



For Immediate Release

October 1, 2013

The Nile Project Releases Debut Album

The Nile Project is proud to announce the release of its first album, *Aswan*, named after the Egyptian city where it was recorded live at the collective's debut performance in January 2013. The concert was the culmination of a ten-day residency that brought together 18 artists from Egypt, Ethiopia, Eritrea, South Sudan, Sudan, and Uganda to collaboratively compose, perform, and record a new body of songs inspired by the Nile Basin's diverse musical traditions and instruments.

For millennia, the Nile has nourished lands of human, ecological, and cultural beauty. Connecting the polyrhythmic styles of Lake Victoria and the pointed melodies of the Ethiopian highlands with the rich modal traditions of Egypt and Sudan, the 4,200 mile river yields an enormous range of songs and dances, expressing stories, emotions, and daily life.

The Nile Project intertwines these traditions into a new, unified sound. A powerful pan-Nile percussion section drives the collective, which reunites traditional instruments of common ancestry while merging new ones. The plucked harp (lyre) and spike fiddle have been at the heart of the Nile's musical identity since ancient times. Today, modern versions of both instruments are found in every country within the Nile Basin. On *Aswan*, the lyre is represented by the Sudanese *masenkop*, Ugandan *adungu*, and Egyptian *simsimiya* and *tamboura*, while the spike fiddle manifests as the Ethiopian *masenko* and Ugandan *endingidi*. In curating the collective, co-producers Miles Jay and Mina Girgis sought to highlight the unique timbres of these instruments, while also surrounding them with complementary sounds from their respective traditions, including the Ethiopian saxophone, Egyptian *ney*, *oud*, and violin, and the bass guitar.

The collective's six vocalists sing in 11 different languages on *Aswan*. Their lyrics range from the deeply personal to the party anthem, exploring themes of identity, regional solidarity, intercultural relationships both between and within their respective homelands, their local music scenes, and living in the diaspora. On the track *Ya Ganouby* (Arabic for "Oh My South"), Cairo-based vocalist Dina El Wedidi sings about her regret for being disconnected from her south (a metaphor for the Nile), and her longing for it to become a more integral part of her life. The song is a musical expression of the collective's mission,

to come together and heal the broken relationships within their cultural and natural environments.

Over the course of their ten days together, the members of the collective participated in a deeply collaborative creative process. They started by introducing each other to the building blocks of their respective musical languages. Each musician then had the opportunity to share two original compositions or reimagined folk songs with the group, which they subsequently arranged and rehearsed in small ensemble configurations. At the midpoint of the residency, they played all of the songs for each other, and then selected the pieces they wanted to perform and record. The collective spent the following four days arranging these pieces for the 18 piece ensemble - weaving them into the seamless tapestry that is captured on *Aswan*. As Brooklyn-based Sudanese vocalist Alsarah put it, “We came in as separate musicians, but we’re now creating a little orchestra with a new sound—a Nile sound.” Each musician brought to the process a spirit of openness, a willingness to share knowledge, and an appetite to learn from colleagues—a microcosm of what the Nile Project stands for.

At a moment when riparian tensions over the proposed Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam have captured headlines around the world, the Nile Project offers an innovative model for cross-cultural dialogue and cooperation. The world’s longest river runs through the political boundaries of eleven countries and touches the lives of 437 million people. Over the past century, East Africa’s leaders have struggled to find ways to preserve and share this critical resource. Founded by Egyptian ethnomusicologist Mina Girgis and Ethiopian-American singer Meklit Hadero in 2011, the Nile Project responds to these challenges by inspiring, informing, and empowering Nile citizens to work together to foster the sustainability of their shared ecosystem.

With its power to promote dialogue, change perceptions, and inspire action, music is the Project’s natural starting place. By exposing local audiences to the cultures of their river neighbors, the initiative’s music provides a space for audiences to learn about each other and create a shared Nile identity. Building on this awareness, the Nile Project is developing educational programs, an online dialogue platform, and a Nile Prize to incubate innovative solutions to the region’s cultural and environmental challenges.

The Nile Project is currently accepting applications for its second annual musical residency, which will take place in Uganda in mid-January 2014. The collective will tour Africa directly following the residency, as well as Europe in 2014 and North America in 2015. For more information, please visit <http://www.nileproject.org>

Aswan was commissioned by Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts for Target Free Thursdays at the David Rubenstein Atrium and received generous support from Swiss Development Cooperation, the U.S. State Department, the Association for Performing Arts Presenters, and Red Bull Media.

Musicians

Adel Mekha / Egypt / Nubian percussions & vocals
Ahmed Omar / Egypt & Eritrea / bass guitar
Ahmed Said Abuamna / Sudan / *masenkop* & vocals
Alfred Gamil / Egypt / violin
Alsarah / Sudan / vocals
Asrat Ayalew / Ethiopia / *kebero*
Dina El Wedidi / Egypt / vocals
Hany Bedair / Egypt / percussions
Hazem Shahin / Egypt / *oud*
Jorga Mesfin / Ethiopia / saxophone
Lawrence Okello / Uganda / percussion & *enanga*
Meklit Hadero / US & Ethiopia / vocals
Mekuanent Melese / Ethiopia / dance & vocals
Mohamed Fouda / Egypt / *ney*
Michael Bazibu / Uganda / *adungu* & *amadinda*
Mohsen El Ashry / Egypt / *simsimiya*
Nyaruach Jal / South Sudan / vocals
Endris Hassen / Ethiopia / *masenko*

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