



Press Release – Ethiopian Women of History and Myth Celebrated on MAQEDA - Atse Tewodros Project - Gabriella Ghermandi - Galileo MC

“Ethiopiquest-style adventures...Ethiojazz...” Songlines

“... rooted in Ethiopian tradition” World Music Central

“Gabriella Ghermandi is a musician, writer and storyteller with roots in both Ethiopia and Italy.” Norran

Galileo MC is highly respected for its diverse global music catalogue and as a record label that champions special projects. The newest addition to the growing Galileo catalogue is a celebration of the historical and mythological women of Ethiopia called MAQEDA, curated and produced by Ethiopian-Italian singer, author, composer and ethnomusicologist, Gabriella Ghermandi.

Taking its name from the Ethiopian for Queen of Sheba, MAQEDA is an Ethiojazz album entirely dedicated to the female figures of Ethiopian and African history and mythology and the rituals of ethnic groups that centre around women. Meticulous research from Gabriella Ghermandi and her musical team resulted in four different Ethiopian languages featuring on MAQEDA including Amharic, Kumana on ‘Kotillidda’, Gamo on ‘Boncho’ and Gofa from southern Ethiopia on ‘Baranche’.

The making of MAQEDA was financed by the Ministero Italiano della Cultura and brought to fruition by the Atse Tewodros Project, a musical ensemble created by Gabriella Ghermandi in 2010. Gabriella’s vision was to bring together an ensemble of Italian and Ethiopian musicians as a way of fostering mutual dialogue and artistic creation. The project was founded in Addis Ababa, growing out of the collaboration between Gabriella Ghermandi, Ethiopian composer Aklilu Zewdy and Professor Berhanu Gezaw.

The Atse Tewodros Project is named after the Ethiopian Emperor Atse Tewodros II who ruled from 1855 to 1868 and was widely considered the father of modern Ethiopia, as the first Emperor to give Ethiopia the chance to modernize while respecting its traditions. In a similar way, the Atse Tewodros Project creates music that respects the diverse traditions of Ethiopian music while opening it up to dialogue and exchange of musical genres.

As producer and singer Gabriella Ghermandi says,

“In my projects, I love to research and bring out unknown music from ethnic groups, to share the amazing variety of Ethiopian musical genres and traditions. I work with musicians who perform on traditional Ethiopian instruments, showing how musicians on traditional instruments can dialogue with modern instruments and also with various jazz approaches. As the daughter of an Italian migrant and an Ethiopian woman, my parents came together as a result of war. I like to create music with a group that brings together artists from two peoples who fought each other, as a form of healing, of practicing peace. Above all, I long to bring as much Ethiopian music as possible to the world.”



Maternal ties and ancestry are widely celebrated on MAQEDA. The album cover shows Gabriella Ghermandi’s maternal ancestry including Gabriella Ghermandi’s great grandmother, Gabriella’s grandmother, and the grandmother’s sisters. The song ‘Kotillidda’ is dedicated to mothers and to their power to rule and is performed in the

Kunama language. While the Kunama represent one of the smallest ethnic communities in Ethiopia, they practise matriarchy. ‘Kotillidda’ literally means the central pillar of traditional houses but is a reference for the mother as the centre of family life, the community and supporter.

‘Maqeda’, the title track of the album is the Ethiopian name for the legendary Queen of Sheba whose cultural importance still lives on today. The Queen of Sheba continues to be revered today by many Ethiopians as one of the country’s most important factual maternal ancestors. The lyrics convey this

respect for Sheba, “Queen of benevolent kingdoms/We had you among us/You Maqeda, Our mother/Treasure chest of sacred secrets.”

‘Saba’ is dedicated to the journey that the Queen of Sheba undertook to meet King Solomon. At the end of this song, the melody played by the Masingo is an ancient Hebrew melody. It is said that the Jews of Ethiopia, known as Falasha, are the twelfth tribe of Israel who arrived in Ethiopia following the son of the Queen of Sheba.

The historical Candace Queens of the Sudanese Meroe Kingdom are also celebrated on MAQEDA on the song ‘Hendeke’. The Kingdom of Meroe became part of Ethiopia during the Axumite reign. From 300 AD to 900 there were approximately 21 kingdoms of Candace queens who ruled independently even if part of the Axumite Kingdom. Now an UNESCO heritage site containing the largest collection of ancient pyramids in the world, Meroe is the site of one of the earliest civilisations of ancient Africa. Here, royal tombs for the kings and queens define the desert landscape.

The Atse Tewodros Project perform their “Ethiojazz” (Songlines) on a wide range of traditional and contemporary instruments. MAQEDA features Gabriella Ghermandi on lead vocals, Anteneh Teklemariam on acoustic and electric Ethiopian lira aka ‘kirar’; Abu Gebre on the Ethiopian traditional ‘washint’ flute and the lesser known wooden-stringed avangala; Camilla Missio on bass guitar; Endris Hassen on the one-string bowed masingo; Fabrizio Puglisi on acoustic piano, Fender Rhodes and Synth ARP; Misale Legesse on traditional Ethiopian drums including the double-headed kebero) and Tommy Ruggero on drum set, doun doun and percussion.

On MAQEDA, the Atse Tewodros Project further broadens its scope through the collaboration of special guests musicians from Senegal, Italian singers, a beatboxer, and a body music performer. The album also features a healthy dose of synths, acoustic guitar and vocals from Gabriella Ghermandi supported by guest singers.

There is plenty of ‘Boncho’ or ‘respect’ due to the women of Ethiopia as Gabriella sings, “Respect. Respect is owed to the women of my Land. No longer ask them to bear the weight of our world! Listen, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters. They are the pillars.” MAQEDA ends with the song ‘Lucy’ dedicated to the oldest fossil skeleton of a human ancestor as discovered in the Afar region of Ethiopia in 1974. As Gabriella sings, “You are a wonder, The Wonderful/You emerged from Africa, from Ethiopia.” The song is to remember that, as the Ethiopian saying goes, the first hominid who decided to stand up and stand on two legs could only have been a woman.

Gabriella Ghermandi’s vision and work as a producer is far-reaching: MAQEDA becomes the second musical project from The Atse Tewodros Project and features seventeen musicians in total. Its importance both musically and historically are commented on by the CEO of Galileo Music, Daniel Dinkel,

“Galileo Music has been endeavouring to provide a platform for music from many parts of the world since 2002. The focus is on music with traditional roots, which is fused with modern stylistic devices or other cultural influences. The Atse Tewodros Project fits this idea with its Ethiopian roots and a band consisting of Ethiopian and Italian musicians. Music is the perfect bridge builder between young and old, traditional and modern and the different cultures. With our releases we want to contribute to bringing people together and Gabriella Ghermandi, her band and her project stand for exactly that in our opinion.”

MAQEDA releases internationally through Galileo MC on 21st June, 2024.



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