

Asnakech Worku — *Asnakech*

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There is perhaps no woman more cherished in modern Ethiopian history than **Asnakech Worku**. As a musician, actress, dancer and cultural icon, Asnakech inspired and challenged society for decades, until her death in 2011. From her beginnings as Ethiopia's first theater actress in

1952 to her climb to become one of the most famous actresses at the National Theater to her days as a club owner-turned-master musician, Asnakech's inimitable confidence and charm made her a household name. She earned endless accolades across the artistic spectrum.

She made seminal recordings of unforgettable original compositions, as well as legendary renditions of traditional songs, that became national staples. With a singular sense of style, glamour and sex appeal that sometimes stunned mainstream society, Asnakech wore clothes no one else wore and said things no one else said. Staid notions of how women should dress and behave didn't apply to her. Battling a mentality that until the early 1950s had men wearing dresses to play female roles in the theater, Asnakech became a national treasure on her own terms.

Her family wasn't pleased with Asnakech becoming an *azmari*—an itinerant praise musician who sings, often in bars, for tips—and didn't bother her, especially after Emperor Haile Selassie I began to emphasize theater and music in society, officially legitimizing her career. Asnakech became an internationally-celebrated performer of Ethiopia's ancient harp, the *krar*, making her one of the most visible female musicians of the 20th century. All this while leaving controversy, broken hearts and a changed cultural landscape in her wake.

In 1975, keyboardist and bandleader **Hailu Mergia** got a call from the owner of Mistratch Music Shop to do a recording with Asnakech and he went for it. This recording is a nearly-forgotten artifact of the remarkable icon's singular legacy, remastered and available outside Ethiopia for the first time. It also provides a rare glimpse into Mergia's work as an arranger-sideman in the Addis Ababa music scene.

This trio recording featuring Mergia on organ and Temare Harege on drums using only brushes is starkly minimal but deeply evocative. The minimalist arrangements ensure the focus is on Asnakech's incisive—and occasionally romantic—lyrics and her virtuosic *krar* performance.

1. Jinyew 06:09
2. Tche Belew 04:32
3. Awkew Beneber 04:21
4. Baynelay Yidal 07:02
5. Mingizem Yene New 07:42
6. Tew Begize Giba 06:13
7. Sak Bleh Askegn 05:33
8. Abyotegnaw Jegna 05:41
9. Kand Yerega Deg New 06:06
10. Mech Alkugn Lela Sew 06:21

CATALOG #: **ATFA031**
RELEASE DATE: **11/02/18**
FORMAT: **LP/CD/Digital**
LIST PRICE: **CD: 14.98 / LP: 25.98**
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LP BOX LOT: **25**
CD BOX LOT: **40**
UNITS PER SET: **2xLP, 1xCD**
GENRE: **Country/Folk**
KEY MARKETS: **NYC, DC, LA, Chicago, Seattle, Detroit, San Francisco, Chicago**
VINYL NOT RETURNABLE
NO EXPORTS

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Selling Points:

- **Backed by Hailu Mergia**
- **Legendary singer/instrumentalist at her mid-1970s prime**
- **Rare work by national hero**
- **Double LP carefully extracted from cassette and remastered by ATFA family engineer Jessica Thompson**
- **Expands our understanding of this monumental figure**

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