

ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 4353

# Ritual Music of Ethiopia

RECORDED AND EDITED BY LIN LERNER AND CHET A. WOLLNER





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SIDE 1

- 1a. Kammba drum solo (Wallano Tribe) 1:00
- 1b. Woyisha cow horn (Wallano Tribe) 1:07
2. Lembola (Hanafa Tribe) 1:42
- 3a. "Boruekka," Ox song (Gernu Tribe) 1:20
- 3b. Ox song & chant (Gernu Tribe) 1:55
4. Washint instrumental (Tigre Tribe) 4:16
5. "Gojjam Endenesh" (Tigre Tribe) 4:11  
(Where there is plenty of honey)
6. Intro. of man to woman (Adjuran Tribe) 5:21

SIDE 2

- 1a. Giddle instruments: "Hanata" (Horn) :10
- 1b. Giddle Tribe: "Filla" (Flute) :05
- 1c. Giddle Tribe: "Mira" (Pipes of Pan) :15
- 1d. Giddle Tribe: "Filla" (Flute) :10
- 1e. Giddle Tribe: "lolata" (Horn) :11
2. Giddle instrumental (Giddle Tribe) 4:36
3. "Sabbath" Service (Falashim Tribe) 2:53
4. "Hermana" (Borana Tribe) 3:32  
(Bringing the cattle to the water)
5. "Siyawe" (Burgi Tribe) 2:55  
(Wedding song)
6. "Guretta" (Konso Tribe) 3:42  
(Greeting song)

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DESCRIPTIVE NOTES ARE INSIDE POCKET

COVER DESIGN BY RONALD CLYNE

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# RITUAL MUSIC OF ETHIOPIA

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and Chet A. Wollner  
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Chet Wollner

The tribes of the Sidamo and Gemu-Gofa Provinces of Southwestern Ethiopia have rarely been recorded. The music of Adjuran, Garris and the Watta had never been documented. The reason is simply that the area south of Dilla to the border at Moyale is mostly desert marked by scattered villages and huge termite hills ten to fifteen feet high. Water is highly valued and either must be carted long distances or bought. Frequently, only the later is possible.

Living on a subsistence level, the tribes of this region eat mainly Injera and Wat. Most of the tribes like the Borana, Burgi, and the Konso are pastoral cattle farmers who depend on the land for their existence. When the people of these tribes sing, or play, or dance, they give themselves totally to the music. The frenzy of the ritualistic ceremonies is attested to by the trance state which many of the people will enter during festivals. Varied, diverse yet unique, the music of this area stands as a landmark in African musical tradition.



An Adjuran dancer in trance during a ceremony at Moyale, Ethiopia. In honor of the birthday celebration of Haile Selassie, the people from the surrounding villages walked into Moyale and danced, sang, and played for two days.

The people who live in this area of Ethiopia still build their own houses. The dome shaped house pictured on the cover represents the architecture of the Hanafa people of Hagre Salam. Constructed of interlaced bamboo, these domes provide living space for one family and their animals. Heated by fires, the animals, who enter by the same door as the people, live in the middle while the family members live around them. Usually two or three homes occupy one living area, and it is not unusual to find that the members of a village living perhaps twenty five miles apart still speak a different dialect. While Amharic is the national language, there are still over 250 dialects still spoken in Ethiopia.

The music of Ethiopia is unique in Africa. The breath accents already documented are an integral part of the ritualistic ceremonies which take place. The Zar possession cults of the Galla people employ these accents and it is not uncommon to find singers whose sole function is to make sounds of babies, cows, or other animals like the camel. Talking and chanting in call and response patterns, the leader tells the story of either an historic event or myth or something funny that happened to him today while his friends respond in antiphonal fashion. The call and response shout Jon ni oh lo ho of the Gemu people is a good example of this method of oral history communication. Similar to the wandering minstrels of seventeenth century England, the "bards" of Ethiopia live in the Southwestern areas and play at weddings, funerals or when they are hired to do so. Rolled trills with the tongue, whistling, and harshly indrawn breath are also not uncommon techniques of singing among the Sidamo people; yet similar to the Gemu people, the Sidamo tribes still enact the song with the

body as well as the voice. Unlike the flautists of the Gidole hills or the reverend Falshim, the musicians of the Tigre tribe who played the Washints actually created their music through the rhythm of their floating bodies. Open ended, their flutes were played by the swaying of the musicians as their bodies danced with each other. Although most of these tribes concentrated on producing sound with their voices, the use of instruments was essential to the music. The five stringed Krar, a sharp shaped instrument, and the Masengo, a one string violin were quite common among the Tigre and the Gemu. The drum, of course forms an important part of African music; yet, it is conspicuously absent among the nomadic tribes such as the Garris, the Watta and the Adjuran.

Dance in Ethiopia varies from tribe to tribe and province to province. However there are certain elements which are characteristic of the performance of all types. For instance, all dances are accompanied generally by singing, clapping and one or more instruments. The major instruments being the drum (as in the Amharic national dance), violin (masenquo) and flute (Washint). Singing is generally antiphonal, although the lead singers may change and singers may even become dancers. Frequently the dance and singing are characterized by exaggerated breathing and sounds of exclamation. For example, the men of the Hanafa tribe sing love songs as though they were gasping for breath, and the Gemus of Arba Minch mimic growling sounds while they sing of tigers at play.

Dancers for the most part neither sing nor play instruments. Yet in Gidole, about 36 men play one note vertical flutes while they dance in a circle with about 30 other men.

The characteristic movements for the dances in the Southern desert region are jumps or hops, while in the more fertile North, the emphasis is on shoulder action similar to a "shimmy". The shimmy is accompanied by a head movement either side-side or backward-forward, which is reminiscent of Ethiopian greeting or parting movements (similar to the French custom of kissing both cheeks). Performing skill is emphasized in the jumping movements in contests of the Gidole people. In the middle of a circle or semi circle of people, one or several men compete to see how high they can jump until tired or overtaken by other contestants. For Adjuran, rhythmic perfection is necessary.

Some Ethiopian dances have a mimetic quality. In the ox herding song a man pretends he is holding a plough being drawn by an ox; in the Tigre pigeon



dance a male "eagle" approaches and moves away from a female "pigeon". In these examples the dance illustrates the content of the accompanying song.

In Ethiopia, dances are performed on festive occasions such as weddings, harvest festivals and Haile Selassie's birthday. The number of participants varies. There are dances in which the sexes are segregated and there are dances for both sexes. The national dance can be a "social" flirtatious dance between a man and a woman, or it may be danced by two men, but communication between the two participants is essential. In other dances, such as that of the Adjuran, the dancers don't face each other. They dance together but separately, relating to each other by keeping to the same rhythm.

Although only several people may be dancing, the entire community participates either by singing, playing an instrument or clapping. In this way the gap is bridged between the performer and his audience, for all are performers to some extent.

Collected during the summer of 1973, the music is part of the Dawa collection. The Dawa is a non-profit organization dedicated to perpetuating, documenting, and exploring ecologically threatened cultures.



The musicians of the Wallamo tribe play flutes ten feet in length which they hold high above their head and blow up into them.

## SIDE I

### 1. KAMMBA DRUM SOLO

The Kamma drum is made from "mokota" wood and is approximately 1½ feet in

diameter. Played by Malko Bokie, this instrument together with the Woyisha Cow Horn which is heard briefly at the beginning, and the Zaya, a six foot long flute held in place pointing diagonally upward, form the principal instruments of the Wallamo tribe who live near Wallamo Soddo in the Sidamo Province of Ethiopia. Fragment.

### 1b. WOYISHA COW HORN

The Woyisha long horn is made from Bamboo and measures approximately ten feet. It is blown during wedding festivals and especially at New Year's time in September. Fragment.

### 2. FARO

This is a traditional wedding song common in the Sidamo Province. This particular Faro is sung by the Hanafa people who live four kilometres from Hagre Salam. Harshly indrawn breath during the response gives the impression of roaring. Singing about the beauty of the bride, the throwing of the bouquet, the singers hope to bring good luck to the couple. During the first month of marriage, the newly married couple lives with the boy's parents. Usually the Hanafa marry between the ages of 18 to 20 for a boy and 13 to 18 for a girl. If a girl reaches her 20th birthday and is still unwed, she is then permitted to ask a boy to marry her. If the boy accepts and his parents refuse, they then may elope. Usually the boy gives the girl's parents a dowry between \$100-200, either in currency, land or cattle. Polygamous, pastoral cattle farmers, the Hanafa people live in dome shaped houses. They still believe in the power of a spiritual tribal elder. Their cult of worship and ceremonies. Every eight years during the Gada festival, which occurs in the months of June and July, the Hanafa people make a pilgrimage to an elevated area near their homes. Bringing back oxen which they steal, they then sacrifice these animals, eating them afterward. Killing anyone who prevents them from fulfilling this ritual, the Hanafa tribesmen cut off the cattle's tail as a trophy and as a sign of their own physical prowess and devotion to their spiritual leader.

### 3. BORAUEKKA

This plowing song tells of the attributes of the ox, his strength and worthiness, his faithfulness and loyalty to his master. Singing about the ritual of plowing the land, the Gemu tribesman of Arba Minch constantly yell to the ox, "Waho Waho" trying to make him plow faster. Chanting scrapping the ground with a stick, and moving in the motions of the ox, the Gemu people take a common task and preserve it in song. Even after long hours of toil in the field, the tribesmen come home

to sing as a means of relaxation. A popular song of the Gemu people of Gemu-Gofa, this song utilizes traditional call and response methods.

### 4. WASHINT INSTRUMENTAL

Three musicians of the Tigre tribe weave a mosaic pattern of sound as they blow their open ended flutes in unison. Moving their arms in a circular motion, the Washint is an extension of the body and the sound is produced by this free movement. Approximately one yard in length, these metal flutes are played by Bebere Zenier, Asgerum Gebere, and Beyene Hafte. This song was recorded in Axum, Ethiopia. Fragment.

### 5. GOJJAM ENDENESH

Gojjam Endenesh or How are Your? is a traditional Tigre folk song. The actual translation is "How are you Gojjam, where honey is found in plenty." This song is usually sung among friends after work in the fields. This particular song utilizes not only the Krar and the Masengo but also a shephard's flute. Accompanying the song, the dancers move to its rhythms picking up their feet, moving them side-wyas, while simultaneously bending from the hips and upper body. Similar to another song "Serihu" Gojjam Endenesh is saying that "you have to work in order to live."

### 6. INTRODUCTION OF A MAN TO A WOMAN

Nomads, the Adjuran tribe is a subgroup of the Garri's. They travel with only what they can carry on their backs herding their cattle in front of them. Kind generous people, the Adjuran stand over six feet in height, by far the tallest regal tribesman and have acquiline features. Singing in poly-rhythmic structure, these people form lines or circles and dance within them. Alternating fast and slow movements, undulating their bodies as a porpoise swims in the water, they dance themselves into trance. Using hop steps or hopping on one foot and sliding the other foot to the front, they may suddenly jump high into the air seemingly defying gravity. Their head seems to flow with their bodies as their hips move gracefully back and forth. Using their bodies as instruments, they dance and sing together with their women. This song, the introduction of a man, is in the form of call and response. When a man desires to meet a woman, it is not uncommon for him to sing with his friends for her. Living close to the land, the Adjuran people are in harmony with it.

## SIDE II

### 1. GIDOLE INSTRUMENTAL

A. Hanafa horn: made of wrapped bamboo this horn summons people outside of



the village to festivals ceremonies and funerals. It is approximately 3 feet long.

B. Filla flute: made of bamboo, this flute is approximately six inches to a foot in length. It is used during dance ceremonies or festivals.

C. Mira: Pipes of Pan. It is played on the way home from the fields or in idle time.

D. Filla flute: made of bamboo, this flute is larger than the other Filla but serves the same purpose.

E. Iolata horn: this horn summons people for work or play. It is usually played by the chief of an age group. A chief of an age group is a person who is respected for his actions; he is responsible and possesses a strong will and good personality.

It is the tradition of the Gidole people that one person makes and takes care of all the instruments. It is his responsibility to keep the instruments while the people are working. When their is a ceremony or a festival, he then gives the musicians their own instruments. This person is usually between the age of 12-20 and possesses a good character. He is usually chosen by the chief or elder of the tribe. Quite often, this function is inherited.

## 2. GIDOLE FLUTE ENSEMBLE

Composed of 36 musicians who each play a flute that produces a single sound, and accompanied by several dancers, the Gidole people sing and dance in a circle as they reenact past experiences. Singing about harvesting, plowing, and "shilota" festival of the harvest, they move freely as they play. While the sound of 36 instruments produces a sound similar to electronic music, the Gidole music is a blend of human interaction at its zenith. Predominantly farmers, the Gidole people run to festivals, playing their flutes as they go. Situated in the mountains of Southwestern Ethiopia the Gidole village remains inaccessible to most travelers and consequently their music remains unique in Africa.

## 3. FALASHIM SABBATH SERVICE

The Falashim people of Ambover still speak Geez, an extinct language which predated Amharic and is one linguistic basis of that language. Living near Gondar, the Falashim continue to preserve ancient Hebraic traditions in their Sabbath worship. The service, of which this section is taken, is the Friday night "Shabat Shalm". Believing that they first came from Babylon through Egypt to Ethiopia, the Falashim people are educating their children to not only speak Amharic but Hebrew and Geez. Interestingly, the Falashim used to pray in Hebrew but from the time of the Sudanese war in 1892, when Hebrew books were burned,

they started praying in Geez and have continued to do so. Today, their number is decreasing as intermarriage and population movement occurs. Mainly farmers, these people have little to eat but still remain happy and content.



Borana women with their gourds and kettles in Moyale Ethiopia. The gourds are used for carrying milk which is sold or traded for food at the market on Saturdays.

## 4. HERMANA

This song of the Borana tribe tells of the ritual of watering the animals. When the women bring the cattle to the water, they sing to express their love of the animals. The chorus sings two notes while the leader shouts above. Trilling, undulating breath is a common aspect of their song. Nomadic, cattle raising people, the Borana historically immigrated from Somalia. Today, they inhabit the area from Moyale to Mega but often trade across the border in Kenya. Women build the homes among the Borana and they also are the principal musicians. Interestingly, instead of using a drum, the dancer, who sometimes is the singer, beats her feet on leather.

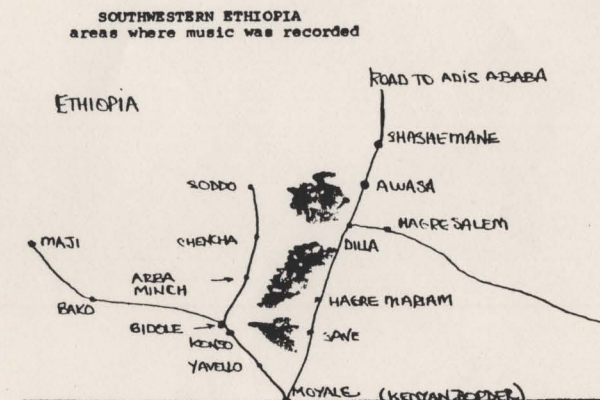
## 5. SIYAWÉ

This is a Wedding Song of the Burgi Tribe. Pastoral, territorial people, the Burgi use sticks, drums, bells, flutes, and horns to make music. Raising maize, wheat, millet, and beans, these people still plow the land by hand; thus, many of their songs are about their daily experiences. Skipping, hopping, and galloping as they dance, the Burgi people are dressed in bright colors and engage in song with the fervor of happy, contented people. During song, the leader remains in the center while the dancers and singers form a circle around her.

## 6. GURETTA

This song is a Greeting Song either for  
- three -

someone you have not seen in a long time or someone you have just seen yesterday. Always respectful of the "guest", the Konso people sing about their guest, their homes, their land, and the hope of a good harvest. Craftsman, wood carvers and artisans, the Konso people have elaborate ceremonies for the respect of the dead. Statues carved from wood are common landmarks of graves in their belief that the dead can be protected from evil spirits.





# Washint Flutes

**I**

**II**

## 1. KAMBA DRUM + Two Waysha Cow Horn Flutes

(NOTATE AS B<sup>b</sup>) d=3=2 ie each measure is equal duration (d=d)

drum notes 5 notes apart

## 3. FARO

melodic outline

CHANT (LEADER)

LEADER SINGS

CHORUS