



## Travel Journal: Ethiopia

On May 8, 2007, I sang a concert of American Music at the US Ambassador's home in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The invited guests were ambassadors from around the world and other dignitaries from Ethiopia. It was a grand evening! They enjoyed the music as well as the historical explanations that put the music into historical context.

The concert consisted of art song folk ballads spirituals and hymn tunes from the 1800s. The final section consisted of music from Broadway. I was surprised when they all gave a standing ovation at the end of the concert, and when I sang another song, they stood again. When I sang the second encore, they stood again. The room was charged with excitement. It was a wonderful example about how music can stir us and move us in profound ways.

I made many friends and some of the ambassadors have invited me to travel to their countries.

Two days later, I had the honor of appearing at the Italian Cultural Institute in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The event brought together Muslims, Protestant Christians and Orthodox Christians. It was the first of its kind in Ethiopia. The intent of the event was to bring these religious traditions together as a way to encourage religious tolerance. Interreligious violence has been a part of the reality in Ethiopia.

I was honored to share the stage with Mohammed Awol, a Muslim chanter. He and his group dramatically performed Muslim chants. In the chanting, one could feel the depth and power of their faith. It was moving.

I performed African-American spirituals which emphasize the need for transcendence in the midst of pain and suffering and which inspire hope. The final song I sang was "Each Other's Light", which is the title song to my new CD. The words, "If we can see each other's light, we can be each other's light," seemed to make an impact on the audience and was a great way to end the evening.

After the concert we enjoyed light refreshments. I was so delighted to talk with so many Muslims and Christians who enjoyed the evening. One of the highlights of my time was when Mohammed Awol walked over to me and hugged me. Even though he does not speak English and I do not speak Amharic, we made a connection that was beyond words. It focused on our common humanity.

I am honored to be a part of something that I hope will become a tradition for Christians and Muslims in Ethiopia. Several people commented that they had never been a part of something like this before. It reminded me of the

statement made by Moshe Dayan: "If you want to make peace don't talk to your friends, talk to your enemies." I witnessed what is possible when we talk together. It was an evening of light and hope. May the light of peace continue to shine on the people of Ethiopia. It was an evening I will long remember.



On May 14, I had the honor of singing and lecturing at the Yared School of Music in Addis Ababa. It is the only school of music in the country. My assignment was to conduct a lecture on the African-American spiritual and sing several of them. My audience was mainly music students with some faculty present. I led them in several call-and-response spirituals and they enjoyed singing them. They also found the stories of the enslaved African very interesting. After singing, the audience stood up and applauded. I had the song "Each Other's Light" interpreted in Amharic and the sound struck a resounding cord!

After the presentation, there was a reception where many students gathered around me to discuss the technique of singing. There is no formal vocal program at the school, and the students were very interested in learning more about vocal technique. Some wanted my e-mail address to continue the conversation. It was a good day at the Yared School, and I hope to visit there again in the future.

The next day, I was involved in a concert to raise funds for AIDS Victims. The event was widely publicized. When I arrived at the Jared Music School concert hall, two newspaper reporters were waiting for me and I did two interviews. I shared the stage with a traditional dance group who began the concert. They were dressed in bright colors and danced to the beat of a drum that was playing in the background. It was wonderful as the audience clapped with pleasure and enjoyment.



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Following the dancing was Ethiopian pianist Girma Yiflashewa, who played three of his won compositions. Girma is a very accomplished musician, having played in Europe. The audience was very receptive to his music as they enjoyed the creativity and talent of one of their own.

I was the last act on the program. I sang old American hymn tunes, spirituals and a series of songs from my new CD *Each Other's Light*. The audience enjoyed singing along on several songs. What was clear to me was that the evening embodied what the world needs. We came together from different countries, religions and generations. We joined our hearts and voices in song and in those moments we were one. The evening was truly a metaphor for what is possible in the world.

A true highlight was when Girma and I walked out on the stage and I sang one of his compositions. Girma was at the piano and I sang in Amharic. I had to prepare to do this from the beginning of my time in Ethiopia. The applause was long and loud as the crowd stood on their feet at the end of the piece. It was a memorable event. Afterwards, I had a television interview on a local station. What a wonderful evening of peace making!



For my final concert in Addis Ababa. I shared the stage with an Ethiopian singer. His name is Tesfaye Gabbiso. He was in prison for seven years during the time of the Communist takeover in Ethiopia in the 80's. While in prison, he wrote many spirituals that helped to sustain him during many difficult days. As he sang his songs, the audience sang many of them with him. His music is greatly loved and well known.

I sang several spirituals on this program, indicating that the spirituals served a similar purpose for the enslaved African as Tesfaye's music does for him. These songs sustained the oppressed Africans in America, and their belief in things of the spirit saw them through very difficult times. I indicated that all of us have valley experiences and must draw on the spiritual source to help us. The audience loved the spirituals and sang them with me.

I finished my time on stage with the song "Each Other's Light". I had the words read in Amharic before I sang them. The audience applauded when hearing the lyrics to this song in their language.

I left Ethiopia with a deep desire to return. My visit was brief, but I was here long enough to know that I have been given a special gift to have the chance to live here for almost two weeks. The Ethiopian people were kind and gracious. They have a deep spiritual sense and I found this attractive. They loved the music I brought to them and we made a genuine connection through music. It was an honor to bring my style of music to them, and I felt privileged to have witnessed their music and dance. I have made many new friends. As my sense family increases through the many people I am meeting in my travels, I marvel at the differences in cultures but notice that in the most profound ways we are similar. We are indeed one human family.

Thank you, Ethiopia, for your kind and gracious hospitality. I look forward to my next visit.