

## The Significance of St. Yared's Music in the Age of Globalization

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Ethiopian Orthodoxy has implicit forms of knowledge, embedded in ritual, oral narratives, and everyday practices. The aesthetic dimension especially music concretizes the spiritual world, re-creating anew the transient sense of a permanent systematic religious structure. Religious tradition is continually recreated, it must be performed; to be perceived, received or realized. Recently a new aesthetics of music has presented itself; emerging out of commentary on music, and musical aesthetics. Scholars call for both aesthetic and theological investigations that take seriously concrete historical and socio-cultural contexts.

Music stabilizes and motivates religious sensibilities; the psychology of religion indicates that music functions as a stimulant. This reflects the Ethiopian hagiological tradition, which relates the supernatural origin of ecclesiastical music. "One day St. Yared was carried into heaven by angels and there he taught his music from the Seraphim- the twenty four heavenly priests whose function is to sing constantly before the throne of God." Abraham (1999:5) Music can be associated with "operant behavior, emitted responses that produce reinforcing effects," Wulf (1991:124). It is acknowledged that "the sensitive influence of music upon the nervous system supports music's claim to superabundance of power, greater than that of the other arts. Music facilitates the "ability to enter altered states of consciousness and to introduce subjective transformations, [possibly including] passing on to a deeper recollective analytical level."

Music generates a shared experience of inner time, what Schultz calls a "musical tuning-in relationship," Hood (1995:225), having a fundamental role in African oral Cultures. Hardly any worship takes place without some sort of musical expression, shedding light on African society's history, myths and values. Music is a major 'focus of research into religion and popular culture', and is an important source of Hope, healing, regeneration". Mapuringa/Chitando (2007:72). With the expansion of African communities overseas, music has taken on a new significance. It shows "the hidden motivation and power relations within the community and beyond, expanding our understanding of the Diaspora and transnational migrants identities, it enables enduring hardships ... and dreaming of a better future,"

Religious music must be understood from the prospective of a people, whose sense of reality is holistic, this is particularly important for "Diaspora migrants who live aspects of their lives transnational. "Transnational mobility and transnational networks have an impact on producing and consuming music – as a key cultural product in the Diaspora",

Ethiopian Christianity has a 'sonic-theology' the transmission of sacred power and authority is primarily vested in the oral word. Ethiopian embodied spirituality resonates

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with the retrieval of Christian teachings valorising the body, associated with recent scientific consensus on human consciousness as a thoroughly embodied phenomenon.

Liturgical Music epitomizes Ethiopia's vocation to preserve the pristine traditions of Early Christianity. "The study of liturgical music requires interdisciplinary work, [which] blurs boundaries, touching context, rhythm, memory, and voice.

### **Liturgical Music in the Ethiopian Context**

Whereas Western Music in general "represents images and concepts, Middle Eastern and African Music evokes intense emotions and ecstasy." From the synagogue chanting of prayers and the cantillation of scripture there developed a psalmody, for which instrumental accompaniment was irrelevant," Three musical forms; psalms, hymns and spiritual songs [were patterned] after the Old Testament Psalter. Patristic sources describe early Christian music was "local and monadic, serving as spiritual sacrifice. Instrumental music was said to belong to the "childhood state of God's people, whereas singing without accompaniment is useful for quieting the passions and lifting the thoughts to God",

Solo singing by musically gifted members of the gathered Church and youths leading responsorial singing are the most clearly attested musical roles during the first three centuries," Flynn (2006:720). Many of the early sources indicate two important roles; some sort of ministerial chant answered by a congregational acclamation. Singing without accompaniment was useful for quieting the passions and lifting the thoughts to God. St. John Chrysostom wrote in the 4<sup>th</sup> Century: Nor the cithora nor the flute nor any other musical instrument is able to produce the sound only perceived in the chant of the Holy monks in the midst of solitude and silence (Epist. I ad Timothy. 4homilia 14),

The Pauline description of the first century household worship showed a more communal model, with vertical and doxological orientation. When early Christians did reflect on the nature of their own music, they called attention to its moral purpose. "The Ethiopian liturgy reveals itself as profoundly original. Among 17 anaphors, some translated from Coptic or Greek. However, there were also local compositions, and a remarkable adaptation of the national genius and local rites, borrowed from the most diverse and distant regions of Christianity. Almost unexplored the Ethiopian liturgy presents itself as being of exceptional importance, both for the comparative history and for the pastorate," Dalmais, (1980:59).

When early Christians reflected on the nature of their own music, they called attention to its moral purpose, inducing movements of the soul. Of all the factors inducing a sense of aesthetic coherence in Ethiopian Orthodoxy, liturgical singing is the most important, and jealously guarded, while

The style of the architecture, the interior furnishings, art works and even the liturgical vestments may not be entirely canonically Ethiopian Orthodox. However, no compromise is made in the liturgical music. It is the music which in a subjective sense embraces the believer as he enters the church, and creates a sense of home coming; a sense of sharing in eschatological worship. The deacons who lead the liturgical singing play such an important role in the Churches in America that they are often the ones who found and direct churches, of course in cooperation with monks or other clergy. Orthodox believers on leaving the Church after a liturgy, often comment on being touched by the spiritual quality and profundity of the singing rather than by the words of the sermon.

Famous individuals such as the philosopher "Simone Weil writ of an affectively toned experience of music, building on a prior doctrinal understanding, provided a deeper, more self-involving understanding of what was previously grasped in 'notional' terms". Aesthetic representation is rooted in the capacity of an artwork to evoke an effective response, communicating a certain feeling, by means of which the represented object can appear as present." The feelings engendered by an aesthetic object can constitute an atmosphere extending beyond the object to embrace various things, within a single overarching pattern of effective response. This is well illustrated by the famous story of St. Yared, and Emperor Gebre Meskel. "Both St. Yared and the Emperor Gebre Meskel under the effective response evoked by the angelic singing, were absorbed in the spiritual world evoked, and impervious to other physical sensations such as pain.

In addition to overriding other sense stimuli, the new world, communicated through music establishes a pattern, which determines the religious perception of the individual. Coming to understand the "religious import of a world is not fundamentally a matter of getting hold of new data, it is rather a matter of seeing a pattern or a particular meaning in the data. Rowan Williams said God-talk is structurally more like talking about some grid for understanding of particular objects, than talking about particular objects in themselves, "Wynn (2005:157). ... This connects with the idea of theological tradition as a type of "dramatic performance, based on the truth of the real revelation. Frank Burch Brown asserted that a religious tradition needed to be performed as it were, if it is to be perceived, received or realized.

Reflection on the aesthetics of music already exists as a significant subplot, in the narrative of Western theological thought, from Pythagoras to the present day. Schleiermacher, Barth and Wittgenstein, acknowledge the impact of music not only upon lived experience, but also upon methodological outlook and writing style. "Schleiermacher was fascinated by the affectivity of musical immediacy, inspiring his understanding of piety as an expression of affections. Wittgenstein's musically informed language of action, play, and practice [constitutes] tools to combat metaphysical interiority, and exteriority, and to point toward an irreducibly public and pragmatic approach to philosophical and theological activity", Stoltzfus (2006:2).

There is an on going debate on "practice as research ... focusing both on the art object and the creative process, embodying situated, tacit, knowledge", the "new musicological sub discipline of 'performance practice', creates a greater awareness of the present authenticity of the performer, in imaginatively recreating music as lived reality. From a traditional Ethiopian point of view all Ethiopian liturgical music is imbued with the spirit of St. Yared, and bears the hallmark of his creative genius. "Each hymn in the Degua (the hymnary containing canticles for all the principal feasts of the year arranged according to seasons) appears under one of twenty two different headings, which Ethiopian savants liken to the twenty two acts of creation. According to some traditions St. Yared did not taste death, but was translated into heaven like Elijah and Enoch (2 Kings 2:11; Gen. 5:24) he will return to welcome the Lord with his chant at the Parousia," Abraham (1999:8).

### **St. Yared's System of liturgical Music, with its three modes**

The liturgical tradition created what Boudreaux called a habitués, a holistic distinct system of thought and 'practice, a range of bodily postures and actions. For aspiring young deacons this entails an arduous period of ritual separation in the wilderness or forest, during which they mastered the liturgical arts, which would make them future

community leaders. In Ethiopia ritual is the integral part of a dominant discourse of society. The embodied music theory recognizes performers as "receivers of meaning, as knower's whose knowledge comes from the body as well as their mind... the body becomes a sight of knowledge. Music is always incorporated. It is in the embodiment within the ritual context, therefore that the discourse of society can most explicitly be "expressed and transfigured from generation to generation... in this arena changes in embodiment ... habitués become most clearly noticeable. Within worship we can trace the play of Christian discourse through the centuries, across the world," Stringer (2005:29).

St. Yared's mind is the prism, through which the different patterns pass. "Corporeal activity is the central core of her musicality. The practices of the "mind are non-practices without the bodily practices, they call, for a site of knowledge only accessible to artists. The site of the performer, where mind and body meet... giving access to knowledge that is impossible to achieve through more detached and exclusively mind work", The Philosopher "Merlau Ponty, spoke of a *praktognosia*, that is not only expressed in action, but in addition, results from the acting itself, without resting on mental knowledge", Yared's music is never performed without movement, during the mehalit (vigil service) music and dance (*mashebsheb*) are combined, to constitute the highlight of the celebration. Thinkers such as Edward Said called for a "line of philosophical reflection that observes and critiques the public or performance occasion questioning received notions of musical formalism. Deconstructing the master narrative of absolute music, [means] going beyond musical notation to reconstruct the cultural system of signification".

It is universality that belongs uniquely to music, together with the precise distinctness, that gives it that high value as the panacea of all sorrows. The combination of sorrow, pain and joy is one of the recurring themes, both in the music and in the life story of St. Yared. As a student he suffered many disappointments, yet he finally succeeded and was recognized as a brilliant scholar. It is said that Yared found inspiration for his musical creations while he was alone in the peace and tranquility brooding over his wife's infidelity. Ethiopian liturgical music is quite unique; those who listen carefully will recognize the haunting sounds of Mother Nature.

The dichotomy of joy and sorrow is also reflected in other ways. The melodies of Yared are arranged in three different modes, each with its own occasion and symbolism. Including "Ge'ez, with its solemn accent, Ezel which is e is mild, pleasant and moving [i.e. joyful]. And Arai, reflecting the high pitched, symbolism of the Holy Spirit, used on ordinary days," Certain of the *mashebsheb* movements are associated with the suffering of Christ, and deeply touch the participants, constituting a sharing in the passion of Christ. The tone later changes, and more joyful episodes follow. It is notable that there is a "marked antithesis between secular music and the kind of music suitable for Christian worship.

### **Ethiopian Orthodoxy and Globalization**

The religious Panorama of our times points clearly to a porosity of frontiers, the ability of distant peoples to communicate, and the dynamism of human choices. "The encounter of cultures affected through the agency of religious entrepreneurs provoked adjustments and reactions. Religious ideas and practices travel fast, entering unforeseen new spaces, during the last quarter of the twentieth century Ethiopian Orthodoxy has become a religion in transition, affected by mobility and the merging powers of

globalization.). First The Orthodox church was challenged by the communist revolution, and the hegemony of socialist atheism. Subsequently, waves of emigration and exile created a large Diaspora community.

In an increasingly shrinking world, religious diffusion [with] cultural contacts and borrowing results from the displacement of religious adhesions. Reduced geographical distances [cause the] emergence of global landscapes, originated by fluxes of people. "Global ethnos capes designate the routes of migrants. Diaspora people's cultures are sites they traverse in their journey, negotiating the persistence of their mutual sense of identity, producing the idiosyncratic matrix of reception and elaboration of different elements. The Trans nationalization of religious practices is not a new phenomenon, but the process has been accelerated, causing the trespassing of cultural borders and re-accommodation of existing beliefs.

After the revolution in 1974 'the old idea of Ethiopia, signifying stability and continuity, exploded; yet despite anti-religious activity, the Derg was obliged to court the church, the main legitimising force behind nationalism and territorial integrity. Most people are convinced that the Orthodox Church in Ethiopia became stronger during the revolutionary period: 'The process to delink church and state came to fuel the desire by a sector of the population to revive the Orthodox nature of the Ethiopian state.'

The atheistic policies of the Dengue (provisional Communist ruling council) not only failed to substantially weaken the church, but provoked a pro-religious counter-reaction a 'religious explosion' in the 1990's. This eventually led to the growth of a multitude of Para-church organizations, which mediated between the church and general public taking over the function of socializing them with aspects of traditional Church culture. Certain of these organizations (such as Mahbere Kidusan) had an organized programme of teaching liturgical music and organizing events to increase awareness and appreciation of the traditions of St. Yared. In a formerly extremely patriarchal society, the policies of the communist period effectively promoted the emancipation of women, who came to play a more prominent role in public life and also in the Church. Well trained young women singers, began to study the Yared musical traditions, and give renditions at the end of liturgical services and at major festivals. While nuns such as Emahoy Gelaynesh challenged male monopoly of the composition of qeney (liturgical poetry). Abune Merha Chrestos and other leaders have spoken of the importance of the Yared music in the age of the Aids pandemic; it is a source of comfort and spiritual power to the afflicted.

Furthermore in the wake of the Rastafarian movement there was widespread conversion to Ethiopian Orthodoxy among those of Caribbean descent and later also in South Africa between Church and state. The position of the traditional schools was seriously weakened. This created the need for new institutions to socialize the spiritual elite and familiarize them with the essence of their faith as enshrined in the liturgical music tradition of St. Yared. New attractive evangelical musical forms were stealing the attention of many of the youth and challenging the central position of the yaredic tradition in Ethiopian culture. Concurrently there was an increasing awareness by Orthodox organizations of the use of mass media and technological advancement, especially loudspeakers. Cassettes and DVD's of popular deacons became a much sought after item of merchandise, this to some extent democratized the musical tradition, and facilitating the teaching of the liturgy. .

### **Conclusion – The Power of Spiritual Music in the Current transnational Setting**

Within a shrinking world the spread of St. Yared's music by technological means is an example of global religious diffusion, and how Diaspora peoples are able to negotiate the persistence of their mutual sense of identity. Diaspora immigrants live aspects of their lives Trans nationally disarticulating both social relations and identities from their original localities of settlement. Yet increasingly technological innovations facilitate retention of essential aspects of religious culture, causing a re-evaluation of fixed ideas and a dynamic of open ended conversation.

In the performing arts the "critical centre consists of successive performances, creatively appropriated and improvised, restating the constructive center of theological work from a textuality of aesthetic to a performative one. A triad of Diaspora networks arises consisting of relationships between the migrant group, their home society and new society of residence. Musical production and distribution processes exemplify the complexity of new immigrant societies, and the cultural exchanges within and beyond the Diaspora. Indiscriminate media exposure reduces spiritual music such as that of St. Yared to a feature of the simulacrum of postmodern society. However, discerning use makes it into a key cultural product, which has the power to transform the lives of many, and give them hope and inspiration to overcome the difficulties of everyday life.