

The Nile Project: Egypt Concerts

Sunday 27 January, Aswan Cultural Palace, 8pm

Thursday 31 January, Al Azhar Park (Cairo), 8pm

Free, all ages

Following the two-week music residency in Aswan, which brings together an ensemble of Nile basin musicians to compose and record new music, the Nile Project presents its world premier with two free concerts in Aswan and Cairo.

“The Nile Project has been in the making for nearly two years and we are thrilled to be bringing such an exciting line up of stories, songs and musicians to audiences in Egypt. We hope these concerts showcase the fresh encounters among our musicians,” said Mina Girgis, founder and executive director.

During the residency (15-29 January at Fekra Cultural Center in Aswan), musicians from countries that share the Nile collaborate to create a new body of songs, drawn from the rich and diverse genres, traditions and instruments found throughout the Nile basin. Under the musical direction of Miles Jay (see notes to editors), the music residency provides a space for the musicians to learn about one another and compose and record new music to be performed in Africa and around the world.

The Nile Project was founded in August 2011 by Egyptian ethnomusicologist Mina Girgis and Ethiopian-American singer Meklit Hadero to address the Nile basin’s cultural and environmental challenges using an innovative approach that combines music, education and an enterprise platform. The world’s longest river runs through 11 countries (Congo DRC, Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, South Sudan, Sudan and Egypt) and touches the lives of 400 million people. The Project’s mission is to inspire, educate, and empower Nile citizens to work together towards fostering the sustainability of the river’s ecosystem, and engage them in a cultural dialogue that evokes Africa’s iconic river as a shared ecosystem.

The musicians taking part in the residency and concerts are (in alphabetical order, see notes to editors for biographies):

Adel Mikha
Ahmed Omar
Ahmed Said Abuamna
Alfred Gamil
Alsarah
Asrat Ayalew
Dina El Wedidi
Hany Bedair
Hazem Shahin
Jorga Mesfin
Lawrence Okello
Meklit Hadero (residency and Aswan concert only)

Mekuanent Melese
Mohamed Fouda (residency and Cairo concert only)
Michael Bazibu
Mohsen El Ashry
Nyaruach Jal
Endris Hassen (residency only)

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Notes to editors

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About Mina Girgis (Founder and Executive Director)

Mina is an Egyptian ethnomusicologist and arts entrepreneur living between San Francisco, CA and Cairo, Egypt. He has participated in organizing many multicultural events such as the Smithsonian Silk Road Festival in Washington DC and Farah El Bahr Euro-Mediterranean Festival in Alexandria, Egypt. He is the founder and the Executive Director of the Nile Project and the Zambaleta Institute.

About Miles Jay (Musical Director)

Contrabassist and composer Miles Jay has collaborated extensively around the world in a wide range of ensembles and productions. Since receiving his BA from UCSB, he spent six years in Egypt, Lebanon and Greece, furthering his musical immersion in the modal music of the Middle East and the Mediterranean. Dedicating himself to developing the voice of the contrabass within these various regional

musical aesthetics, he has worked extensively with the ensembles of Youssou N'Dour, Ziad Rahbani, Fathy Salama, Ross Daly, Naseer Shamma, Niyaz, Mashrou3 Leila, the Cairo Symphony Orchestra, and most recently on Nadine Labaki's latest film score, *W Halla2 La Wein (Where Do We Go Now)*. In addition to his unique playing technique, Miles has received wide acclaim for his innovative craftsmanship as an instrument maker; personally designing and hand building a new type of double bass, inspired by several traditional instrumental designs, as well as the need for a compact, travel friendly acoustic bass. Miles is about to release his first solo album titled *the Troposphere*.

About the musicians

Adel Mekha

Adel Mekha is a widely respected Nubian percussionist and vocalist. With his knowledge of traditional Nubian rhythms and an expressive singing voice, Adel has worked with a wide range of ensembles and projects in and around Cairo, Egypt. Currently, Adel is a member of *Uss We Lazq (Cut & Paste)*, a socially engaged Egyptian band.

Ahmed Omar

Born in Egypt to an Eriterian father, Ahmed took his first steps in music at a Nubian music institute in downtown Cairo. He started with singing, playing the guitar, and eventually moving on to his current instrument, the bass guitar, which he plays for leading Egyptian bands such as *Senet, El Dor El Awal, Beshir, and Wust El Balad*. Ahmed has also organized the *Afri-Cairo Music Festival* and is a partner and manager at the *Wust El Balad* recording studio.

Ahmed Said Abuamna

Ahmed was born in East Sudan near the Red Sea, and is from the Hadandawa, the largest of the Beja clans. He comes from a long line of *masankop* players, and was taught by his father beginning at age 7. Also a keyboardist, he performs regularly at weddings and other events, often accompanied by several dancers, and is well known in the Beja community for his distinctive vocal style. Since 2009, Ahmed has been collaborating with Miguel Merino as the *Otaak Band*, combining the unique timbre of the *masankop*, and Ahmed's Beja singing with drumset, electric and acoustic bass, keyboards, and a variety of hand drums and percussion.

Alfred Gamil

Alfred Gamil is an alumni of Egypt's Arab Music Institute (graduating in 1975 with a distinction) and the High Institute for Arabic Music (graduating in 1983 with an MA, honors of the first degree). Later on, his Ph.D thesis bore the title *Achieving a number of Arabic Maqamat (gemmas and scales) of the Turkish Sazenda*. All along, he also specialized in studies of voice, lute and the *tumbur* (a long-necked, stringed instrument resembling the mandolin). He studied violin since 1987 with Professor Bretzy as his main instrument and was a student of the renowned Abdou Dagher, a violin legend dubbed *Malik Al-Taqasim* (king of improvisations). He has been performing internationally for many years and has founded and leads his group *Qithara*.

Alsarah

Alsarah is a singer, songwriter and ethnomusicologist. Born in the capital city of Khartoum, where she spent the first eight years of her life, she started her musical training at the age of 12. After attending The Pioneer Valley Performing Arts Charter High School, in Hadley, MA, she spent four years at Wesleyan University studying Music with a concentration in ethnomusicology. Residing in Brooklyn, NY, she performs music from different parts of the Middle East and East Africa. Most recently, she has been working with the Nubatones.

Asrat Ayalew

Asrat has been a professional kebero player for eight years, throughout which he has nurtured profound musical bonds with some of the best traditional singers and masenqo players in Ethiopia. He performed in the USA as a founding member of the trio Zena Bel Bandas and as part of Debo Band, playing the Kennedy Center, Lincoln Center, Levitt Pavillion, Joe's Pub, Lowell Folk Music Festival, Chicago World Music Festival and many more. He has worked with Akale Wube, ETH and Arat Kilo, and has recorded with France's Badum Band. He regularly performs at Addis Ababa's Fendika Azmaribet Bet.

Dina El Wedidi

Dina discovered her passion for music at the age of 19 when she joined the reputable Warsha Theater Troupe, where she mastered the iconic vocal and spoken word traditions of Al-Sirah Al-Hilallya and Al-Madih. Today, Dina and her band are a popular staple in Egypt's budding independent music scene, experimenting with local idioms and genres that fuse the sounds of instruments such as the accordion, trumpet and the Irish violin. In 2012, Dina was the recipient of The Rolex Mentor and Protégé Arts Initiative with Gilberto Gil as her mentor.

Hany Bedair

Hany Bedair is a professional tablakh and riqq player from Egypt. He has been teaching Oriental Percussion at the Institute of Middle East Studies, as well as at The Arab House of Oud, headed by the renowned Iraqi artist Nasseer Shamma. Bedair performs with various established artists such as Omar Khairat, Ziyad al-Rahbani, Nasseer Shamma, and leading Egyptian bands such as Eftekasat, Nagham Masry, Masar Egbary, the Donia Massoud Band, Ramy Essam, Eskenderella, to name but a few. Throughout the years, Bedair hit the international stage playing in major Jazz festivals worldwide.

Hazem Shahin

Hazem is an acclaimed oud player and the leading and founding member of Eskenderella – an Egyptian band renowned for reviving the work of stalwarts of the Egyptian song such as Sayyed Darweesh and Al-Sheikh Imam. The band also perform their original songs composed by Hazem and written by various Egyptian poets. Born in Alexandria, Hazim graduated from the Higher Institute of Arabic Music, then went on to study at the House of Oud, established by the Iraqi oud player Nasseer Shamma. In 2002, Hazem was awarded the Best Oud Player in The Arab World award as part of the International Oud Competition in Beirut.

Jorga Mesfin

Jorga is a self taught musician with influences that span the spirit and innovation of Jazz and the ancient and diverse sounds found in Ethiopian music. A professional performer since the age of 17, his career boasts appearances with Tsegaye Gebremedhin, Carolyn Beard Withlow, The Last Poets, Vijay Iyer, Wayna Wondossen, Kirk Whalum, Takana Miyamoto, Gizze Reggae band, Dionne Farris, Aster Aweke, Mahmoud Ahmed and Mulatu Astatke. He is the founder of Ethio-jazz group Wudasse, and composed the score to Haile Gerima's epic Ethiopian movie Teza, for which he won the award for Best Music Selection at the 22nd Carthage Film Festival and Best Composer Award at the 5th Dubai International Film Festival. As a saxophone and piano instructor, Jorga teaches at the African Jazz School, Mekanisa Mekanyesys Music School and the Wusate Berhan Abere Music Training Center for the Visually Impaired.

Lawrence Okello

Lawrence Okello is a professional percussionist and multi-instrumentalist from Uganda. Since joining the Ndere Troupe in 1997, he has been performing with them in Uganda and on international tours, as well as managing the troupe.

Meklit Hadero

Born in Ethiopia, raised in the U.S. and nurtured by San Francisco's richly diverse arts scene, Meklit is an acclaimed singer that embodies worlds. Her music's influences range wide – from the jazz and soul favorites she grew up on; to the hip-hop and art-rock she loves; to folk traditions from the Americas and her forebears' East African home. After studying political science at Yale, she moved to San Francisco and became immersed in the city's thriving arts scene. Named a TED Global Fellow in 2009, Meklit has served as an artist-in-residence at New York University, the De Young Museum, and the Red Poppy Art House. She has also completed musical commissions for the San Francisco Foundation and for theatrical productions staged by Brava! For Women in the Arts. She is the founder of the Arba Minch Collective, a group of Ethiopian artists in diaspora devoted to nurturing ties to their homeland through collaborating with both traditional and contemporary artists there. Meklit is a co-founder of the Nile Project.

Mekuanent Melese

Mekuanent is a singer and dancer of traditional Ethiopian music. He was born and bred in a town called Amer-ghele in Sekota, located in the Wollo region of Northern Ethiopia, where Agews, Amharas and Tigray Ethiopians have lived together in harmony for centuries. He started singing and dancing at a young age, performing at holiday celebrations, church ceremonies such as Timket and Shadey, weddings, and other town functions. His professional musical career began in 2006 when he was recruited by the Ministry of Culture in Bahir Dar to join the Cultural Group, a professional troupe that tours throughout Ethiopia. Mekuanent is currently working on his new album, in between touring with the Cultural Group and performing at traditional clubs in Bahir Dar with the Sora Band.

Mohamed Fouda

Mohammed Fouda is a widely respected ney player, who travels all over the world to perform and collaborate with various artists. In addition to his mastery of the Egyptian maqam system, and the various styles of ney and kawala found throughout

the Middle East, he has revived an ancient form of the ney that dates back to Pharaonic times; practically rescuing it from artistic extinction.

Michael Bazibu

Michael Bazibu is a Ugandan multi-instrumentalist and virtuosic adungu performer based in Kampala. He's one of the lead musicians of the Ndere Troupe, a cultural development organisation that performs a repertoire of more than 40 authentic Ugandan dances and songs, accompanied by various indigenous percussive, stringed and wind instruments.

Mohsen El Ashry

Hassan El Ashry, AKA Mohssin, is the celebrated lead simsimiyya player in Al Tanbura, a collective of veteran Egyptian master musicians, singers, fishermen and philosophers. For nearly twenty-five years they've been custodians to some of Egypt's oldest folk melodies at their home in Port Said, the Mediterranean gateway to the Suez Canal. Their music is driven by the seductive call of the simsimiyya – the ancient lyre dating back to the times of the Pharaohs.

Nyaruach Jal

A sister of an internationally acclaimed hip hop artist, Emmanuel Jal, Nyaruach was born around 1983 in Southern Sudan, at the time of the civil war. She lost her mother and was separated from the rest of her immediate family, including Jal, at the age of 4. As years went on, the war intensified, and the orphaned girl was forced to run around with her relatives, witnessing and experiencing the worst of civil war crimes. There was little hope in her life until she reunited with Jal in 2004 in Nairobi. The two recorded a song together called Gua, which stands for "peace" in their native Nuer tongue. The track was broadcast by BBC across Africa and became a No. 1 hit in Kenya in 2005. Nyaruach kept her past to herself for a long time, but in 2008 she stepped over her personal pain and revealed her shocking story in War Child, an award winning documentary on Emmanuel Jal's life. Being in the studio and recording music became the happiest time in her life. She has recently finished recording Gatluak, her first single.

Endris Hassen

Endris is one of the most sought-after masenqo players in Ethiopia. He is a member of Ethiocolor, the resident band at Addis Ababa's Fendika Azmari Bet, and performs with Hager Fikir, Ethiopia's National Theater. Endris has also performed and collaborated with the likes of Paal Nilssen-Love, The Ex, Imperial Tiger Orchestra and Trio Kazanchis. He has played on more than 600 recordings.

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