



Musical Scholarship and Ethiopian Studies: Past, Present, Future

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Musical Scholarship and Ethiopian Studies: Past, Present, Future

Kay Kaufman Shelemay

1. Introduction

Important events are habitually celebrated and commemorated through music and dance, so, it is not surprising that the study of music can offer scholars insights into many aspects of life, past and present. As we mark the Fiftieth Anniversary of the International Conferences of Ethiopian Studies (ICES) in 2009, it is an appropriate moment to review and appraise the entry of musical scholarship into the Ethiopianist discourse. We will find that discussions touching on various aspects of music and its performance enter into the history of Ethiopian Studies rather quietly, well after the series of international meetings were first launched half a century ago. But since the turn of the twenty-first century, the field of Ethiopian musical studies has gained momentum and come of age, in many ways paralleling the broader course of Ethiopian Studies, but at the same time, providing distinctive narratives. This essay will provide an overview of the musical contributions to the ICES Proceedings. It will then step back to appraise these contributions as part of Ethiopian Studies in general as well as from the perspective of the broader world of musical scholarship. The conclusion will suggest that there is a great deal of work yet to be done and sets forth agendas for future work on music.

2. An Overview of Musical Contributions to the ICES Proceedings

Music entered the Ethiopianist discourse only with the Third ICES Conference (Addis Ababa, 1966), initiated by Abba Tito Lepisa's "The Three Modes and the Signs of the Songs in the Ethiopian Liturgy."¹ This article provides a detailed

¹ Contributions to the ICES proceedings will be discussed in chronological order, and, when there is more than one contribution discussing music in the relevant volume, in order of appearance. Each article will be identified in the text by the place and date of the ICES conference at which it was presented; full publication information, including publication date, is found in the bibliography at the end of this essay. The Proceedings for the 16th ICES

description of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church's system of modal practice and the notational system through which it is represented; it is particularly useful in its inclusion of tables identifying the liturgical source texts from which the individual *milikkii* were derived. That Abba Tito's article appears amidst other studies on related topics in Ethiopian Christian practice and literature presages the placement of other lone musical offerings amidst closely related subject matter.

The Fourth ICES Proceedings (Rome, 1972) contains one article with substantial musical content, Haile Gabre Kristos's "Poesia E Canti Popolari Tigrini." Stressing the importance of the union of song and popular poetry to a population's culture, the essay details the textual structure and content of popular, improvised Tigrinya poetry. It spans a wide array of poetic genres, including texts drawing on sources ranging from the sacred to the most secular, with attention to aspects of their song performance accompanied by musical instruments.

The Fifth ICES was divided into two sessions (Session A, Nice, 1977 and Session B, Chicago, 1978). The only music articles in the two resulting proceedings volumes are both early publications by the present author focusing on the music and culture of the Ethiopian Betä Israel (Falasha). Shelemay's "Continuity and Change in the Liturgy of the Falasha" (Nice, 1977) argues for the importance of ethno-musicological observation and analysis in explicating the manner in which the Betä Israel liturgy has been transmitted over time. This article, which is the first in the ICES Proceedings to include both detailed textual and musical transcriptions, demonstrates how overlapping cues in text, melody, performance practice, and instrumental accompaniment interact to sustain transmission of the Betä Israel liturgy as an oral tradition. The second article "Rethinking Falasha Liturgical History" (Chicago, 1978) sets forth a new historical perspective on the genesis of the Betä Israel liturgical tradition, supported by evidence from the texts and music of their liturgy viewed in combination with Betä Israel oral testimony and written evidence from Ethiopian historical sources.

The revolutionary years, and the resulting difficulties in carrying out musical research in much of Ethiopia during that period, are important factors in music's absence from

(Trondheim 2007) were in press when this article was submitted and no final page numbers for the draft articles could be cited for that reason. I thank Birhanu Tifera, Steven Kaplan, and Marilyn Heldman for their help and comments.

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ICES Proceedings 6 (Tel Aviv, 1980), 7 (Lund, 1982), and 8 (Addis Ababa, 1984).² An article by Boris Avramets appears in ICES 9 (Moscow, 1986). Avramets, who was unable to visit Ethiopia for research purposes, drew on the secondary literature to craft "Socio-cultural Functions of Instrumental Ensembles and Their Role in Traditional Ethiopian Musical Culture." Avramets surveys a wide array of Ethiopian musical instruments from all regions of the country, comparing and contrasting them with instrumental traditions elsewhere in Africa, proposing that Ethiopia's single-tone flute ensembles relate to processes of social ordering and to the fundamental world view of African peoples.

The single volume published from ICES 10 (Paris, 1988) contains no articles on music, although two music papers were in fact delivered at the 1988 Paris conference, by Kay Kaufman Shelemay and Peter Jeffery, respectively, based on their collaborative project then underway on Ethiopian Christian chant.³ It is only in the Proceeding of ICES 11 (Addis Ababa, 1991) that musical contributions begin to re-enter the Proceedings, with four papers on disparate topics.

In the Proceedings of ICES 11, Loren F. Bliese surveys "The Afar Drum Song Karambo," discussing in detail the texts, melodies, and performance contexts of two songs from this genre. The two songs, the first a wedding song, the second containing an account of a 1975 massacre of Afar during a raid, share twelve syllable meters and a chorus.

Genevieve Udessa contributes to the ICES 11 Proceedings an ethnographic survey of song genres important past and present within Guji Oromo society. His discussion summarizes various types of songs performed on different occasions and venues, ranging from work songs to those used for entertainment.

² No doubt the presence of so few scholars in Ethiopianist musical research in the mid-1970s left the field without a critical mass at the very moment when ethnographic work in music came under pressure in Ethiopia. Curfews and prohibition on public gatherings during the early years of the revolution reduced musical performance. Suspicion about recording activities and censorship of research tapes also rendered participant observation very difficult.

³ These two papers were submitted by the authors and accepted for publication, but were evidently placed within a planned second volume of papers that never appeared. These materials were later absorbed into Shelemay and Jeffery's three-volume study titled *Ethiopian Christian Liturgical Chant. An Anthology*, published in 1993, 1994, (with accompanying CD), and 1997. Shelemay's primary research for this project was carried out during regular, private meetings during 1975 at her Addis Ababa home with leading church musicians.

"The Role of Traditional Performance in Hadiya" by Moges Moela takes a close look at funeral ceremonies among the Hadiya in Southern Shewa. Drawing on data from ten funeral ceremonies in different administrative regions, Moges argues for the "functional value" of "these dramatic performances" in shaping and guiding the Hadiya social order, suggesting that they serve as "instructional media" and provide a living archive of a people's identity and sustains culture from generation to generation. (Moges, p. 255)

Cynthia Tse Kimberlin's "Traditions and Transitions in Ethiopian Music: Events as a Catalyst for Change" is the fourth and final music entry in the Proceedings of ICES 11. Surveying changes in Ethiopian music at home and abroad since 1974, Kimberlin highlights eight factors that she suggests have sparked change, including the impact of political circumstances, 'shifts' in musical performance, new audience/performer relationships, and innovative technologies.

The Proceedings of ICES 12 (East Lansing, 1994) do not contain any papers on music, but Vol. 2 of the Proceedings from ICES 13 (Kyoto, 1997) includes two. Woube Kassaye contributes "An Overview of Recording and Distribution of Music in Ethiopia," tracing the history of music recording and distribution in the country while summarizing factors shaping recording and distribution, evaluating song content, and cataloguing recordings according to the issuing label. Woube draws on a variety of sources, including his own M.A. thesis from Addis Ababa University (Woube, 1995), calling for a new focus on preservation to maintain and enhance audibility of Ethiopian recordings from the past.

Also in the Proceedings of ICES 13, Cynthia Tse Kimberlin delves into individual musical careers in "Four Contemporary Ethiopian Composers and Their Music: Asnakech Worku, Nuria Ahmed Shami Kalid A.K.A. Shamitu, Ezra Abate Yimam, and Ashenafi Kebede." Based on her own observations, interviews with musicians, and correspondence, Kimberlin discusses eleven compositions by these four musicians and the careers that gave rise to them. The paper also highlights the impact of gender on musical opportunity and access, as is clearly seen in the contrast between the trajectories of the two Ethiopian men, both trained in Western music and notation, and the traditional educational background and oral musical transmission of two Ethiopian female musicians.

The Proceedings of ICES 14 (Addis Ababa, 2000) contain only a single musical contribution in Vol. 1, "The Azmari, Voices of Ethiopian Memory," by Anne Bolay. This article, based on fieldwork in Gondar and Wallo, unites song analysis, *azmari* life-stories past and present, and various anecdotes, while observing that "even if music, strictly speaking, is not the topic of this study, it remains an important data" (Bolay: 75). Bolay approaches *azmari* poetic repertoires as living memory transmitted from generation to generation, providing an overview of tales and songs of *azmaris*, as well as the occasions on which they perform.

The Proceedings of ICES 15 (Hamburg, 2003) and ICES 16 (Trondheim, 2007) mark the flowering of Ethiopianist musical scholarship, with six papers found in the Proceedings of ICES 15 and nine papers in those of ICES 16, respectively. Wolfgang Bender's "Initial Research into the Life and Work of Tessema Eshete: The First Ethiopian Singer to Record Commercially" in the Proceedings of ICES 15 (Hamburg, 2003), reconstructs the career of Tessema Eshete (1877- 1964), imperial adviser, poet, and musician, the first Ethiopian, and likely the first African musician, to be commercially recorded in 1908 in Europe. Based on details provided by Tessema's grandson and a wealth of primary recording data gathered both in Ethiopia and in European archives, Bender's study illuminates an important moment in Ethiopian music history.

In "Arbore Soundscape - Remapping Arbore through Music," Echi Christina Gabbert provides an acoustemological approach to Arbore culture. Through a discussion of eleven types of Arbore songs, as well as details of the circumstances in which they are composed and performed, Gabbert argues for appreciation of the broader "sound texture" of a place.

Eritrean music is the subject of Cynthia Tse Kimberlin's "Who dared?": Twenty-Two Tigrīñña Songs from Mändāfāra, Eritrea. Kimberlin draws on songs she recorded between 1962-64 while a Peace Corps volunteer in Eritrea to identify underlying structural and organizational principles. Kimberlin tracks the history of songs recorded before the revolution through feedback interviews to identify those no longer sung, and transcribes several in Western notation, elucidating their form and structure.

Simone Tarsitani contributes "Zikri Rituals in Harar: A Musical Analysis" to the Proceedings of ICES 15, exploring devotional activity marked by male responsorial singing and their lyrics of praise. Based on ethno-musicological fieldwork carried out

between 2000-2002, Tarsitani's study documents highly original Harari musical expression within the religious life and culture of this historic town.

The strong ethno-musicological interest in sound recordings is underscored in Timkehet Teffera's "A Comprehensive Analysis of Sound Recordings from Aksum, Ethiopia." Providing an overview of recordings made in Aksum by a 1906 expedition and today housed in Berlin, Timkehet documents thirty-seven traditional songs with texts in Amharic and Tigrinya. The paper provides a close reading of selected musical examples, and reveals the challenges of working with historical recordings which lack detailed contextual information.

Seeking to capture recent events in scholarly activity, Olivier Tourny discusses the work of an early twenty-first century team research effort on "Ethiopian Traditional Music, Dances and Instruments: A Systematic Survey." More than twenty Ethiopian and European scholars and students joined together for collecting, recording, analyzing, publishing and preserving Ethiopian songs, dances and instruments, a program that later joined forces with UNESCO.⁴

It was at ICES 16 (Trondheim) that the program included the largest contingent of music scholars to date, providing rich offerings of nine papers on various aspects of Ethiopian music. Ezra Abate's "Ethiopian Kīññit (Scales): Analysis of the Formation and Structure of the Ethiopian Scale System," draws on data from two hundred and fifty songs gathered by fifteen students from the Yared School of Music in different areas of the country. The paper surveys the pitch structure of Ethiopian secular music from the North, Central, Eastern, and Southwestern regions, with attention to musical structures rather than to cultural associations.

Revivals of dances and songs by refugees returning home to Bonga, Gambela, are the subject of Wendy James's paper "Music, Song, and Dance in the Blue Nile Borderlands: Revivals in the Refugee Context." James traces the background of musical performance as well as historical connections between music and ceremonials of different ethnic communities and the pivotal role of music during displacement of people during the revolution and its aftermath. Her attention to the musical dynamics of return and repatriation provides insight into changing relations between dance, modernity and cultural practices.

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The challenges of maintaining traditional musical practices in a changing world are also the subject of Kifle Assefa's paper "The Significance of St Yared's Music in the Age of Globalization." The paper both draws on many theoretical sources regarding music's role in African religions, and concludes with comments regarding Ethiopian Orthodox response to changes during the revolution and in new homelands abroad.

Cynthia Tse Kimberlin's "Diverse Connections as a Model for the 21st Century: Yared Music School (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia)" traces the history of Yared School, with attention to both its local and international connections, and detailed information on the individuals, including its directors, who led and shaped the school since its beginnings in 1923. The paper ends with discussion of the impact of Western art music in Ethiopia and elsewhere in Africa.

"Making Music, Making Money: The Economics of Ethiopian Circus Bands" by Leah Niederstadt focuses on the live music and vocal performances that were key elements in Ethiopian circus performances from the troupes' earliest days in 1991. Niederstadt provides a nuanced history of circuses and their economic realities, including comparisons to similar groups elsewhere in Africa.

A detailed discussion of Arsi wedding rituals is found in Leila Qashu's "Arsi Oromo Society Viewed Through its Wedding Music." This paper offers description and analysis of different musical repertoires for Arsi men, women, and youth, each with a special role in the wedding ritual.

Kay Kaufman Shelemay's "Music in the Ethiopian American Diaspora: A Preliminary Overview" provides an initial survey of musical life among Ethiopian immigrants to North America. The paper, which cuts across sacred, traditional, and popular musical repertoires, is based on ethno-musicological fieldwork extending from 1977 until 2007 in the United States.

A concern with issues related to the establishment of digital archives in Ethiopia, especially in Harar, are the subject of Simone Tarsitani's paper "Digital Sound Archives and Libraries: Meanings, Problems and Perspectives of Preserving and Making Accessible Recorded Sound in Ethiopia." With local capacity building for producing digital documents as a central goal, Tarsitani discusses the responsibility of

⁴ See Ohinata, Proceedings of ICES 16, for additional details of this project.

researchers to collaborate with local collectors to insure that indigenous custodianship and scholarly work are complementary.

Olivier Tournéy's paper, "'Kiddasie' A Kĩmant (Ethiopian Agaw) Ritual," presents a description and analysis of a Kĩmant ritual in the context of Kĩmant history and beliefs. Drawing on ritual texts and translations, musical transcriptions, and excerpts from his field notes, Tournéy provides an overview of a central ritual for a tradition he predicts will vanish within 50 years.

The final music paper in the Proceedings of ICES 16 is by Woube Kassaye, who discusses "The Practices of Music Research in Ethiopia: Successes and Challenges." The paper discusses team initiatives in music scholarship on Ethiopia, from the early nineteenth century efforts by Villoteau until the present, providing a call for a paradigm shift that will lend support to music scholarship in Ethiopia on a par with initiatives elsewhere in Africa.

Of the twenty-seven papers on musical topics that appeared in the ICES Proceedings through the 2007 meeting in Trondheim, nearly half (15) represent work done after the year 2000. The papers span a range of topics from the traditional to the innovative. Interest in Ethiopian sacred music across boundaries of religious groups—Christian, Judaic, Qimant, Muslim—unites papers from the earliest dates (Abba Tito Lepisa, Shelemay) to the most recent (Kifle, Tarsitani, Tournéy). A smattering of essays focus on standard units of musical study such as instruments (Avramets), songs (Bliese, Genene, Gabbert, Kimberlin), musical analysis (Kimberlin, Ezra Abate), and the lives and accomplishments of individual composers or performers (Kimberlin, Bolay, Bender, Kifle). Critical approaches to mechanisms of change are found (Shelemay, Kimberlin), while the challenges attendant to the use of new recording technologies and the archives in which their products are preserved is clearly evident as well (Bender, Woube, Timkehet, Tarsitani). Seven of the authors, including the earliest two contributors of articles on music to ICES proceedings, are Ethiopians, with the remaining thirteen scholars constituting a broadly international group from Europe, Russia, Great Britain, and the United States.

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3. Musical Scholarship within Ethiopian Studies and Beyond: Looking to the Future

The articles surveyed above provide a representative map of recent decades of musical scholarship in Ethiopia, although the absence of a contribution by the late Ashenafi Kebede, a pioneer of Ethiopian musical studies and a founder of the Yared School of Music, is an unfortunate lacuna.⁵ Music has been used throughout these ICES publications to better understand Ethiopian society past and present (Boley, Gabbert, Shelemay, James) and to take stock of the challenges of displacement and resettlement in a globalizing world (James, Kimberlin, Kifle, James, Shelemay). If the contributions on music from the earliest dates address a demonstrably broad cross section of Ethiopian regions and ethnic communities, the movement to study music of peoples from Ethiopia's Southern and Western regions has increased markedly over time. Here one undoubtedly sees the impact of the paradigm shift introduced by publications beginning in the mid-1980s (James and Donham, 1986; James, 2002; Donham, 2002), which have redefined notions of center and periphery as well as expanded the critical frameworks within which music scholars conceive and carry out their research. Most topics treated in the recent papers discussed here, especially those published post - 1991 necessarily reflect changes in Ethiopian society and its study following the difficult years of the revolution.

Scholars pursuing Ethiopian musical topics are primarily trained in ethnomusicology or anthropology, with most employing ethnographic methods to study and interpret music as a central aspect of Ethiopian expressive culture. While many ethnomusicologists, as we have seen above, draw on historical sources and engage in historical reconstruction through use of indigenous written sources, oral testimony, and/or archival or present-day sound recordings, the focus of ethno-musicological work is generally on the present, drawing on participant-observation to document and interpret living traditions.

Ethiopian music - and scholarship about it - is yet to have a major impact on international musical scholarship, a situation that stems from a convergence of disciplinary history with broader historical factors. The number of individuals

⁵ See Kimberlin, 1999, for an overview of Ashenafi Kebede's career and contributions to Ethiopian musical studies as scholar and composer. Ashenafi received his Ph.D. from Wesleyan University (Middletown, CT, USA) in 1971, and spent the rest of his career in Diaspora, primarily as a professor of music at Florida State University in Tallahassee, Florida.

studying the music of Ethiopia has been relatively small to date, with the movement of young scholars into the field increasing markedly only in the first decade of the twenty-first century. To briefly situate Ethiopian music within African musical studies in general, the largest number of music scholars have long been engaged with West African musics and, through their publications, effectively canonized West African drumming traditions as the paradigmatic African musical style. The rhythmic complexity of West African musical traditions as well as their historical relationship to a range of African American tradition consumed the attention of many early European and American scholars and attracted yet more students to these fields. The musics of Francophone and Anglophone African countries attracted a large number of both native and foreign researchers post African independence, no doubt encouraged by the accessibility of song texts and oral traditions to speakers of French and English in Europe and the United States.

The study of traditional African music lost ground across the board in the 1990s as African musicians began to enter popular music circles, with initiatives such as the release of Paul Simon's *Graceland* album (1986)⁶ also serving to bring South African music and musicians to the fore of international consciousness (Meintjes, 1990). The deep engagement of South African musicians in the fight against apartheid as well as the explosion of post-colonial studies in British, French, and American universities brought the music of newly independent African states front and center, gaining the attention of scholars entering the growing field of popular music studies (Meintjes, 2003).

The globalization of African music and the simultaneous expansion of its study took place during the very years when the Ethiopian revolution silenced many of the most talented Ethiopian musicians or drove them into exile; these events, as well as a series of natural disasters such as drought and famine, rendered much of the country inhospitable to musical performance and musical ethnography by scholars from abroad for the better part of two decades. Thus, the fates of Ethiopian music and that of scholarship about it were effectively linked, with the same factors that hindered the circulation of Ethiopian music and musicians abroad serving simultaneously to discourage the entry of new scholars to its study. From the mid-1970s through the early 1990s, music scholars tended to go elsewhere in Africa rather than acquire languages useful mainly within Ethiopia's borders and undertake case studies thought

⁶ The cover of *Graceland* inexplicably features an Ethiopian icon of Saint George produced at a Stephanite monastery around 1500. For further details about this icon, see Heldman, 1989.

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to lack many of the musical and interpretive challenges to be found in other post-colonial African countries.⁷ Given conditions in Ethiopia, as well as the opportunities elsewhere in Africa, there is little surprise that music scholars tend to drop from sight during much of the 1980's and 1990's at ICES meetings.

The entry in the early 2000's of a lively group of young researchers into the field of Ethiopian musical studies, while a deeply committed group of older researchers remain active on the scene, provides an opening for re-inventing Ethiopian musical scholarship for the twenty-first century. Here one must acknowledge once again a convergence of developments in the Ethiopian musical world that have served to attract and sustain scholarly interest. The movement of so many Ethiopian musicians abroad and their residence in Diaspora communities world-wide has brought Ethiopian music to new audiences. One also should not underestimate the profound impact of the multi-volume *éthiopiquest* record series beginning in the mid-1990s,⁸ which brought heterogeneous Ethiopian musical styles to listeners across the world and attracted a new generation to its study.

But what of the future? One sees promising new directions in musical research that stand to expand our knowledge of Ethiopian music in relation to its changing contexts. There are also promising indications, in the light of work accomplished in team projects in recent years (Ohinata, Tourney, Tarsitani), that scholars of Ethiopian music are embracing broader trends in ethnographic research by moving toward more collaborative methodologies. The growth of collaboration is beginning to construct an interactive community of music scholars within the broader population of Ethiopianists.⁹ At the same time, there is a clear opening for scholars trained in other disciplines to participate in the musical discourse, amidst strong evidence that excellent work may be done on musical topics by specialists in other fields, as can be seen in contributions by Haile Gebre Kristos, Loren Bliese, Wendy James, Leah Niederstadt, and others. Recent strides have also been made in training more Ethiopian scholars as part of the new cohort. (Ohinata) All of this bodes well for a future in which cooperation and interdisciplinary collaborations may result in exciting new research.

⁷ See Shelemay (1996) for a fuller discussion of these issues.

⁸ The series, now containing more than two-dozen volumes, was initiated and edited by Francis Falceto for Buda Records, Paris. The first albums date to the mid-1990's.

⁹ For a recent guide to collaborative research design, see Luke Eric Lassiter (2005).

This survey of musical contributions to ICES Proceedings highlights surprisingly varied contributions, but also uncovers some glaring lacunae, including the unfortunate neglect of Ethiopian popular music. There have been moments during recent decades when several Ethiopian musicians have reached broader listening publics and have begun to move Ethiopian music on to the world stage; however, ethnomusicologists have not generally tracked these developments. For instance, following her departure from Ethiopia in 1982, Aster Aweke performed widely in Europe and the U.S.; she was the first Ethiopian whose recordings were distributed internationally by a major modern record label, with her album *Aster* released by Columbia Records in 1990. (Interview by author with Aster Aweke, 5 April 2009, Cambridge, MA) Mulatu Astatke's musical initiatives as a composer and performer of Ethio-jazz, dating to his lengthy residency in the U.S. from 1959-1966, have recently reached substantial numbers of listeners through the soundtrack of Jim Jarmusch's 2005 independent film, *Broken Flowers*, in which his music is featured. Mahmoud Ahmed's 1975 recording of *Ere Mäla Mäla*, reissued as Vol. 7 of *éthiopiennes* in 1999, has subsequently brought him new international exposure. The list of Ethiopian musicians making their way in the world of popular music continues to expand, with two American-based musicians of Ethiopian descent nominated for Grammy Awards in 2009.¹⁰ And amidst the growing prominence of Ethiopian popular musicians, no one has been the subject of more recent international attention than Teddy Afro (Tewodros Kassahun), whose songs garnered widespread attention and led to international calls for his release after he was imprisoned in 2008 on a hit-and-run driving charge.¹¹

While we can take note of recent work that intersects directly with promising new directions in acoustical and environmental studies (Gabbert) and the work of several papers exploring the impact of displacement on and through musical performance, in settings of forced migration and Diaspora, the new wave of Ethiopianist musical research fits within some of the current trends in musical scholarship, but only very cautiously. If there is ample room for music scholars to enter into study of the now

¹⁰ Both Wayna Wondwossen and Kenna Zemedkun were nominated for a 2009 Grammy Award under Category 27, Best Urban/ Alternative Performance. (Grammy.com: http://www.grammy.com/GRAMMY_Awards/51st_Show/list.aspx, accessed August 12, 2009)

¹¹ Teddy Afro was released from prison on August 13, 2009. See "Pop Star Teddy Afro Freed From Jail in Ethiopia," August 13, 2009, Reuters and ABC News, Addis Ababa. <http://abcnews.go.com/print?id=8321807>

global Ethiopian musical tradition, it is also past time to approach the musical subject matter more critically.

African studies have led the way across the disciplines in both developing new methodologies and opening up issues of scholarly interest and concern worldwide (Bates et al). As in the rest of Africa, music has been an integral part of contested processes of social change in Ethiopia. Yet only a few of the papers discussed here even hint at issues front and center elsewhere in the ethno-musicological and broader scholarly literature; very few delve into the sensitive territory bordering on the politics of musical performance. Music can carry both open and hidden transcripts (Scott); it can give voice to national aspirations (Askew) or index the emergence of new and contested identities (Meintjes, 2003). Scholars of Ethiopian musical studies need to summon the courage to give their materials full voice and to address the issues that compel Ethiopian musicians to make music. Until that moment arrives, Ethiopian music and its study will likely remain on the margins. Ethiopian musical scholarship will come of age only when it explores at last the challenging issues lurking just under the musical surface.

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