

# Awalom Gebremariam *Desdes*

A W E S O M E  
T A P E S  
F R O M  
A F R  
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A



At the age of 28, Awalom Gebremariam arrived in the United States, following a years-long journey from Eritrea. He'd made it to a refugee camp in Ethiopia several years ago and eventually attained asylum status for passage to America. But before he left his hometown, Eritrea's highland capital Asmara, he made his first and only recording so far, *Desdes*.

In 2006, Awalom began to teach himself two of Eritrea's most recognizable and important folk instruments, the wata and the krar. Although they have roots in traditional music, they are heard in most Eritrean folk and pop recordings. 2006 was also the year the singer-songwriter and multi-instrumentalist's biggest musical inspiration, Abraham Aferewerki, passed away. Although the younger musician says his musical influences aren't pinned to specific people as much as by the spirit of Eritrean music itself, Aferewerki was such a pillar that his work and death are poignant for many people. (When pressed, Awalom says he also looks up to legendary Eritrean singer Yemane Barya and Bob Marley.) Much of the music he heard growing up was intertwined with Eritrea's difficult and contentious split from Ethiopia. An enormous proportion of popular songs' lyrical content from the the era of Ethiopian annexation in the 1950's until now are filled with imagery and metaphors connoting freedom, national pride and the country's lengthy struggle for independence.

Awalom completed *Desdes* in 2007, not long before he departed Eritrea. Because Awalom left after the recording he never received any money for cassette and CD sales. But he also didn't get to find out how much of an impact the songs have had locally.

His songs appear to focus on love, but Awalom isn't speaking about romantic love per se. Love of country and pride in the struggle for independence are what helps makes songs like these popular among listeners locally and in the large worldwide Eritrean diaspora. While we don't have many details about the popularity of the tape in Asmara, the strength of Awalom's sentiment was enough to carry the recording across many miles and into Awesome Tapes From Africa's cassette deck.

In 2012, during a trip to Switzerland to help promote a film about biking in Eritrea, ATFA was given a copy of *Desdes* by fixed-gear bicycle athlete Patrick Seabase, the documentary's protagonist. Seabase gave a copy to ATFA founder Brian Shimkovitz as a gift and it later appeared on the ATFA blog.

A few years later Shimkovitz was contacted by some agencies in North Carolina, where Awalom had settled. Through a translator very one decided to work together on a reissue of his recording. It took many months to source a clean master but now the album is ready and Awalom's goals are clear. He spent years waiting for the chance to escape economic and political turmoil at home. Now 29 and living in North Carolina, he works in a restaurant and plans to bring his music to Eritrean communities across North America as well as newer listeners with whom his powerful sounds and remarkable journey will deeply resonate.

1. *Desdes* 06:46
2. *Tehhelo* 05:22
3. *Teumat Chena* 06:16
4. *Aadu* 07:15
5. *Eritrea* 07:09
6. *Salel* 07:44
7. *Segamaye* 05:30
8. *Malegaanya* 05:19
9. *Gwaal Haagaraye* 06:53
10. *Showite Sigem* 09:08

CATALOG #: **ATFA020**

RELEASE DATE: **4/15/16**

Format: **LP, CD, Digital**

LP BOX LOT: **25**

CD BOX LOT: **40**

UNITS PER SET: **2xLP; 1xCD**

GENRE: **WORLD**

KEY MARKETS: **DC, LA, San Francisco, Chicago, Seattle, Minneapolis**

VINYL NOT RETURNABLE

TERRITORY RESTRICTIONS: **NONE**

LP: **#751937436119**



CD: **#751937436126**



## Selling Points:

- Rare recording from Eritrea for Intl market
- Asylum seeker escapes brutal regime to work in America
- Deep folk pop you can dance to
- Joyous songs celebrating revolution
- Official release featured first as

**AWESOME TAPES FROM AFRICA**

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