



## **A Confluence of Musical Tributaries: The Nile Project returns to the US for Second Tour, Jan-Apr 2017**

"The Nile Project is more than a band," exclaims Kenyan percussionist/vocalist and Nile Project musician Kasiva Mutua. "This is something completely new. The way we combine collaboration and education is revolutionary—not only here at home in the Nile River but everywhere we've been."

One of the tightest cross-cultural collaborations in musical history, the Nile Project brings together artists from the 11 Nile countries, representing over 450 million people, to compose new songs that combine the rich diversity of one of the oldest places on Earth. Kindred harps and resonant lyres from the river's sources in East Africa and Ethiopia to its deltas in Sudan and Egypt have reunited to learn new musical modes while buzzing timbres and ingenious polyrhythms support vocals in more than ten languages.

On the surface, the Nile Project blends traditional musical idioms into one seamless Nile sound. But look a little further and you'll begin to see an ensemble of musicians modeling contemporary organizational concepts such as systems thinking, network theory, and participatory leadership. The Nile Project is pioneering a new approach to transform transboundary water conflicts by using music to ignite cross-cultural empathy and spark environmental curiosity. And its collaborative model offers a blueprint for new ways in which Nile citizens can organize themselves to strengthen the sustainability of their river.

An ensemble of 13 musicians with tour the United States from January to April of 2017.

To craft this music, Egyptian and Ethiopian artists have mastered each other's' modal systems. A Burundian bassist has become the foundation within head-spinning Ugandan rhythms. Instruments that parted ways millennia before are reunited and pushed into new tunings. Old love songs and lullabies have crossed geographical and linguistic barriers to forge unexpected tunes and improbable friendships.

Creating together, with the role of lead and soloist rotating among the ensemble members, the Nile Project Collective has crafted emotionally stirring, musically complex pieces that weave together over the course of a concert into one long and shifting composition. This work serves as a rallying point to draw more and more people from more and more places into a meaningful conversation, where love and art intertwine with politics, history, ecology, and commerce.

Yet it all starts with sound, and with listening. "I feel like I am just beginning to be aware of what we are facing in the Nile Basin. It is difficult. We need to listen to each other," explains Egyptian vocalist Saleeb Fawzy. "Listening is the basis for understanding."

### **The Nile Project 2017 US Touring Ensemble**

**Adel Mekha:** A widely respected Nubian percussionist and vocalist based in Cairo, Mekha's knowledge of traditional Nubian rhythms and an expressive singing voice have brought him work with a wide range of ensembles and projects.

**Ahmed Omar:** Born in Libya to an Eritrean father and Egyptian mother, it is no surprise that mixing cultures has become part of Omar's creative output. Today, he plays bass for several leading Egyptian bands and organizes the AfriCairo festival and music project.

**Asia Madani:** A Sudanese vocalist and percussionist residing in Cairo, Madani grew up surrounded by music with a father that played oud and a professional percussionist as a brother. She is a captivating performer who has appeared at many international festivals.

**Dave Otieno:** One of Kenya's leading guitarists, Otieno is fluent in the Benga style common to the Lake Victoria region. He has toured throughout Africa and Europe and recently performed at the Folklife Festival at the Smithsonian, Washington D.C.

**Ibrahim Fanous:** An Eritrean kraar player and vocalist based in London, Fanous began his vocal training at a young age in Eastern Sudan in three different languages—Arabic, Tigrinya and Amharic. He performs internationally throughout North Africa and Europe.

**Kasiva Mutua:** Kenyan percussionist and singer Mutua may have learned drumming from her grandmother, but has developed her own knack for powerful beats. One of Kenya's leading drummers, her expressive playing can tell a story on its own, or keep a band perfectly in the pocket.

**Micheal Bazibu:** A member of Uganda's leading traditional music and dance company, Ndere, for the past 17 years, Bazibu plays several traditional Ugandan stringed and percussion instruments with virtuosic grace.

**Mohamed Abozekry:** Despite his tender years, this Egyptian oud player has a stunning command of his instrument, as well as an open ear for other forms, skills that got him a recent album deal with Harmonia Mundi.

**Nader El Shaer:** Born in the culturally rich town of Port Said, Egypt, El Shaer taught himself accordion and ney, only to fall in love with the tones of the kawala (end-blown cane flute) and its role in Arabic classical music.

**Saleeb Fawzy:** Born in Minya, Egypt, vocalist and percussionist Fawzy has a deep knowledge of Coptic church hymns and has toured throughout Europe and the Arab world. He is currently working on Tawasol project, helping people to learn through art.

**Selamnesh Zemene:** Hailing from a long line of unique culture bearers in Northern Ethiopia, this young singer has brought her traditions to collaborations with indie darlings like Debo Band and The Ex.

**Steven "Sogo" Irambona:** Born in Burundi, Steven Irambona started to play the guitar and sing at an early age. He is a World Bank Musical Ambassador for Burundi and a popular voice of the people. Irambona has lived in exile in the USA since 2015.

The ensemble flows from a larger collective of musicians—most of whom are young and work across genres—that in turn arises from a long, thoughtful recruitment and collaboration process. The Nile Project strives to include musicians from many different cultural communities along the Nile, while finding a compelling combination of instruments and voice to support and balance one another.

Since its founding in 2011, the Nile Project has grown its Musicians Collective to include 35 artists from 10 Nile Basin countries; held five music residencies resulting in the widely acclaimed album *Aswan* and the soon to be

released album *Jinja*; performed for more than 100,000 people in the Nile Basin, the Middle East, across the US and Europe through 75 concerts; held over 130 workshops at 40 universities for more than 10,000 students; and received widespread local and international press coverage.

With recent invitations to lead workshops for diplomats and policymakers by the Lincoln Center and European Commission, the Nile Project is at the forefront of modeling how music and art can drive meaningful social change.

The Nile Project's mission is to transform the water conflict in the Nile Basin by inspiring, informing and empowering Nile citizens to collaboratively cultivate the sustainability of their shared ecosystem. Through an innovative approach combining cross-cultural musical collaborations, youth leadership development, and a collaborative network focusing on food sustainability, the Nile Project seeks to address the cultural and environmental challenges at the root of the Nile conflict in order to shift the world's longest river from a divisive hydropolitical argument to an opportunity for fruitful transboundary cooperation.

"Unlike so many other cross-cultural collaborations, for us, the music is just the starting point," says Sudanese vocalist and percussionist Asia Madani. "The concert opens the door. It makes people curious and inspired. It engages their sense of empathy."

Using music to spark cultural curiosity, the Nile Project engages audiences to learn about the world's longest river and understand its large-scale social, cultural, and environmental sustainability challenges. The Collective's collaborative model offers a blueprint for new ways Nile citizens can organize themselves to make the Nile more sustainable. In an evolving series of interlocking programs that spring from the concert experience, the project hopes to inspire, educate and empower young people worldwide to contribute to Nile sustainability.

For this reason, nearly every stop on the U.S. tour will be accompanied by a series of workshops and symposia involving the Nile Project participant musicians, complemented by the faculty resources and student interest of each campus. From water issues to women's roles, from musical discovery to the image of the Nile through history, a wide range of topics tackle the river's complexity and aim to draw students into active roles. These activities expand the circle of conversation begun by the musicians, to encompass entire academic communities.

### **Select Nile Project Workshop Topics**

The Nile Project will offer a variety of workshop themes during its 2017 US Tour, including those below. These programs will serve as catalysts for longer-term engagement with students and faculty beyond the tour ensemble's musical performances.

Lecture Demonstrations:

1. Musical Collaboration & Water Cooperation
2. Zar: A female ritual along the Nile

Panels:

3. The Nile & Religion
4. River Stories

5. The Nile & African Identity
6. Music, Citizen Engagement and Water Resource Management

Performances:

7. Concert
8. K12 & Student Matinee Performances

Workshops:

9. Music & Dance Workshops

The Nile Project is also available for class visits on a variety of subjects including:

- Hydropolitics of the Nile
- Music entrepreneurship
- Arts administration
- World Music industry
- Applied ethnomusicology
- Water conflict transformation
- Network leadership
- Race relations & environmental justice

In celebration of the recent launch of the Nile Project's highly anticipated University Program at home in the Nile basin, the Nile Project will kick off their US Tour with the release of *Jinja*.

*Jinja* is the long awaited follow-up to *Aswan*, the live recording from the Nile Project's debut concert in 2013. Featuring artists from Burundi, Egypt, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Sudan, and Uganda, the album consists of ten original compositions born during the Nile Project's 2nd annual musicians Gathering in Jinja, Uganda.

The Nile Project University Program is designed to bring together university students from Nile Basin countries to collaborate on solving Nile sustainability challenges.

Partnering with six universities in Egypt, Ethiopia, Tanzania, Kenya, and Uganda, the Nile Project launched its inaugural class of Nile Fellows, a 12-month leadership program for 24 students from our partner universities to establish Nile Project Clubs on their campuses.

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