

## SCHOLARSHIP ON ETHIOPIAN MUSIC: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

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**ABSTRACT** Broad and significant appraisals on Ethiopian studies have been carried out with thematic and disciplinary orientations from authors such as Bahru Zewde, Alula Pankhurest, Gebre Yntiso and Belete Bizuneh. One might expect music to be a relevant aspect of such works, yet it is hardly addressed, resulting in a dearth of independent and comprehensive assessments of Ethiopian music scholarship; a rare exception is the 3 volume *Ethiopian Christian Liturgical Chant: An Anthology* edited by Kay Kaufman Shelemay and Peter Jeffery (1993–1997). Generally speaking, music is one of the most neglected themes in Ethiopian studies, especially as compared to the dominant subjects of history and linguistics. Although some progress in musical studies has recently developed, the existing scholarly literature remains confined to limited themes. Beside inadequate attention to various topics there are problems of misconceptions and lack of reciprocity in contemporary scholarship. This paper outlines the evolution of Ethiopian music scholarship and exposes general trends in the existing body of knowledge by using critical works from a variety of disciplines. It also introduces the major subjects and personalities involved in Ethiopian musical studies. The paper concludes with highlights of pertinent problematic issues followed by practical suggestions for fostering Ethiopian music scholarship.

**Key Words:** African studies; Ethiopia; Cultural studies; Music scholarship.

### INTRODUCTION

Certainly, it is a mistake to assume that influential works from the foreign scholars marked the beginning of musical research in Ethiopia, discounting the inquiries by Ethiopians into their musical traditions. Ethiopian musical scholarship likely began as early as the creation, practice, and oral transmission of music itself in Ethiopia. The written documentation of musical culture can also be traced back to the old Ethiopian chronicles and hagiographies, as in the example of St. Yared's sixth-century account. This article provides a brief overview of important major studies, personalities, and emerging trends in Ethiopian musical scholarship both within the country and abroad.

As a fragment of the whole, musical scholarship essentially shares major patterns of evolution with the larger repertoire of Ethiopian studies. Accordingly, this outline borrows concepts and data from the broad body of literature on Ethiopian studies. In the present study, three eras of research have been chosen in order to sketch the general scholarship on Ethiopian music. The first phase refers to the time period prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, which consists mostly of the accounts of travelers, missionaries, and explorers. The second phase is marked by the first Ethiopian "modernist" intellectuals, who emerged during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup>

century and who held multiple roles in art, literature, and music. A third span of literature covers the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which significant ethnographic research was done, chiefly by the academic community.

## EARLY ACCOUNTS OF ETHIOPIAN MUSIC

Pre-20<sup>th</sup> century travelers' accounts have been very important sources for Ethiopian musical studies, and Ethiopian studies in general. From a preliminary list of chroniclers made in 1978, ranging from Ludovico di Varthema (in 1503–1508) to James Bruce (in 1768–1773), seventeen different travelers had documented Ethiopian music (Shelemay & Jeffery, 1997: 132). A number of these travelers left valuable sources on musical culture. For example, beyond mere passing remarks in the form of a memoir, the first European work “intended to be a scholarly account” of travels to Abyssinia was by Mariano Vittori and was published in Rome in 1552. However, the earliest widely circulated work was by the Jesuit Athanasius Kircher, whose account was published in his encyclopedic and popular *Musurgia Universalis* in 1650 (Shelemay & Jeffery, 1997: 132–136).

Similarly, James Bruce made a detailed description of musical instruments. He also witnessed the massacre of *azmariwoch*,<sup>(1)</sup> punished for their “naughtiness” in 1770 during *Ras*<sup>(2)</sup> Michael Sihul's reign. Later, Guillaume Villoteau met Ethiopian *debtara*<sup>(3)</sup> in 1798 in Egypt while traveling with Napoleon's military campaigns and pioneered ethnographic research on Ethiopian chant with remarkable accuracy (Shelemay & Jeffery, 1997: 137). Francisco Alfarez and Job Leutholf were also among the travelers who made significant records regarding Ethiopian music (Moorefield, 1975; Powne, 1968).

In general, the accounts of travelers, missionaries, and explorers grew out of their fascination with a culture that was new to them. These reports were instrumental in providing detailed descriptions, which were often overlooked as trivial nuanced matters in accounts by local scholars. However, this literature requires the reader to use caution, as it often suffers from rampant Eurocentric views that subscribe to the values and norms of the West. Indeed, Shelemay & Jeffery (1997: 131) found, “Western literature on Ethiopian chant is an outstanding example of the way incomplete and misunderstood information, passed on in the context of a very different culture, can lead to serious misrepresentations and distortions of the subject matter.”

Local scholars' endeavors prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century differed from those of foreign observers; local scholars seemed to concentrate on the production and practice of the music culture attempting to define the uniqueness of Ethiopian musical forms, not necessarily in relation to Western practices of musical analysis. For example, in 567 AD Saint Yared composed his great opus of four volumes that symbolized the four seasons of the year in different modes: Ge'ez, Ezil, Araray.

With the emergence of modernist scholarship at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Ethiopian scholars were engaged in diverse lines of inquiry. These intellectuals were interested primarily in history, language, and the like. However, a number of these scholars were likewise involved in artistic and musical ventures.

For instance, *Negaddras*<sup>(4)</sup> Afework Gebreyesus went to Accademia Albertina di Belle Arti (Italy) to study painting in 1887; he is also known for his earliest novel, *Tobiya*, printed in 1908, which is said to mark the birth of Amharic literature. This work has inspired a considerable number of literary works, mostly dealing with moral issues, written by Ethiopian writers prior to the Italian occupation (1935–1941) (Eshetu, 2006: 3). Another example is *Negaddras* Tessema Eshete, who was sent to Germany in 1908 to be trained as a driver and auto mechanic. He managed to record seventeen songs on disc, and as such is considered to be the first African musician to record and publish in Europe.

*Aleqa*<sup>(5)</sup> Taye Gebremariam (1860–1924), who is among the personalities referred to as “the first generation of intellectuals” (Bahru, 2002), has a special importance in relation to musical research. According to Gustav Arén (1999: 36), *Aleqa* Taye, having been ordained by *Atse*<sup>(6)</sup> Menelik II, was initially interested in studying the Holy Scriptures and history from the Ge’ez collection of parchments found in Germany. Around 1906, *Aleqa* Taye collected Ethiopian folk songs, which Dr. Eugen Mittwoch helped to published in 1907 in Germany; these included Amharic proverbs, puns, riddles, stanzas, tales and anecdotes, and fables and parables. After *Aleqa* Taye’s return to Ethiopia, his collections *Abyssinian Children Songs and Games* and *Abyssinian Stories and Fables* were published by Dr. Eugen Mittwoch in 1910 and 1911, respectively (Arén, 1999: 38). From this remarkable collaboration, *Aleqa* Taye is considered by some to be the first Ethiopian ethnomusicologist.

Many foreign scholars also engaged in Ethiopian musical scholarship during the first quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The best example is Mondon-Vidailhet’s substantive piece “La Musique Éthiopienne” in *Encyclopédie de la musique et dictionnaire du Conservatoire*, printed in Paris (Mondon-Vidailhet, 1922). As a musician and political advisor to *Atse* Menelik II, Mondon-Vidailhet had the chance to learn the Amharic language and about Ethiopian culture. In 1897, he reported an important event of the first brass band in the Emperor’s court in the daily *Le Temps* (Pawlos, 1984: 340). Monneret De Villard’s entry in *Oriente Moderno* in 1942 on liturgical music is an example of European scholarship in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century; it was followed by Bernard Velat’s (1954) ecclesiastical work on Ethiopian *dabtara*.

Subsequently, in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, additional important scholarly works appeared, which treated Ethiopian music in a more profound manner. Two exemplary tomes from prolific writers on Ethiopia are Sylvia Pankhurst’s (1955) volume *Ethiopia: A Cultural History* and Donald Levine’s (1965) *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture*. These dedicate a good deal of attention to liturgical, *azmari*, and other genres of music while contextualizing the traditions within a wider scope of Ethiopian history and culture.

Another seminal figure in Ethiopian music scholarship and performance is Halim El-Dabh. Originally an Egyptian composer and ethnomusicologist, El-Dabh came to Ethiopia in 1961.<sup>(7)</sup> According to David Badagnani, El-Dabh was hired by Haile Selassie I University (now Addis Ababa University) as an associate professor in 1963, when his Rockefeller Foundation funds began to run out.<sup>(8)</sup> In 1963 he formed Orchestra Ethiopia, comprising thirty-six traditional instrumentalists, vocal-

ists, and dancers from many different Ethiopian regions and ethnic groups (Aboneh, 2005: 4). His responsibilities included co-directing the Creative Arts Center and conducting research on liturgical music, especially that of the northern region. He later obtained logistic support from Haile Selassie I University, allowing him to expand his field research to the secular music of the remote southern regions.

El-Dabh conducted research and made field recordings in sixteen African countries and other parts of the world. His Ethiopian field recordings were completed in 1964. Besides their being the earliest intensive field recordings of Ethiopian music, these collections are important because of their wide geographic and ethnic coverage—from Addis Ababa to Arisi, Kaffa, Jima, Lalibela, and Eritrea. El-Dabh asserts that he tried unsuccessfully to deposit his recordings in the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES),<sup>(9)</sup> but my preliminary search of the IES collection turned up sixty-six of them.

Important music researchers with strong theoretical orientations, such as Bálin Sárosi (1967) with *The Music of Ethiopian Peoples* and Michael Powne (1968) with *Ethiopian Music: An Introduction*, added to this scholarship. Powne's book especially has been one of the most authoritative books on Ethiopian music. It contains important firsthand ethnographic research, yet was obviously written from a Eurocentric perspective, exemplified in his treatment of Semitic thesis. A simple example is found in his definition of Ethiopians heirs of the “true” Ethiopian Semitic culture (Powne, 1968). Ashenafi (1971: 68) strongly criticizes Powne after observing one of his conclusions, writing, “His subjective cultural orientation emerges unforgivably.”

## LATTER TWENTIETH-CENTURY SCHOLARSHIP

In the last four or five decades of contemporary scholarship, Ethiopian scholars increasingly appeared within the musical study panorama in a significant manner, both in popular and academic discussions. In general, only the limited number of individuals who were exposed to modern education, like Menelik II, Taferi Mekonen, or others who studied in schools owned by missionaries had the privilege to study abroad. These individuals later secured important positions in politics and government administration. Similarly, those from artistic and literary spheres who were given such opportunities also assumed leading roles. A number of prominent figures in Ethiopian music such as Beshah Teklemariam, Iyuel Yohannes, Ashenafi Kebede, Mulatu Astatke, Tesfaye Lemma, and Tsegaye Debalke could be said to belong to this group. Since the diverse role of all these personalities cannot be discussed in such short paper, only a few representative examples of their scholarly activities are pointed out here.

A key aspect of scholarship from this era involved the development of an alternative writing system for Ethiopian music. Iyuel Yohannes and Tesfaye Lemma provided interesting innovations worthy of mention. Iyuel attempted to adopt a European notation system for transcribing Ethiopian music for an individual or a group of musical instruments in a simplified version (Iyuel, 1980). Tesfaye's endeavor (*The Orchestra Ethiopia Notational System*) was an extended undertaking

using alphabetical, diagrammatic, pictographic, and composite signs to designate time signature, rhythm, tempo, and instrument (Shelemay, 1983). Tesfaye is currently writing a comprehensive history of Ethiopian music in Amharic.<sup>(10)</sup>

Ashenafi Kebede also offered a special contribution to Ethiopian musical scholarship. In addition to his Ph.D. dissertation *The Music of Ethiopia: Its Development and Cultural Setting* (1971), he produced about a dozen seminal works. While serving as the first director of the Yared School of Music (1963–1968), Ashenafi published *Yemusika Sewasew* (The Grammar of Music, 1966), which remains the only major Amharic book on music theory.<sup>(11)</sup> Additionally, the book is significant in its attempt to indigenize Western music theory. Another of his important books is *Roots of Black Music: The Vocal, Instrumental, and Dance Heritage of Africa and Black America* (Ashenafi, 1982), which provides an excellent overview of the styles, forms, and instruments of African music.

Ashenafi's *The Music of Ethiopia: Azmari Music of the Amharas* (1969), published by UNESCO, is an important recording, with excellent explanatory notes. Ashenafi also authored an interesting novel in the Black activist tradition, *Confession* (1960), about an Ethiopian music student in the United States. Because of the similarities of several characters to actual persons and the circumstances leading to Ashenafi's tragic death in 1998, some critics believe the book to be a reflection of the author's own experiences.

Following the 1974 revolution, the involvement of international scholars in Ethiopian music was limited due to the unstable political environment. Nonetheless, a number academic papers related to music was produced locally, although the work of native researchers tends to have limited distribution. A limited number of international scholars have undertaken important academic research in spite of such deterrents, which subsequently opened several potential avenues of musical inquiry. Two such notable undertakings are the Ph.D. dissertations by Cynthia Kimberlin, *Masingo and the Nature of Qanat* (1976), and Shelemay's, *Music, Ritual, and Falasha History* (1986). These scholars have produced dozens more publications on Ethiopian music, securing Ethiopia's place on the map of world music. Some Ethiopians, including Zenebe Bekele, Timkehet Tefera, and Woube Kassaye, have also produced Ph.D. dissertations at various European universities.

## CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP

Important academic work in this field is not limited to foreign research. Despite an extreme lack of logistical and training support for research, essential papers have been produced by students of various faculties and departments at Addis Ababa University (AAU). As academic papers, these are by and large methodologically sound. Students have often worked on subjects on which they have an insider's ethnographical perspective, which often substantially enriches these documents. Furthermore, these academic papers play an essential role in filling the gap created during the Derg<sup>(12)</sup> period (1974–1991), when the amount of field research conducted by Western scholars was minimal. Other major disciplines with research relevant to musical inquiry include theater arts, language and

literature, history, and education. Ethiopian students in these disciplines at AAU have also contributed to musical investigations.<sup>(13)</sup>

Theater and music have been viewed as twin sisters of the performing arts in popular Ethiopian culture. This perception is deeply rooted in the minds of artists and the public. A simple example of this connection is that musical or theatrical institutions, including those of the military, usually have a single department concerned with music and theater. Because of this practice, most formally trained actors, directors, or scriptwriters are also vocalists, lyricists, or instrumentalists. Not surprisingly, many of the topics and personalities discussed in theater arts theses are inherently linked to the musical experience.

Ethiopian theses focusing on language and literature are mostly concerned with folklore and textual content. The contents of these native studies, both background narratives and textual analyses of folk music and commercial records, provide valuable contributions to the body of musical knowledge. Fekade Azeze's B.A. thesis on the song texts of three military music departments, *Yesostu Yewetader Yemuzika Kifloch Zefenoch Yeamarigna Gitmoch Tinat*, is an excellent example of such valuable studies (Fekade, 1973).

Important musical research is also found in the history department of AAU, as history can include any aspect of human experience. Perhaps the contributions most important to musical studies are those made on general subjects, rather than those found in personal biographies. Some examples of useful thematic inquiries include a work on the imperial bodyguard band, by Birhane Kidane (1993), and modern music in Ethiopia by Selam Siyoum (1996).

Although there are not many papers related to music in the Faculty of Education, a few important masters theses include *Content Analysis of Secular Amharic Songs Produced in Cassettes (1972–1994): Implications for Curriculum Planning* by Woube Kassaye (1995), and *Developing Primary School Music Curricular Materials in Multicultural Society: The Case of Addis Ababa* by Ezra Abate (2002). Besides being among the few masters' theses written on music by Ethiopians, they give considerable scope and depth on the subject.

Since its official opening in 1970, AAU's Yared School of Music has been dedicated predominantly to music education and performance, as most instructors are specialists in these areas (see Tables 1 & 2). Beyond these seminal fields of music scholarship at Yared, some initiatives from both instructors and students have resulted in noteworthy musical research. For example, about sixty traditional musical instruments collected by Tesfaye Lemma have been displayed, descriptions of which appeared in his 1975 publication *Ethiopian Musical Instruments*.<sup>(14)</sup> More importantly, seventy-two papers were produced between 2004 and 2007 for the course "Ethiopian Folklore and Theory." Each paper is equivalent to a B.A. thesis and represents highly valuable ethnographic research. It is expected that papers submitted for this course will increase by twenty-five each year in the near future.

Although the trend of overemphasizing biographical research is now moving to more diverse themes, there is still a need for more coursework and preparation in two areas relevant to this paper. The first basic need is to focus on improving English grammar and syntax, as these are essential for communicating research

**Table 1.** List of former instructors at Yared School of Music

No.	Name	Years of Service	Specialization
1.	Akile Brihan Weldekirkos	1967–1974	Yared Music, Amharic
2.	Aklile Birhan Reta	1967–1983	Yared Music
3.	Alemayehu Fanta	1967–1995	Traditional Instruments
4.	Alemu Aga	1972–1980	Geography, History, Begena
5.	Amni Ibrahim	1977–1990	Ethiopian Music History
6.	Ashine Hayle	1973–1988	Flute, Trombone, Solfeggio
7.	Ashenafi Kebede	1966–1968	Founder
8.	Assefa Geremariam	1975–1979	Literature
9.	Assefa Gurmu	1969–1991	Clarinet
10.	Aster Dibaba	1974–1977	Music History, Music Theory
11.	Ayele Abebe	1972–1977	Mathematics
12.	Bekele Gebremariam	1966–1974	Clarinet
13.	Belete Bekele	1974–1975	Clarinet
14.	Bisrat Tamene	1987–1993	Deputy Director
15.	Daniel Yonnes	1973–1977	Music History
16.	Dinku Geremariam	1973	Amharic
17.	Fekadu Girama	1982–2000	Geography, History
18.	Getachew Mekonnen	1984–1984	Clarinet
19.	Gezahegn Haile	1980–2002	Violin, Cello
20.	Girma Yiffrashewa	1994–1998	Piano
21.	Hailemariam Kekeba	1990–1998	English
22.	Hialu Weledemariam	1971–1973	Trumpet, Solfeggio
23.	Bizuayen Gebremariam	1973–1999	Amharic
24.	Lemma Feysa	1978–1986	Trumpet
25.	Lisanework Gebregiorgis	1980–1994	Yared Music
26.	Mamo Gebremariam	1972	Trombone
27.	Maregn Tesfalidet	1972–1977, 1980–1981	Violin, Viola
28.	Mekuria Fikade	1975–1981	Violin
29.	Melaku Gelaw	1966–1995	Traditional Instruments
30.	Metasbia Melaku	1985–1995	Piano
31.	Nersis Nalbandian	1966–1978	Choir
32.	Seblework Abebe	1993–2003	English
33.	Selamawit Meka	1999–2003	Amharic
34.	Shibabaw Alemu	1986–2006	Yared Music, Amharic
35.	Tamiru Chipsa	1990–1994	Violin
36.	Tefera Mekonnen	1971–1982	Piano, Double Bass
37.	Tesfaye Gebereziabheir	1982–1985, 1992–1993	Double Bass
38.	Teshome Shenkute	1984–2006	Traditional Instruments
39.	Tsege Feleke	1970–1998	Trumpet, Violin, French Horn
40.	Tsegaye Dealke	1968–1976	Ethiopian Music History, Music Theory, Folklore
41.	Tsehaye Teklehaymanot	1987–1991	Piano, Solfeggio
42.	Yigzu Desta	1972–1985	Violin, Cello
43.	Yitna Tadegegn	1980–1987	Mesenqo

Source: Memorial Week Booklet for Academic Musicians, June 2003.

**Table 2.** List of current instructors at Yared School of Music

No.	Name	Years of Service	Specialization
1.	Aklilu Zewdie	1992–	Conducting, Clarinet
2.	Alemayehu Gebre Tsadik	1987–	Trumpet
3.	Alemayehu Welde Yohannes	2000–	Mesenqo
4.	Alemnesh Awol	1994–	Flute
5.	Amsale Mulugeta	1984–	Flute
6.	Asfaw Shemelis	1986–	Percussion
7.	Bekele Debire	1974–	Conducting
8.	Belay Cherenet	1986–	Trombone
9.	Eleni Alemayehu	2005–	Piano
10.	Ermias Welde Eyesus	1980–	Church Music
11.	Ezra Abate	1989–	Music Pedagogy, Piano
12.	Feleke Hailu	1989–	Music Pedagogy, Clarinet
13.	Getachew Gessi	1982–2000, 2005–	Choral Conducting
14.	Hailu Alemayehu	1995–	Music Pedagogy, Violin
15.	Henok Temesgen	2006–	Double Bass
16.	Kidan Wondimeneh	1998–	Piano
17.	Martha Samuel	2006–	Viola
18.	Martha Tilahun	1998–	Piano
19.	Mesfin Abate	1986–	Double Bass
20.	Mintesinot Kebede	2006–	Clarinet
21.	Seblu Seba	2007–	Piano
22.	Selamawit Aragaw	2006–	Violin
23.	Solomon Lulu	1974–	Trumpet
24.	Tadele Tilahun	1991–	Clarinet
25.	Tamara Solomasova	1991–	Viola
26.	Tekleyohannis Zike	1979–	Conducting
27.	Valentina Colman	1977–	Piano
28.	Yeshumnesh Taye	2007–	Flute
29.	Wube Kasaye	1981–1998, 2005–	Music Pedagogy
30.	Yishak Dawit	2006–	Trombone
31.	Yohanes Mengistu	1991–	Trumpet
32.	Yonas Ayana	1989–	Choir Conducting

Source: Archives of AAU Office of the Associate Vice-President for Academic Affairs.

to a wider audience. The second area for improvement is that of enhancing methodological skills such as statistical analysis and data collection techniques. One possible measure might be to offer more applicable courses, such as musical ethnography. As many people have suggested, a graduate research program in this area would be the ultimate solution.

Recently musical scholarship has attracted growing interest, especially from the international community. The papers presented at the 16<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Ethiopian Studies (ICES) in July 2007 (see Table 3) attests to this fact. Eleven diverse musical topics were presented, allowing, for the first time, enough presentations to form a separate panel session. This represents a significant increase in interest, especially considering that only one article had been presented at the



**Table 3.** Musical topics presented at the 16<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies

No.	Name	Title of presentation
1.	Anne Damon-Guillot	Liturgical Music of the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church: 'aqwaqwam or the Zema in Movement
2.	Cynthia Tse Kimberlin	Yared Music School (Addis Ababa, Ethiopia) 1946–2003: Diverse Connections as a Model for the 21 <sup>st</sup> Century
3.	Ezra Abate	Ethiopian Kignits (Scales) and Their Structure: Analysis of the Kignits
4.	Fumiko Ohinata	Progress of the UNESCO/Norway Funds-in-Trust Cooperation Project (2005–2008): “Ethiopia- Traditional Music, Dance and Instruments”
5.	Hugo Ferran	The Maale Protestant Music
6.	Itsushi Kawase	Exploring the Representation of Cultural Images in Traditional Ethiopian Dance of Azmaribet in Addis Ababa
7.	Kay Kaufman Shelemay	Performing Community: Ethiopian Music and Musicians in the United States
8.	Kifle Assefa	The Significance of St. Yared’s Music in the Age of Globalization
9.	Kristin Skare Orgeret	Censorship of Popular Music in Ethiopia. The Case of Teddy Afro
10.	Olivier Tourny	The Ethiopian Traditional Music Programme. Stage II Music
11.	Simone Tarsitani	Digital Sound Archives & Libraries: Meanings, Problems and Perspectives of Preserving and Making Accessible Recorded Sound in Ethiopia
12.	Woube Kassaye	The Practice of Music Research in Ethiopia: Successes and Challenges

Source: IES Registration desk for the 16<sup>th</sup> ICES Norway Trondheim July 2–6, 2007.

14<sup>th</sup> ICES.<sup>(15)</sup> Of the eleven papers presented in 2007, only three were read by Ethiopian scholars, evidence of the prevailing dominance of foreign research on Ethiopian music.

The UNESCO/Norway Funds-in-Trust Cooperation Project (UNESCO, 2007) “Ethiopia—Traditional Music, Dance and Instruments” is another instance of both the increase in musical study and the continuing Western domination of such studies as well as emerging interest of local experts (see Table 4). Not only thematic development but also geographical extension has evolved. For example, Hugo Ferran and Thierry Fournel conducted ethnomusicological study in southern Ethiopia, while Timkehet Teffera, Katell Morand and Olivier Tourny conducted fieldwork in Tigray, Bahir Dar, Gondar areas (northern Ethiopia). Simone Tarsitani has also made intensive research in Harar (eastern Ethiopia).

## ONGOING SCHOLARSHIP

There are two distinctive personalities in current music scholarship especially worthy of mention. The first is Francis Falceto, who describes himself as a music lover, rather than as a scholar. Nevertheless, he has published about seventy pieces of writing, including CD booklets and notes, on Ethiopian music.<sup>(16)</sup> Falceto is the editor of the twenty-three *Ethiopiennes* CD series, dating back to 1998, that focus primarily on music released by Amha Records, Kaifa Records, and Philips-Ethiopia in the 1960s and 1970s. In addition, he has produced contemporary music CDs accompanied by informative booklets on Ethiopian music records,

**Table 4.** List of individual experts involved in the UNESCO/Norway Funds-in-Trust Cooperation Project (2005–2008): Ethiopian–Traditional Music, Dance and Instruments

Individual Experts	Institution
Abraham Nigatu	Tigray Bureau of Tourism and Culture
Anne Damon	Jean Monnet University, Saint Etienne, France
Arnaud Kruszynski	Paris University I
Asfaw Shemelis	Yared School of Music, Addis Ababa University
Bastien Lagatta	Paris University X
Belaye Tshernet	Yared School of Music, Addis Ababa University
Christina Gabbert	Mainz University
Claire Lacombe	Jean Monnet University, Saint Etienne University
Daniel Wogaso	Institute for the Study of Culture, SPNNR Languages and History
Dereje Tadesse	Ethiopian National Archives and Library Agency
Emanuel Abera	Independent Music Teacher
Ezra Abate	Yared School of Music, Addis Ababa University
Hugo Ferran	Paris University VIII
Hussein Endessa	Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau
Ilaria Sartori	University of Rome, La Sapienza
Itsushi Kawase	Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies, Kyoto University
Katell Morand	Paris University X
Kay Kaufman Shelemay	Department of Music, Harvard University
Leila Qashu	Paris University VIII
Olivier Tourny	CNRS – Paris University V
Perrine Fitremann-Houngbo	EHESS, Paris
Shibabaw Alemu	Yared School of Music, Addis Ababa University
Simeneh Betreyohannes	Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Addis Ababa University
Simone Tarsitani	Graduate School of Asian and African Area Studies Kyoto University
Solomon Lulu	Yared School of Music, Addis Ababa University
Solomon Mulugeta	Independent Music Teacher
Stéphanie Weisser	University of Brussels
Tasew Chefike	South Omo Zone Information and Culture Office
Tekeleyohannes Zike	Yared School of Music, Addis Ababa University
Thierry Fournel	143 rue Gabriel Peri
Timkehet Teferra	Martin-Luther-University of Halle-Wittenberg
Woube Kassa	Department of Teacher Education & Curriculum Studies, Addis Ababa University
Yohannes Mengistu	Yared School of Music, Addis Ababa University

Source: Adapted from UNESCO's (2007) Circular Letter No. 3.

which have inspired other local producers to do the same. Recently, Francis Falceto also received a prestigious award from the BBC for these endeavors. *Abyssinie Swing: A Pictorial History of Modern Ethiopian Music* (Falceto, 2001) is another of his commendable contributions to Ethiopian music literature, while his forthcoming project, *A Biblio-Discography of Ethiopian Music*, which he has been working for the past twenty years, will be a most valuable addition to Ethiopian music literature.

Despite the wide distribution and accolades connected to his work, a number

of questions have been raised on Falceto's ventures. One criticism is the inaccessibility of the *Ethiopiquest* CDs on the Ethiopian market, as the few volumes locally available are priced between 150–200 birr (=US\$13–\$18, 2009), far beyond the reach of the average citizen. Many Ethiopian music lovers are offended that they are thus deprived of enjoying their own music and suggest a less expensive offering of the records for the Ethiopian market.<sup>(17)</sup> Moreover, some artists featured in the *Ethiopiquest* CD series have said that they have not benefited from sales of the series. In response, Alemayehu Eshete<sup>(18)</sup> bears witness to the fair remuneration he received from the project. *Ethiopiquest* CDs, to Falceto's credit, have provided an opportunity for active musicians such as Mehamud Ahmed, Mulatu Astatke, and Getachew Mekuria to reach a wider audience.

Another objection to *Ethiopiquest*, aside from the question of reciprocity, would be that the series implies that its music represents a "golden age." Such labeling serves, perhaps inadvertently, to discredit the musical progress of the last three or four decades, which has both rhetorical and practical implications in representing Ethiopian music in the world music map. In an online forum (Seleda, 2003), the rising Ethiopian musical star, Jorga Mesfin, commented on the question "Why did it take a foreigner to make *Ethiopiquest*?" with, "*He didn't make it, he just compiled it and sold it. It took Starbucks to make the world find out where Yirga Cheffe is. I think whoever did it deserves credit for recognizing the value.*"<sup>(19)</sup> To the query, "Were the late 1960s and early 1970s really the Golden Age of contemporary Ethiopian music, or was that a term coined as a ploy to market tons of relatively hassle-free archival material?" Jorga replied:

The 60s ... I was not born. And the 70s ... I will take a guess. If the decision is made by the number of great musicians on the scene, and the number of upcoming artists, today would be the Golden Age of Ethiopian music because there are numerous incredible musicians all over the place. The problem is that they are all over the place and don't have the opportunity or venues to create as freely. Individual talent is probably higher today than it was in the 70s. But a group sound is virtually non-existent. The 70s and some of the 80s had great bands with distinct characteristics and attitudes that could be discerned within minutes of listening, and for that it could be considered Golden. However, if by some miracle the talents that exist today are allowed to get together for an extended period of time and just create without regard to sales, money, etc, we might catapult into a Platinum Age within minutes (Seleda, 2003).

These two issues, foreign agency and representation of the musical episode of a different generation, are the major source of discontent shared by many of today's Ethiopian musicians and the public.

Another interesting addition to Ethiopian musical study is that of Itsushi Kawase, a Japanese visual anthropologist and Buddhist monk. As a guitarist, he has performed in Japan, Canada, and India. In 2001, as part of his graduate study in African Area Studies at Kyoto University, he began studying *azmari* and *lalibela* music. Between 2005 and 2007, he made four ethnographic musical films:

*Lalibaloch: Living in the Endless Blessing, Duduye, Kids Got a Song to Sing, and Dancing Addis Ababa.*

In local screenings, some individuals have protested that the films emphasize minor details, leading to social and cultural misrepresentations. Kawase admits that his films focus on individual experience, but believes that detailed explanations in his personal presence, which accompany the film presentation, make possible an understanding of the background of his films.<sup>(20)</sup> Unfortunately, the release of these films on the World Wide Web does not include his explanations.<sup>(21)</sup> Nonetheless, Kawase's initiative for capturing the musical experiences of Ethiopia on film has provided an alternative approach that has been neglected by the academic community. Although many ethnomusicology researchers employ film documentation methods, such films are rarely edited so that they represent social narratives in themselves.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Drawing upon the discussion of previous sections some final remarks that are pertinent to further inquiries are presented here. To begin with, there is a need for more research on the distribution of audio and film recordings based on Ethiopian music. One possibility would be to provide training and education opportunities for Ethiopian students in academic institutions overseas. This would provide chances to explore broader historical and geographical contexts and to take advantage of archival resources that are unavailable in Ethiopia.

As evidenced by scholarly publications and ongoing research, the domination of Western scholarship in the field of Ethiopian music has continued, and is strengthened by the fact that until recently, very few Ethiopian scholars were working intensely on the subject. For example, unlike in other disciplines such as history, only 3 out of 12 presentations with musical themes were authored by Ethiopian scholars at the 16<sup>th</sup> International Conference of Ethiopian Studies (see Table 3).

More so than any other theme in Ethiopian scholarship, music has remained a subject for the study of foreigners. While international interest should certainly be encouraged, as it contributes to a greater body of knowledge, it is extremely important to enhance the local capacity. The enhancement of native researchers' capacities through further academic training would balance representation on these subjects.

Collaboration between staff and students from diverse faculties and departments at AAU is one feasible way to advance scholarship. For example, students from the Institute of Language Studies, the Department of History, and Yared School of Music write papers discussing important personalities, such as artists Alemayehu Eshete, Asnakech Worku, and Alemu Aga. These essays are written from various perspectives, such as the linguistic study of lyrics, historical biographies, and musical analysis. One can imagine how valuable these papers would be if they were made more available and their insights were combined, as they complement one another in method and data. Making a complete bibliography would likewise provide a basis for merging past and present research and developing future

collaborative projects. Furthermore, some excellent papers, such as *Yeato Yoftahe Niguse Yehiwet Tarik* (The Life Story of Yoftahe Niguse), by Mulugeta Siyum (1982), *Ye Negaddras Tessema Eshete Achir Yehiwet Tarik Ena Gitmochache* (A Short Biography and Study of Negaddras Tessema Eshete his Lyrics) by Kinfe Hailu (1973), *Ye'ato Beshah Teklemariam Tarik* (Biography of Beshah Teklemariam), by Tesfaye Demisie (1987)—which are exemplary of Ethiopian scholarship into music using an interdisciplinary approach—could be published with very little modification so that they would reach a wider audience.

Increasing the availability of the few existing B.A., M.A., and Ph.D. papers on Ethiopian music would also be a practical step toward sharing this limited body of knowledge. Several known academic papers on Ethiopian music by international scholars are not currently available in local university libraries. Surprisingly, of the dozen or so doctoral dissertations on music found at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies library, none except Woube Kassaye's are available; not even those by Ashenafi Kebede, the school's founder are available at the Yared School of Music library, where they would be most useful. As English is the official medium of instruction at AAU and the language is well known by Ethiopian academic community, the translation of academic papers and articles from French, German, and other languages into English, if not to local languages, is a necessary undertaking. Before further projects are initiated in this field, it would be wise to complete and disseminate an inventory of the existing body of research. Without this step, it will be impossible to recognize the gaps in research and the need for communication among scholars.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, music in Ethiopia has been among the least explored topics in Ethiopian studies, but that situation is improving. In addition to the increased emphasis given to this research, an important recent development is the move towards more diversity in musical studies. Another example of conceptual development of contemporary discourse is that Ethiopia would be better understood in its relationship to the rest of Africa. It is crucial to extend the focus (thematic, geographic and periodic) of the extent of musical research with ethical consideration and reciprocity. The growing number of public debates and academic discourses on Ethiopian music over the last few years should supplement and complement one another; fostering integrated forums of constructive considerations that bridge academic and public dialogues should continue.

## NOTES

- (1) Plural of Azmari, traditional professional musicians who wander from place to place or serve in the courts of nobilities. In the text, Amharic words are written in italic font; Ethiopians are referred to by their first name, as is customary.
- (2) Head; the highest traditional title under the emperor.
- (3) A learned cleric, often with attributes of astrology and intrigue.

- (4) Head of merchants; originally leader of a merchant caravan, used to refer to the chief customs officer, which was later conferred as a title of honor.
- (5) A title for a scholastic chief of priests or lay administrator.
- (6) Emperor.
- (7) Halim El-Dabh had been studying composition in the United States since 1950 but did not acquire U.S. citizenship until 1961, which is the same year he came to Ethiopia for ethnomusicological research.
- (8) David Badagnani is an assistant to Prof. Halim El-Dabh, writing his doctoral thesis on his life and work, at Kent State University. I acknowledge the information provided by him through Charles Sutton (2007).
- (9) Information provided by David Badagnani.
- (10) Charles Sutton, interview, January 23, 2008.
- (11) Zenebe Bekele (1990) later attempted to write supplemental works on music theory in Amharic.
- (12) The military committee formed in June 1974 that took over the Imperial regime.
- (13) This paper cites thesis references submitted to Addis Ababa University because the author did not have access to other theses written on the subject of music that may be available at other universities in Ethiopia.
- (14) Personal communication with Ato Asfaw Shimelis, Head, Traditional Music Instrument Section, Yared School of Music.
- (15) According to Ato Birhanu Tefera, one of the 14<sup>th</sup> ICES organizers, not all of these papers were presented at the conference. Since the 15<sup>th</sup> ICES proceedings have not been issued, the comparison is made with the 14<sup>th</sup> ICES.
- (16) Written correspondence with Francis Falceto, January 20, 2008.
- (17) According to Francis Falceto (interview, January 28, 2008), he is an editor of the series; the decision makers are Buda Musique of Paris.
- (18) Interview, January 5, 2008.
- (19) Mesfin's responses appeared on "Seleda 30 Questions—the 2015 issue" Volume 4. Issue July 2, 2003, (<http://www.seleda.com/>). Accessed on November 20, 2007.
- (20) Personal communication with Itsushi Kawase, January 2007.
- (21) Information on Itsushi Kawase's films are found online at <http://www.itsushikawase.com/filmography.html>

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