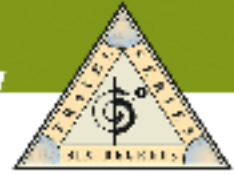


BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION



Meklit

We Are Alive

“We’re in-betweeners, living along the musical hyphen lines,” says the creative Ethiopian-born **Meklit** (Muh-Kleet) of her relationship with her new record label. As both are open-minded and based in the Bay Area, the partnership seemed natural to this emerging singer-songwriter. The compatibility is evident as Meklit canvases a wide range of sounds on her most inventive album to date, *We Are Alive* (Six Degrees Records).

After being named a TED Global Fellow in 2009, Meklit cut her teeth on her 2010 debut, *On A Day Like This...* Folk and jazz strains served as a foundation for her elegant songwriting, setting her off onto a world tour before settling back into her San Francisco home for a number of collaborations. First she crooned sweet harmonies behind hip-hop project **Copperwire’s** *Earthbound*, and then returned to her more soulful roots alongside Oakland artist **Quinn DeVeaux** on 2012’s *Meklit & Quinn*. The latter included ingenious covers of such artists as Arcade Fire, Stevie Wonder, Talking Heads, MGMT, Lou Reed and Sam Cooke.

Constant exposure to outside influences often causes musicians to evolve quickly. It was in this frame of mind that Meklit re-entered the studio to throw a world of flavors into a new cauldron.

“Four years passed between my two solo albums, so I had time to write this one,” she says. “Only this time, the songs came faster, more easily. *We Are Alive* is a merging of everything I’ve done into one, a real culmination of influences.”

The album’s thirteen songs run the stylistic gamut. In order to capture the spontaneous magic of classic recording sessions the album was tracked entirely onto tape. Producer **Eli Crews** (tUnE-yArDs, Deerhoof, Geographer) helped guide the album’s spirit of innovation and sonic dexterity.

The title track, ‘We Are Alive,’ features fine stick work by drummer Lorca Hart keeping time alongside a rush of handclaps and shakers, with Meklit’s silky voice floating effortlessly above the guitar-driven song. The piece is based on two different five-count rhythms: a traditional Sudanese rhythm called the Camel Walk and a Radiohead tune. The song was born out of learnings she garnered in a residency for the Nile Project, a musical enterprise bringing musicians together from across the Nile Basin, co-founded by Meklit (as a TED Senior Fellow) and Egyptian ethnomusicologist **Mina Girgis**.

“I wrote the song in the summer of 2013,” Meklit says. “The words were an improvisation. But they rang so true that I was immediately attached to them. As hard as it gets and as sweet as it gets, we are alive.”

Horns are prominently placed throughout the album, reminiscent of her debut. Meklit’s longtime trumpeter **Darren Johnston** and guest trombonist **Adam Theis** punctuate the

bouncing grooves of ‘Slow’ and ‘Overgrown,’ while Johnston adds a light touch to ‘In Sleep,’ a track led by the marimba flow and arrangement chops of bassist **Sam Bevan**. The most ‘jazzy’ of the songs, however, is certainly ‘A Train,’ with memorable references to Harlem and West African crafts flying from Meklit’s low register.

A few special guests emerge: famed author **Walter Mosley** penned the album’s liner notes. Meklit met him while speaking together on the radio show *West Coast Live* in 2010, and they forged a quick friendship. Ethiopian piano sensation **Samuel Yirga**—a Real World Records artist whose debut, *Guza*, garnered much international critical acclaim—adds a beautiful solo on ‘Kemekem.’

“We really enjoyed working with Samuel,” Meklit says. “It definitely ended up changing the nature of the song. It was a hard-hitting tune when played live, even though it is a love song. Samuel brought it back to a very flirtatious place, which is what the lyrics are describing. It says things like, ‘You live on the top of the hill, I live on the bottom of the hill. Why don’t you roll on down and meet me there.’ Samuel brought it to this slinky place.”

Meklit has an exceptional ability to capture an entire range of human emotions, sometimes in a single song. Feelings of longing and loss mingle with an uplifting sense of hope. She can be outwardly joyous, as the title song suggests. Yet the architecture of happiness is built upon the vast experience of being human. And one thing that runs throughout all of her work is that critical essence of humanity, the totality of who we are as creatures sharing a planet together.

And so it always comes back to a sense of community for Meklit. Her experience working with producer Eli Crews was an incredibly satisfying one, which left her wanting more.

“I totally had studio withdrawal for a week after recording,” Meklit says. “That has never happened to me before. I hope we make many albums together.”

“I’m really proud of how it turned out,” she concludes. “Recording to tape meant the core of the songs was really *us*, my band in the studio playing together. They were integral in creating the arrangements with me as well. This album is the sound of an actual ensemble, friends who’ve spent a lot of time working together and loving the process. We really knew what we were getting into going into the studio, but we left just enough space for surprises to emerge.”

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