jumoke Alaji, and Quentin Lily; and Aleja Parsons (life partner), the mother of the love of his life, Zemora Yacine Nichols (daughter).