

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION



ZOMBA PRISON PROJECT

Returns with a triumphant second album
"I Will Not Stop Singing"

"...glorious songs from behind bars...one of the top 30 albums of the year."
— *Irish Times*, Jim Carroll

"The music is sad...but also inventive, uniformly compelling and, in a way that unsettles the listener, entirely lovely." —*Vice.com*

Produced by author and Grammy-winner, **Ian Brennan** (Tinariwen, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Malawi Mouse Boys), the **Zomba Prison Project's** debut album "I Have No Everything Here" was the surprise "world music" hit of 2015. Featuring prisoners and officers from Malawi's maximum security prison— many that were previously non-musicians— the record offered songs of heartbreaking and forthright loneliness, regret, and despair coupled with a sense of resilience and courage under the most extreme of circumstances. The album received the first **Grammy** nomination *ever* for the country of Malawi, an honor that sadly the overwhelming majority of African nations have still yet to receive.

Brennan and his wife, Italian filmmaker and photographer, **Marilena Delli**, returned to the prison twice more in 2016 to compile a new album of equal gravity to - if not more so than - the first. The new recording is called "*I Will Not Stop Singing*" and its standout track, "I Will Never Stop Grieving for You, My Wife," was born out of Brennan's songwriting workshop on the very final day of recording. Done in a single take, the tune explores for the first time the writer's emotions around the recent loss of his wife and mother of his four young children.

The themes and concerns of the inmates are clearly expressed also in other titles such as "I Am Done With Evil," "Leave My Daughter Alone," "Protect Me," and perhaps most revealingly, the almost prayer-like chant, "I Will Not Return to Prison." Other standout performances come the newcomer firebrand vocalist, Agnes Chiwisa, and the ethereal, spine-chilling falsetto that lifer, Elias Chimanya unexpectedly reaches at the climax of the a cappella track, "Sister, Take Good Care of Your Husband."

Earlier this year, **Brennan's** fourth and latest book, [How Music Dies \(or Lives\): Field-recording and the Battle for Democracy in the Arts](#), was published. The **Zomba Prison Project** is featured along with the extensive, other international recordings that Brennan has worked on, including the seven albums he has produced in the past year alone. The tome grapples with global inequities in terms music distribution and the disproportionate dominance of English-language artists. [LargeHeartedBoy.com](#) describes it as "One of the most thought-provoking books on modern music that I have ever read."

Welcomingly, in the aftermath of their **Grammy** nomination, worldwide media swarmed to Zomba Prison. Sadly though, many “journalists” failed to delve too deeply into the facts, and almost wholeheartedly ignored the women, whose contributions had made up *more* than half of the songs. Still, the prisoners’ story provided uplift from China to Argentina to New Zealand to Israel...and far beyond. And through this attention, the musicians gained a new confidence and pride in their abilities, which shines through on the new record.

In the time since the release of the first **Zomba Prison Project** record, Malawi slipped to the #1 poorest nation on earth. This has been evidenced at the prison itself, where the inmates recently went three full days without eating due to "delayed funding" from the government, breaking the all-too frequent one or two day stints. This lack of nutrition is particularly perilous for the high number of prisoners that are HIV-positive or have AIDS.

As much as they are able, **Brennan** and **Delli** have continued to contribute musical equipment, food, and clothing to the prisoners.

Amidst the good news of various prisoners being released over the past few years, two female inmates whose cases **Brennan** and **Delli** first funded to have appealed in 2013, remain incarcerated due to their files having been “lost.” In January, Brennan and Delli visited the country’s highest court and personally searched through dusty stacks of two-inch thick files to at last confirm definitively that the files were in fact missing. This bureaucratic error translates to the two individuals being held without any documentation whatsoever as to why. Nonetheless, as of this writing, they continue to languish behind bars. Meanwhile, another inmate, Elube— whose charges Brennan and Delli were also having actively reviewed— perished in the prison, as her own child had done the year prior to the recording of the first album. The new album is dedicated to her memory.



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