

## BOOK REVIEW

Kay Kaufman Shelemay. *Sing and Sing On: Sentinel Musicians and the Making of the Ethiopian Diaspora*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022. 432 pp. Notes. Bibliography. Index. \$35.00. Paper. ISBN: 9780226810027.

Most humanities scholars either engage with a single subject over the course of their careers, deepening their involvement with that site over time, or transition out of their first project into an entirely new subject or site. Any scholar who looks wistfully back at their early work and thinks about the path not taken will be heartened to read Kay Kaufman Shelemay's long-awaited book on music-making in the Ethiopian-American diaspora, *Sing and Sing On: Sentinel Musicians and the Making of the Ethiopian Diaspora*. After focusing most of her publications since the 1990s on material about Syrian Jewish music, theories of soundscapes, and early music, Shelemay presents here a substantial longitudinal study about Ethiopian musicians, primarily based in the USA, arguing that they serve as sentinels guarding the towers of culture and society and safeguarding Ethiopianness. She does so through the mechanism of multitemporality (22), presenting interviews, observations/fieldnotes and repertoire collected primarily in the 2006–2010 period but informed by work as far back as the 1970s and up to the assassination of Oromo musician Hachalu Hundessa in 2020. Shelemay's longstanding commitment to Ethiopian culture and intimacy with Ethiopian musicians is singular.

Across three sections, Shelemay develops the concept of the sentinel musician, from the concept of the *azmari* (itinerant minstrel) employing the poetic mechanism of wax and gold (*semana worq*), to the Oromo musicians in the Imperial Bodyguard Orchestra mid-century, to the diasporic performers who experiment with language of lyrics and instrumentation but return to Ethiopia for visits. In some instances, whole chapters are dedicated to tracing an individual's imprint on Ethiopian music-making, such as mythological founder Saint Yared (Chapter Three), impresario extraordinaire Amha Eshete (Chapter Five), or contemporary singer Abonesh "Abiti" Adinew (Chapter Six). The concept of the sentinel is returned to frequently, and is evidenced so abundantly through primary data plus tables, glossary, and appendices that the reader has no choice but to be convinced. If there is such a thing as being too meticulous, this book meets that burden at over eighty pages of endnotes that often include extremely important material.

As a reference document, this book provides material that any nonacademic enthusiast of Ethiopian music will appreciate, including dozens of interviews with well-established and emerging musicians conducted in the 2006–2010 period, as well as musicians who have died in the decades of Shelemay's engagement in the field. Shelemay recalls her earliest encounters with Orchestra Ethiopia in 1974/1975 (Chapter Eight), before the Derg censored and regulated musical life. Fans of Ethiopian music will find material about Oromo musicians

like Tilahun Gessesse and Ali Birra (Chapter Four), Elizabeth Namarra from the earliest days of Pentecostalism in Ethiopia, and quite brave and soul-baring material from Getatchew Gebregiorgis (Chapter Five). We hear from female azmaris like Telela Kebede, and Ethio-jazz stars like Getatchew Mekurya whose voices are not represented in print or academic literature. This material provides a substantially more nuanced discussion of ethnicity than the material currently available in publication, including welcome representation of Oromo issues. Shelemay's longstanding relationship with Mulatu Astatke translates to extensive attention to his projects, although it would have been useful to see some discussion of current debates over Astatke's legacy in Ethiopia, particularly in light of his critical comments about defectors during the Derg (110). The focus on the voices of musicians is expansive in terms of genre, giving equal weight to Church musicians as to Afro-futurist Meklit.

One hopes that with this book as a resource, scholars will fan out across North America to conduct follow-up studies in Toronto, Minneapolis, Los Angeles, and Atlanta as immigration to the USA from the Horn continues. Even more importantly, though, one hopes that scholars will be inspired to work in the diasporas not covered in this study, such as the Persian Gulf, where Ethiopian labor migration to Saudi, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Qatar is widespread and controversial (brief mention: 141), and in European centers like London and Rome where Ethiopians and Eritreans mostly coexist, sometimes alongside Somali populations. There is a well-documented Ethiopian diaspora in Israel composed of the Beta Israel (Ethiopian Jews) that Shelemay wrote about to great acclaim, so one wonders why there is virtually no mention of that diaspora in this study, especially considering reference to the Ethiopian community in Australia. It was probably sufficient just to qualify this volume as the definitive study of "an" Ethiopian diaspora rather than "the" diaspora. As a contribution to diaspora studies, readers will appreciate the discussions of how institutions like Dukem restaurant in Washington DC and the *Ethiopian Yellow Pages* facilitate diasporic music networks.

The triumph of this study, though, is the voice it gives to the musicians who stand as sentinels, and Shelemay includes discussions that might be fairly noncontroversial today such as descriptions of life under the Derg for musicians across genre and defections during world tours, plus more controversial issues such as domestic violence (142) and the personal pain of living as a refugee. The book went to press as a violent regional conflict erupted in late 2020 and Shelemay managed to reference it (230), bringing decades of experience pretty well up to date. As a contribution to Ethnomusicology and African studies, an important additional achievement of *Sing and Sing On* is the author's reflections on longitudinal studies, particularly in her flagging of issues that appear not to be especially important or useful to an ethnographer but emerge as key threads through a longer-term historical lens (203).

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