

A PIECE OF INFINITY



MEKLI



**MEKLIT**

# A PIECE OF INFINITY

- 1 AMBASSEL** 4:40
- 2 TIZITA** featuring Brandee Younger 4:32
- 3 ABEBAYEHOSH** 3:29
- 4 DALE SHURA** 4:19
- 5 GEEFATA** 3:44
- 6 ERE MELA MELA** 4:33
- 7 MY GOLD** featuring Camille Thurman 4:13
- 8 STARS IN A WIDE FIELD** 4:12
- 9 LEFEQER ENEGEZA** 5:36

Produced by Meklit Hadero

Co-produced by Sam Bevan

Tracks 1-6: Arr. Meklit Hadero/Slow Whim Productions, BMI—Sam Bevan/Bev 'N' Breakfast Music, ASCAP—Kibrom Birhane/KIRAR, ASCAP. Track 7: Meklit Hadero/Slow Whim Productions, BMI. Track 8: Meklit Hadero/Slow Whim Productions, BMI—additional lyrics by Bernice Johnson Reagon/Songtalk Publishing Co., BMI. Track 9: Meklit Hadero/Slow Whim Productions, BMI—Alemtsehay Wedajo



**Smithsonian**  
American Women's History Museum

*This project received Federal support from the Smithsonian American Women's History Initiative Pool, administered by the Smithsonian American Women's History Museum.*

# MEKLIT

**MARTHA GONZALEZ**

*"We are all tuning forks, you know?  
Let a person sing and all the places  
they have loved will resonate."*

—Meklit Hadero

Taken from her critically acclaimed podcast *Movement*, the above statement resonates as I organized my thoughts on what to say about the album you hold in your hands—*A Piece of Infinity*. Although new to the Smithsonian Folkways family, Meklit Hadero arrives as a celebrated, world-renowned Ethio-Jazz performer who has toured across four continents. Her musical prowess, complexity, and ethics are informed by her experience as a refugee immigrant from Ethiopia where, for the first 24 years of her life, Meklit lived in 12 cities on three different continents. An intellectual, activist, and sonic traveler, Meklit is not only a prolific vocalist, composer, and songstress but also a cultural activist with a gift for building community through music via multimedia platforms. As if that weren't enough, Meklit is also a mother to an adorable four-year-old son, Leo. To prepare for writing this introduction, I had enjoyed listening to the album non-stop for almost a month. I also dove deep into other aspects of Meklit's life.

# A PIECE OF INFINITY

After listening to her over the years and playing *A Piece of Infinity* repeatedly, I could hear all the places that resonated in her music and indeed, all the places she has loved. My goal was to understand Meklit as an artist, but more importantly as a human being, a woman, and a mother. Meklit as universe.

I met Meklit Hadero 14 years ago in Seattle, Washington. My partner Quetzal Flores and I were introduced to Meklit by her cousin and prolific poet/MC, Gabriel Teodos. At this initial meeting we had a little jam session in my Seattle basement apartment. I remember feeling instantly like I was in the presence of greatness. It was our first musical encounter, and her beauty, presence, and generosity of spirit immediately filled the room. She felt like family. Over the years we have crossed many musical paths, and I've had the pleasure of observing her growth and witnessing her power on many stages across the country. I have come to find that Meklit illuminates any space. Fast-forward, the same energy permeated the Bissap Baobab restaurant in early December 2023, when she invited me to a jam session and luncheon bringing together immigrant musicians, an extension of her *Movement* podcast. A physical manifestation, if you will. It was perfect. I looked forward to spending a moment with Meklit, beyond the stage, in family and in her other worlds.

Situated in the Mission District in San Francisco, Bissap Baobab is a restaurant that holds space for immigrant African communities' musical events and others, despite the ongoing threat of displacement due to gentrification. I flew in that morning from Los Angeles and made my way to the restaurant. I was one of the first to arrive, aside from her partner, virtuoso percussionist Marco Peris Coppola, himself a formerly undocumented immigrant. Soon the room was filled with immigrant musicians from across the globe: Mali, Pakistan, Palestine, Mexico, Iran, India, Spain, Italy, Chile, and of course Ethiopia. We had a delicious meal, and then the jam session began. The amount of talent and diversity in the room was astounding. Meklit was the host and moved about the room greeting and hugging folks. The musicians who were Bay-area locals had brought their instruments, and all began to share and connect from their musical standpoints. Singer-songwriters; multi-instrumentalists; a pianist; saxophone, *riq*, and *kora* players; East Indian percussionists. Singing in Spanish, English, and Malian languages. It was uplifting. While one part of the world engaged in genocidal war and violence, the people at Baobab were creating music. The sharing alternated among musicians and then, at the urging of all, Meklit shared a traditional tune. As she began, the room fell silent. And there it was, the powerful voice and the magical



**“ SHE SYNTHESIZED THE  
MOMENT FOR US. WE FELT  
SEEN AND CONNECTED.”**

energy she emits that captivated us all. She synthesized the moment for us. We felt seen and connected. Nobody else shared after this. It was the perfect ending, or better yet a new beginning? This is what Meklit hopes for. Plant a seed and have it grow. A new beginning and moment where Bay-area immigrant musicians continued to connect across the shared experience of migration and displacement, and, although I am not an immigrant or from the Bay area, again I felt like family.

The following morning Meklit and Marco invited me to breakfast. I was thrilled to be able to visit with them and their highly intelligent child Leo to discuss the album at length. Amid cooking and Leo's inquiries, Meklit explained that *A Piece of Infinity* is based on traditional Ethiopian songs. She was adamant in informing me, however, that she was not trying to have anybody make her out to be an authority on Ethiopian traditional music. As she stated, "This is just as the title suggests—a piece of infinity. When you release things in a Western context, people often think that it is 'the thing!'" She goes on to state that "this often reduces the music, which makes it limited and narrow." Meklit informed me that in Ethiopia there are 80 languages and 300 dialects. "These are just my interpretations of traditional music sung in Kembata, Amharic, Oromigna languages." One album cannot represent all that is the Ethiopian cultural



universe. No one album can, and, as she states, “I’m just one fractal of an infinity.”

Her words inspire me, and I immediately digress to the times when I have seen her talk about Ethiopian culture and the music on stage. She goes on, “I can feel the power of traditional songs. Whenever I sing them, I can feel the millions of people that have sung them before me—and added their love to them. It feels like you’re riding a current of power.” *A Piece of Infinity* is indeed a current of power—power that is rooted in Ethiopian cultures and collaboration. For collaboration is always somewhere in the orbit of Meklit’s cultural work, whether it is her own staged music performances or the cultural work she does on the ground, in community, or on the internet. In this collection, one hears the story of women’s songs in “Abebayehosh” and “Dale Shura.” True to collaboration, this work was recorded at the Bay Area’s Women’s Audio Mission, the only studio in the world built and entirely run by women, via support from the Creative Work Fund. The project was also funded by the American Women’s History Initiative through Smithsonian Folkways. The record features genius Black women soloists, including Brandee Younger on harp and Camille Thurman on flute. Also included is “Lefeqer Enegenza,” written by legendary Ethiopian woman poet, theater artist, and trailblazing cultural leader Alemtsehay Wedajo.

I cannot discuss the music on this album without mentioning the vocal prowess and uniqueness of Meklit's signature sound: her iconic tone, whispered delivery, and now a belting voice, which she discovered during the process of giving birth to Leo. Vocal technique is not wanting, but what I was made aware of is that her delivery is intimately tied to the content of the lyrics and the repertoire she has chosen, which ranges from grown-up feelings to children's playfulness. "Tizita" espouses the feeling of longing—a feeling of nostalgia, the bittersweetness that rises when you remember something precious from your past. And because Meklit understands that tradition is alive and not a static object, she redid some of the melodies of "Tizita," exploring higher registers within the composition. Tradition is full of tales of love, and "Ambassel," an Ethiopian love song, became one of my favorites. In it Meklit states, "Love like a mountain, which is like God." In this piece her vocal performance has more power and rootedness as you hear Meklit progressively open up as the song moves. "Ere Mela Mela" is asking for solutions; thus the melody feels more like a maze. Finally, we are privy to the journey Meklit experienced with her father Ayele Hadero to research and re-create two songs for the album, "Geefata" and "Stars in a Wide Field," the latter of which was based on a traditional Kembatigna children's riddle.

Again, music is more than a repertoire for an album but an opportunity to connect. In Meklit's words from one of her podcasts, "We use music to talk about the things that are hard to talk about. It's hard to talk about migration. Sometimes it's better if we can hear the sounds of migration." I thought back to yesterday's jam session as she continued. "I am curious about telling a story with others. As immigrants we have so much in common among us. What keeps us apart is mostly language. Through solidarity, through music, we can come to a greater understanding. I don't see it as a wall."

Indeed, I hear invitations to think, to love, to groove. To contemplate the infinity of the human condition in the context of Ethiopian cultures, for as we know, this is where all of humanity can be traced back to. So sit back and enjoy. Meklit Hadero has curated a piece of infinity for you, and she hopes it will make you curious about the rest of the Ethiopian galaxy.



Track Notes

“  
**THROUGH SOLIDARITY,  
THROUGH MUSIC,  
WE CAN COME TO  
A GREATER UNDERSTANDING.”**

A traditional Amharic love song, one of my absolute favorites of all time. I used to hear my mom singing this to herself from across the house. The scale, also called Ambassel, is a world on its own. The notes bring me home.

Meklit, vocals; Kibrom Birhane, keyboard; Sam Bevan, electric bass; Colin Douglas, drumkit; Marco Peris Coppola, *tupan* and percussion; Howard Wiley, tenor saxophone

Featuring Brandee Younger, harp; Meklit, vocals; Kibrom Birhane, keyboard; Sam Bevan, upright bass; Colin Douglas, drumkit; Marco Peris Coppola, *tupan* and percussion; Howard Wiley, tenor saxophone

Brandee Younger  
appears courtesy  
of Impulse! Records

“Tizita” is one of the most beloved traditional song forms of Ethiopia, expressing passionate longing and nostalgia. There have been so many versions of “Tizita,” and I have been brewing mine for nearly a decade. I nurtured it singing softly to myself while driving, walking, and living life. I knew this album would be the place for my “Tizita” to bloom. Thanks to the brilliant Brandee Younger for bringing the glittering dreaminess of the harp to this much-loved tune.

“Abebayehosh” is an Ethiopian New Year’s song, sung traditionally by young girls every September when the hills are covered in the yellow flowers (*adey abebay*) of Ethiopian springtime.

Meklit, vocals; Kibrom Birhane, keyboard; Sam Bevan, electric bass; Colin Douglas, drumkit; Marco Peris Coppola, *tupan* and percussion; Howard Wiley, alto, tenor, and baritone saxophone

Meklit, vocals; Kibrom Birhane, keyboard; Sam Bevan, upright and electric bass; Colin Douglas, drumkit; Marco Peris Coppola, *tupan* and percussion; Howard Wiley, tenor saxophone

This beautiful traditional Oromo women and girls' song is a prayer for the rain that gives hope to the land and to the people. It honors the cycle of life and the deep relationship between people, animals, and the land.



“Geefata” is a Kembatigna song of celebration, traditionally sung by the community after a successful hunt. Eternal thanks to my father, who was born and raised in Kembata. I will always treasure the time we spent together finding, translating, learning, and interpreting this song.

Meklit, vocals; Kibrom Birhane, keyboard and synths; Sam Bevan, electric bass; Colin Douglas, drumkit; Marco Peris Coppola, *tupan* and percussion; Howard Wiley, tenor saxophone

Meklit, vocals; Kibrom Birhane, keyboard and *krar*; Sam Bevan, electric bass; Colin Douglas, drumkit; Marco Peris Coppola, *tupan* and percussion; Howard Wiley, tenor saxophone

**A beloved Amharic song, where the main character calls for a solution and the wisdom to navigate love's labyrinths.**

This is the first song I wrote after my child was born and captures that feeling of wanting to give your child the world. My version of that is about magical experiences, creative expression, and rooted remembrance of where he comes from. Camille Thurman's gorgeous flute is a perfect diaspora arrow linking Jazz and Ethiopian music together, in our very own way.

Featuring Camille Thurman, flute; Meklit, vocals; Kibrom Birhane, keyboard; Sam Bevan, electric bass; Colin Douglas, drumkit; Marco Peris Coppola, *tupan* and percussion; Howard Wiley, tenor saxophone

Meklit, vocals and *krar*;  
Kibrom Birhane, microcosm;  
Sam Bevan, upright bass  
and guitar; Colin Douglas,  
drumkit; Marco Peris Coppola,  
percussion; Howard Wiley,  
tenor and alto saxophone

This song is a whole cosmology, based on translations of children's riddles from Kembata. The words are a portal. May they offer you a lift. A line inspired by the legendary Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon slips in right at the end.

Words and Music by  
Meklit Hadero. Additional lyrics  
by Bernice Johnson Reagon.  
© 2025 Songtalk Publishing  
Co. and Meklit Hadero

Deep thanks to the genius Alemtsehay Wedajo, a woman whom I have looked up to for so long as a visionary poet, writer, director, and actor. She wrote these gorgeous Amharic lyrics, and I am so grateful that this living legend was open to collaboration.

Meklit, vocals; Kibrom Birhane, *krar*; Sam Bevan, upright bass

## Credits

Produced by **Meklit Hadero**

Co-produced by **Sam Bevan**

Brandee Younger appears courtesy of **Impulse! Records**

Primary musical advisors:

**Ayele Hadero and Kibrom Birhane**

Support musical advisors: **Teferi Assefa and Abdisa Chala**

Recorded at **Women's Audio Mission in San Francisco**

Engineered by **Mary Anne Zahorsky**

Additional select vocal engineering by

**Arielle Finkman and Minji Will**

Mixed by **Gloria Kaba**

Mastered by **Jessica Thompson**

Annotated by **Martha Gonzalez and Meklit Hadero**

Cover and liner notes photography: **Alexa Treviño**

Executive producers: **Maureen Loughran and John Smith**


Production manager: **Mary Monseur**

Production assistant: **Kate Harrington**

Editorial assistance by **Carla Borden**

Art direction, design, and layout by **Caroline Gut**

*This album was supported by a generous grant from the American Women's History Initiative and was also made possible in part by a grant from The Creative Work Fund, a program of the Walter and Elise Haas Fund that also is supported by The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation.*


A decorative graphic consisting of numerous nested squares, each with a thin black border, creating a tunnel-like effect that recedes towards the right side of the page.

**Smithsonian Folkways** is: Sophie Abramowitz, digital communications and distribution specialist; Paloma Alcalá, sales associate; Monica Alexander, financial operations manager; Logan Clark, special projects and content manager; Toby Dodds, director of web and IT; Seth Elkins, licensing and publishing assistant; Will Griffin, licensing manager; Kate Harrington, production assistant; Maureen Loughran, director and curator; Jennifer Mellizo, education specialist; Mary Monseur, production manager; Sahara Naini, inventory coordinator; Jeff Place, curator and senior archivist; Sophie Sachar, communications assistant; Laura Shanahan, communications specialist; Ronnie Simpkins, audio specialist; John Smith, associate director; Jonathan Williger, communications manager; Brian Zimmerman, mail order manager, sales and customer service specialist.



**Special appreciation** to my father, Ayele Hadero. Thank you for being on the journey of “Geefata” and “Stars in a Wide Field” with me. I treasure our collaboration. Thank you to Terri Winston, genius cultural strategist and Executive Director of Women’s Audio Mission, who was essential to making this recording possible.

**And what must be said more than anything else:** Deepest heartfelt gratitude to the originators of this music, the traditional folk musicians of Ethiopia, whose legacy I hope to honor with this album. Ethiopian traditional music is not a music of the past. It is a present-time, future-forward sound. Ethiopian traditional music is also multiple. What is on this album is only a fraction of its magnitude, just a piece of the infinity. May this record be a resonator of cultural power.

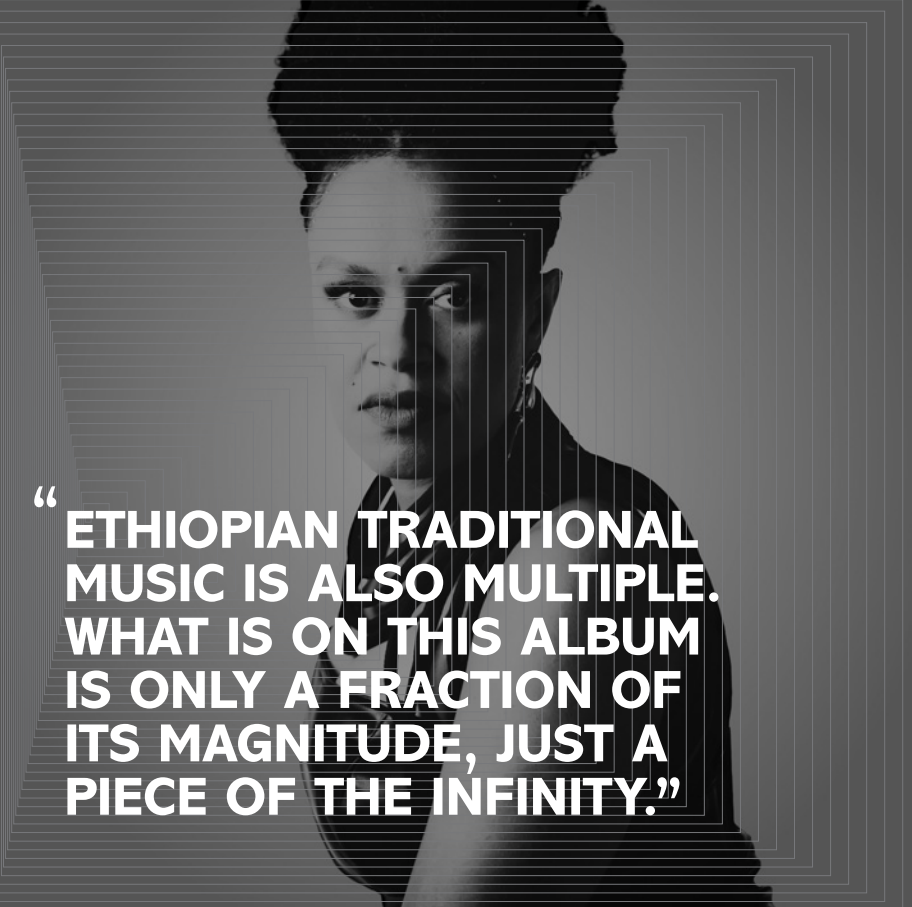
A decorative graphic consisting of numerous concentric squares, each slightly offset from the others, creating a tunnel-like effect that draws the eye towards the center of the page. The squares are thin and light gray.

**Smithsonian Folkways Recordings** is the nonprofit record label of the Smithsonian Institution, the national museum of the United States. Our mission is to document music, spoken word, instruction, and sounds from around the world. In this way, we continue the legacy of Moses Asch, who founded Folkways Records in 1948. The Smithsonian acquired Folkways from the Asch estate in 1987, and Smithsonian Folkways Recordings has continued the Folkways tradition by supporting the work of traditional artists and expressing a commitment to cultural diversity, education, and increased understanding among peoples through the production, documentation, preservation, and dissemination of sound.

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings, Folkways, Arhoolie, A.R.C.E., Blue Ridge Institute, Bobby Susser Songs for Children, Collector, Cook, Dyer-Bennet, Educational Activities, Fast Folk, Folk Legacy, Mickey Hart Collection, Monitor, M.O.R.E., Paredon, Right on Rhythm, UNESCO Collection of Traditional Music, and Western Jubilee Recording Company recordings are all available through:

Smithsonian Folkways Recordings Mail Order  
Washington, DC 20560-0520  
Phone: (800) 410-9815 or 888-FOLKWAYS (orders only)  
Fax: (800) 853-9511 (orders only)

To purchase online, or for further information about Smithsonian Folkways Recordings go to:  
[www.folkways.si.edu](http://www.folkways.si.edu). Please send comments and questions to [smithsonianfolkways@si.edu](mailto:smithsonianfolkways@si.edu).



**“ETHIOPIAN TRADITIONAL  
MUSIC IS ALSO MULTIPLE.  
WHAT IS ON THIS ALBUM  
IS ONLY A FRACTION OF  
ITS MAGNITUDE, JUST A  
PIECE OF THE INFINITY.”**

A PIECE OF INFINITY

MEK LIT



# MEKLIT

A PIECE OF INFINITY

SFW CD 40263

SMITHSONIAN  
FOLK  
WAYS  
RECORDINGS

This project received Federal support  
from the Smithsonian American Women's  
History Initiative Pool, administered  
by the Smithsonian American Women's  
History Museum.



Smithsonian  
American Women's History Museum

Washington DC 20560-0520 folkways.si.edu  
©/© 2025 Smithsonian Folkways Recordings

LC 9628

## A PIECE OF INFINITY

- 1 **AMBASSEL** 4:40
- 2 **TIZITA** featuring Brandee Younger 4:32
- 3 **ABEBAYEHOSH** 3:29
- 4 **DALE SHURA** 4:19
- 5 **GEEFATA** 3:44
- 6 **ERE MELA MELA** 4:33
- 7 **MY GOLD** featuring Camille Thurman 4:13
- 8 **STARS IN A WIDE FIELD** 4:12
- 9 **LEFEQER ENEGEZA** 5:36

Produced by Meklit Hadero  
Co-produced by Sam Bevan

*A Piece of Infinity*, the latest album by Meklit, is an invitation to think, to love, and to groove. Celebrating the rich musical traditions of Ethiopia, the Addis-born, San Francisco-based vocalist, songwriter, and composer molds folk tunes from a multitude of communities and cultures throughout Ethiopia into jazz-inflected fantasies imbued with warmth and reverence. At its center is Meklit's voice, which soars and whispers, intoning strength and devotion in Kembatigna, Amharic, Oromigna, and English. From songs of longing and love to children's riddles and original compositions, Meklit traverses expansive sonic ground that offers just a glimpse at the infinite complexity of Ethiopian culture. Featuring guest appearances by harpist Brandee Younger and flutist Camille Thurman and recorded at San Francisco's Women's Audio Mission.

# MEKLIT