

LONDON ETHIOPIANS HONOUR TAMAGN BEYENE

By Wondimu Mekonnen

Artist Tamagn's presence at the Porchester Hall of London was not to entertain as at other times. London has no stomach for any entertainment after the June and November 2005 massacre in Ethiopia, and the detention of hundreds of thousands citizens. Tamagn was there to be informed that London Ethiopians were aware of the good things he had been doing so far and the meeting was to encourage him to continue the fight. The Sunday 30 May 2005 meeting with Tamagn was emotional and at tearful. The CUD Support Group was behind organising the meeting to recognise the patriotic role of the talented National Comedian of Ethiopia, Artist Tamagn Beyene. The invitation was delivered by text in a very short time, but Ethiopians arrived at the meeting hall in good numbers.

Ato Hailemariam Legesse of CUD, who chaired the meeting started by welcoming the young talented patriotic Ethiopian and made a brief introduction of the programme and sharing his admiration for Artist Tamagn Beyene. He believed Tamagn was the national asset of Ethiopia, as he was not only a comedian to make people laugh but also a true patriot who remained loyal, just like his name indicated “ታማኝ” to his motherland.

He then went ahead with the schedules of the day and called upon Ato Andargachew Tsigie, to brief the audience with the current situation in Ethiopia in general and that of CUD in particular.

Ato Andargachew started by recounting the thin ray of democracy that briefly sparkled on the Ethiopian soil about a year ago, in association with the May 2005 National Election but then quickly turned dim dashing the hope that the people would peacefully bring the right leadership to administer the country. He revisited how the Woyyane initially deceived itself by believing it would win the election with a minimum manoeuvres but when it realised the people were serious, the nasty gang turned even nastier. Woyyane used every technique to stop the people from making their minds about who should govern over them. The sporadic murder, intimidation, and bribing before the election failed to deter the people and the opposition from going for an all out victory. Then on the Election Day, they clearly saw the determination of the people and realised they lost the election by a humiliatingly large number. Therefore, they resorted to violence – from robbery to murder and mass arrest. Ato Andargachew remembered the June Massacre with broken voice. Andargachew was among the forty or so thousands arrested beaten up and taken away to Showa Robit detention centre and happened to be a first hand eye witness. The treatment the detainees received in the hands of the detention centre by handpicked guards was horrendous. He described the brutality of the Woyyane regime, a fraction of which he had given at testimony hearing of The House International Relations Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations on HR 4423. Ato Andargachew also remembered those who were murdered in November 2005 and the hundreds of thousands detained in Showa Robit, Dedessa and other ghost camps of Woyyane. He recalled the bravery of the leadership of CUD, who listened to the people's demand not to join the parliament until justice was done and the robbed people's voice returned. Honouring the wishes of the people, the

leadership of CUD stayed away from the phoney parliament but ended up in jail, ironically charged with treason and genocide – the joke of the century.

Andargachew further explained the gruesome situation that the detained leaders of CUD. Prof. Mesfin W/Maraim's, Eng. Hail Shawl's and Ato Debebe Eshetu's health had deteriorated. While appreciating Rep. Christopher Smith for sponsoring H.R. 4423, The Ethiopia Consolidation Act, Ato Andargachew could not hide his disgust with the USA administration, particularly the current role of Ambassador Vicki Huddleston. Vicki Huddleston played a big role in helping Woyyane to clone a 2nd CUD lead by Ato Ayele Chamiso and Co. After what she had done, Vicki Huddleston went to Kaliti prison to talk to Birtukan Mideksa, who wrote an open letter to her, and Dr. Berhanu Nega. It was reported that Vicki's meeting with Birhanu Nega was exceptionally confrontational. Birhanu expressed to her that she was working with fraudsters (Ayele Chamiso et al) after she confirmed to him that some of the signature of the councillors were forged. When she told him that **Democracy takes hundred years to mature**, he angrily called her "Racist" and asked her to leave. Present at the spot were the French ambassador and the US embassy First Secretary. Vicki, however, refused to leave asking Birhanu to bless Ayele Chamiso et al. Birhanu refused. She also asked him to rejoin the judicial process and defend himself in court. "We won't join a fraudulent legal process. We will be okay staying in prison as long as it takes" he was heard replying.

Ato Andargachew concluded his speech by asking Diaspora Ethiopians to double their efforts to help the people.

He then turned to Tamagn and welcomed him to London. The meeting was actually to honour him and get inspiration from him to continue the battle for justice and democracy in Ethiopia.

There were two people who knew well Tamagn and lined up, willingly to talk about him before he would address the audience.

The Chairman called upon Ato Alebachew Dessalegn, who is a journalist by profession, a first class photographer and an accomplished actor himself. Normally, Alebachew is an outstanding orator, but on the day his voices were frequently broken and his eyes were wet with tears, remembering what Tamagn had to go through for the love of his country in the hands of the brutal regime's security men in 1990s, just like what they are doing today to the opposition leaders. In presenting Tamagn's brief life history, he had to borrow some words from Artist Alemtsehay Wedajo, whom he heard her talking at one of the meetings held in the USA to honour Tamagn, while he was there to document the life of Laureate Tsegaye Gebremedhin.

Ato Alebachew recounted the childhood of Tamagn Beyene, son of Grazmach Byene Wondweson and Weizero Mamite, whose age could not be described with precision, as a very bright but difficult child, angry and confrontational. He was not scared of anyone but even terrorised older bullyboys to their pants. In spite of that aggressive character, still Tamagn was known to be kind hearted and very considerate for his friends and loved ones. He followed unfailingly Sunday radio "listeners' choices" "የዘፈን ምርጫ" and sang along. He sang songs of famous performers copying their voices exactly as the original. He loved music. While still a small child, he organised

children's singing and dancing group and staged a show when some of the officials from the city Gondar visited his village, ነፋስ ጠውጫ - Nefas Mewcha - in ጋይንት - Gaynt District. The performance of those children impressed the officials of then regime, who invited the group to the City of Gondar. Among the audience who watched those talented kids, lead by Tamagne, was the late Artist Awlachew Dejene. Awlachew immediately had his eyes on the cute little Tamagne. Tamagne and another kid were chosen to join the Gondar Province Artist Group. However, Tamagne was shortly afterwards wanted by Addis Ababa. The Gondar chief of the time refused to let Tamagne go anywhere. He could not take off his eyes from the young entertainer, who made them laugh or cry at his own will. There was a feud between the Addis and Gondar but Addis eventually won him over. Tamagne joined the National Theatre. At that tender age, Tamagne took Addis Ababa too with a storm. His talent was quickly recognised and his name became a household name of every Ethiopian. He joined the "People for People" World tour group and travelled to Europe and America. Tamagne became the artistic ambassador of his country.

According to Alebachew, Tamagne was not just a multi-talented artist but also a problem solver, organiser and an accomplished leader. He was like a calm in the storm. He never panicked in chaos. He recounted the chaos and frustration of the "People for People" group when they lost their drummer during their world tour. They nearly abandoned the tour but Tamagne volunteered to take up the drum and fill the gap. Within a few days of training he became an amazing drummer and rescued the situation.

Away from his performing profession, Ato Alebachew asserted that Tamagne is much more appreciated by his fellow countrymen and women, for his patriotism and absolute love of his country and people. In those early dark days of Ethiopia, when the TPLF leadership took over Addis and started dismantling Ethiopia along ethnic lines, called the Ethiopian national flag as a worthless rag, Tamagne picked up tri-colour, wore it over his body, and bravely challenged those ethnic dictators in front of thousands of stadium spectators. Actually, he humiliated them with his razor blade language. As a result, the loving son of Ethiopia had to be beaten up, tortured, imprisoned and suffered in the hands of the Woyyane, the National Disgrace of Ethiopia. Woyyane might have done harm to his body, however; they did not break his spirit. Tamagne remained a patriotic Ethiopian to this day, unwavering and gallant spokes person of the country. Tamagne was forced to go on exile, but he became an inspiration to those Ethiopians determined to fight on to bring, peace, democracy and justice in Ethiopia. Ato Alebachew could equate the strong character, determination and bravery of Tamagne only to that of the Ethiopian lion. No one could break the spirit of the lion. He expressed his joy in being given the opportunity to speak about the gallant son of Ethiopia and left floor to the next person.

Ato Hailemarim invited an elderly Ethiopian citizen of London, who knew Tamagne from his childhood, Liqe Mamhiran Abebaw Yigzaw. As LM Abebaw Yigzaw strolled to the stage, Tamagne sprung to his feet and greeted the elderly man and his mentors with joy and open arms. The two embraced and kissed on the cheeks in Ethiopian style. The scene was hard and very difficult to describe. It was like a father and son rejoining after long separation.

As LM Abebaw Yigzaw started to describe his first encounter with the young wonder, Tamagn was unable to keep a straight face. Some one had to hand him a tissue paper to fight back his tears. Tamagn was born in Gaynt. Ato Abebaw reminded the audience that people from Gaynt district were always known for their bravery. For him, it was not difficult to understand where the childhood aggressiveness of Tamage was coming from. Gaynt was the birthplace of Gebrye, the right-hand man of Emperor Theodros, the brave warrior and true patriot. LM Abebaw Yigzaw was among the officials that visited the village of - Nefas Mewtcha, only to be stunned by the performance of little kids, not guided by any known elderly artist but by another angelic face child, Tamagn Beyene. Watching those kids sing and dance አስክሱታ blew away their mind and could not resist inviting the kids to perform in the city of Gonder. Those little kids amazed the citizens of Gondar too by their performance. When they were about to return, the Government officials of Gonder would not just let Tamage go, but they had to take him away at that young and tender age together with one other child and put them with the Gonder Artists Group. Tamagn became the centre of attention of that Group. It was not always easy to manage the little Gaynte. He could be moody. He could be aggressive. He hated being ordered and pushed around. He always stood up for his rights. He always wanted to do his own things and at times did not follow instructions to the frustrations of his superiors. However, when left to do what he liked to do, he was the best in his performance. He simply got his own ways and did what pleased him. He was gifted presenter. He was singer. He was a dancer. Just as he was becoming an icon of Gondar, the authorities in Addis had their eyes too on Tamagn. LM Abebaw Yigzaw remembered the then Governor of Gondar, Major Melaku Tefera, a feared man of the time, resisted any attempt to take him away from Gondar. Although Major Melaku was known for his fearsome character, he had the softest heart for Tamagn. He believed the departure of Tamagn would lead to the collapse of his Gondar Artists Group and he would not let his favourite performer leave his domain. A strong negotiations from his superiors had to free Tamagn from the clutches of Melaku Tefera. Once arrived, Tamagn felt at home in Addis. A Gaynte - ጋይንቲ - from village of Nefas Mewtcha outsmarted the አራዶች *arades* from Addis. His outstanding performance in the National Theatre, his singing ability, his world tour with the People for People Group was breath taking. LM Abebaw Yigzaw, an authority in the Ethiopian Orthodox church could not resist expressing his amazement with the way Tamagn would play ትዝታ Tizeta – the famous Ethiopian national love song. Tamagn would cross his arms across shoulders and waist, pretending to dance with his partner, tenderly touching his own body, could convince the audience he was with someone on the other side. For LM Abebaw Yigzaw, Tamagn occupies a special place in his heart and would always admire him. His patriotism that excelled his artistic gift was something that captured the hearts and minds of his fellow Ethiopians. The brave son of Ethiopia challenged the national traitors in power and which landed him a genocide and treason charge. At this moment, Tamagn the entertainer, Tamagn that could make any one cry or laugh could not just hold back his tears.

At the end, LM Abebaw Yigzaw turned towards Tamagn, apologised for not being able to attend his wedding, and expressed that he would remain the dearest son he loved so much and would love him forever. As the two again embraced each other, the audience stood up on their feet and gave the father and son figures on the stage a standing ovation.

After a short break, Tamagn took the floor, not as an entertainer, but just like one of the outstanding political figures that frequently dominated London town halls. As Tamagn took the floor the audience expressed their appreciation by giving him another standing ovation, but Tamagn begged them to return to their seats with a frequently stretched hand gestures.



Tamagn said that although he never officially registered and lived in London, he had stayed in London for a long time and considered coming to London as coming home. Tamagn thanked the audience for sacrificing their Sunday rest and coming to the meeting. Tamagn always compared his place in the history of the country with those forefathers before him. Those amazing patriots never had the privilege of modern logistic support or armour. Whenever the country was invaded, their kings would simply announce to follow them to defend their country with their own spear and shields, with their own ቆሎ ሰንቅ - roasted grain for food on the road. They fought and protected that country with their sweat and blood. Tamagn said what he had done so far for his country is nothing compared to those forefathers.

When the May 2005 election came, looking at the enthusiasm of the people and quality of the opposition, there was a small hint that there might be some opportunity for the right leadership to emerge. Tamagn believed Ethiopian should be administered not by the thugs who had no knowledge of governance but the well-educated and capable individuals. One should be appointed to the post of leadership not by elements of the gene in the blood but ones ability and knowledge. He also remembered reading from Amb Zewde's book what an amazing team of leadership Ethiopia had in the past, to the extent of setting up the USSR against the USA, wrong

footing the French against the Italians and winning the day for Ethiopia. That was the kind of leadership that Ethiopia deserved but not tribalist ignorant leadership. Even the Dergue reflected Ethiopian patriotism. EPRP was an Ethiopian organisation, composed of genuine Ethiopians without reference to the tribal blood genes. Woyyane is the first that took tribalism as a weapon to promote hatred. Tamagn compared the composition and qualification of the members of the dictatorial regime and members of the opposition. Meles and his gang had been in the jungle for 30 years, not building but destroying schools, bridges, hospitals and infrastructures. Tamagn compared that with the 76 years old Prof. Mesfin Woldemariam, 50 of which were spent on educating Ethiopians, helping with building and developing Ethiopia. He asked whom does Ethiopia need? Adisu Legesse, the ex sports teacher or Hailu Shawl the engineer and accomplished entrepreneur? He then called few names from the opposition like, Prof. Mesfin Woldemariam, Eng. Hailu Shawl, Dr Berhanu Berhanu Nega, Dr Befedadu Degefe, Dr Hailu Araya, Dr Gizachew Dr...., Dr...., Dr...to the names of the members of the regime in power, Ato Meles Zenawi, Ato Bereket Simon, Ato Adisu Legesse, Ato Tefera Walwa ... Ato..., AtoAto.... The audience eventually got the irony and busted into laughter.

Tamagn's talent resurfaced when he started talking about Treason and the Genocide charge brought against him along those amazing leaders of CUD. When some one broke the news to him and read him clips from the Internet that he was among the charged with Treason and Genocide, he just could not comprehend what that was exactly meant. When the friend explained to him genocide means የሰው ዘር ማጥፋት mass murder of a certain group of people, the Amharic sounded a bit weird to him. He thought በገንዘብ ማጥፋት ከሆነ እሷ፤ ግን ኢንጅነር በዘር ማጥፋት ልክሰሰ፡ which meant he could have understood if he was accused of wasting money, some how, but how could he be charged with wasting human lives? Therefore, he asked his friend if it was possible to request to correct the charge into squandering money. People laughed at that. Then Tamagn went on to say whenever he had a headache, he mistakenly complained thinking his genocide had relapsed. That too sent the audience into long laughter.

Tamagn is not member of the CUD, although it was his right to be one. He just could not comprehend why he should have been charged along such educated and talented leaders of the CUD and journalists. However, he sensed that he must have said something that had pinched them from their seats. If love and loyalty for his country and people had been seen as treason, be it, he would take the charge with grace. Tones of lies had been broadcast on the radios and televisions sponsored by Woyyane in the USA. All those who did not take part in their treachery of the national interest of Ethiopia must be seen in their eyes as criminals. He asked if there were Woyyane supporters in the audience to tell their bosses that Tamagn preached love and living together in Ethiopia in peace and not to kill and eliminate each other.

Tamagn then went on to demolish those Woyyane advocates who live abroad and preached hate. He just could not comprehend while they were living in Britain, the USA and other democratic countries along their Afghan neighbours, Arabs friends, Turkish colleagues, Chinese, Bangladeshi, Pakistani, ... Greek mates in peace and harmony, why they should write a programme that would set fellow Ethiopians against fellow Ethiopians, divided their own country along ethnic lines and annihilate each other. He just could not come with terms in hearing them preach venom.

Tamagn had a go at him from both sides when he produced his DVD of political jokes on Prime Minister Meles and President Mengistu. First, he had a call from someone who was so angry on the phone for comparing patriotic President Mengistu with traitor Meles. He told Tamagn that he was so naïve in his comparison and needed to correct himself. Tamagn explained to him both Meles and Mengistu were Ethiopians. He was up for a country where both Meles and Mengistu could live in peace without killing each other or killing other people.

Then he had an arrogant call from another guy. He quoted him in Amharic imitating the caller.

"አሎ! ተማን ነ?"

"ሁሉ ጌታዬ ማን ለበል? አዎን ታማኝ ነኝ።"

"አንታ በበላይ!"

Mildly translated:

"Hello, are you Tamagn"?

"Yes I am"?

"You are rude.

The above raised a roar of laughter. Tamagn asked Ethiopians in London and the Diaspora never to let down the struggling Ethiopians at home. As for him he vowed to fight on until justice is made.

He went on to talk about love for his people. Hate is only Woyyane's philosophy and nobody else's. These days, they had been moaning about the campaign waged against the people of Tigray. No Ethiopian to his knowledge raised his voice against his/her brothers and sisters from Tigray but only Woyyane is preaching that. If any one asked where and when and who said what, Woyyane had no evidence to produce. They were saying openly that non-Tigre Ethiopians were saying: **"ትግራ ወደ መቀሌ፤ ቤት ወደ ቀበሌ።"**. "Tigrés to Meqele and Houses to Kebele". Tamagn thought that was an outrageous lie created by Woyyane to convince Tigres that without Woyyane they would be like fish out of water. In his part, Tamagn claimed that he never hated Tigres. Woyyane could fall and die if it wanted, but he would never hate the Tigres. Why should he? Woyyane failed to achieve that hatred from other Ethiopians against Tigres, and that is why gang created stories about genocide, waged controlled explosions here and there in Addis Ababa, but Tamagn vowed never to fall in that trap.

Tamagn stopped briefly and focused on the audience and wondered if someone called Ato Muluget Asrate was in that hall, as he was dying to meet that character. He had to endure more than 6 hours of TV lecture by that individual on hatred. People roared with laughter because Mulugeta Asrate, would not be expected to attend such a patriotic gathering. Mulugeta is an opportunist who could sell even his soul to the highest bidder. When the Dergue was in power, he nearly made Ethiopian Embassy his home. Once Woyyane took over the Embassy settled in, Mulugeta Asrate shifted his allegiance and greeted them with the list of individuals who were working for the Dergue, excluding himself. Tamagn then went on to convey his message to Mulugeta Asrate, who was heard on one of the Woyyane sponsored TV stations that he

regularly sent messengers to every London meeting. He asked the massager to take the following message to Mulugeta Asrate. The message was:

“ወያኔን መደገፍ መብትዎ ነው። ዳሩ ግን እንደዚያ የነሱ መጋጃ መሆን ያሳፍራል። አሁን ሎንዶን ስመጣ ላገኘዎትና ልብ ለልብ ልንጨዋዎትና ልንነጋገር አልጫ ነበር። ሕልጫ አልተሳካም። መልዕክቱ ግን እንዲህ ነው። እዚህ አገር ደቻሳ የሚባለው ድጎማ እንዳለ አውቃለሁ። ወያኔን ካልደገፉ የማይሰጥዎ ከሁኑ፤ አባታችን ያሳውቁኝና፤ እንደዚያ የወያኔ መጋጃ ሁነው ተዋርደው ዕድጫ ልክዎን ከሚቀሩ፤ እኛ አዋጥተን እንክፍልዎታለንና ከእንደዚህ ዓይነት የውርደት ሥራ እራስዎን ነጻ ያውጡ።”

In short, the above translated, the message to Mulugeta Asrate was that if he was doing what degrading task of performing the role of Woyyane burden animal, Tamagn and his colleagues are ready to contribute and pay him the money to save his soul.

The audience went into a deafening applaud and a loud laughter. The funny thing was that there was no smile on the face of Tamagn. He looked deadly serious in his message to Mulugeta Asrate Kassa. Oh boy! Mulugeta Asrate Kassa must have been saying loads of rubbish on that tv programme to drive Tamagn so angry.

Tamagn finished his speech by asking the people to promise for themselves never to give up on the struggle and keep fighting for justice, equality and the survival of a united Ethiopia as a nation.

Again the people stood up on their feet and gave a standing ovation, which is only reserved to a very few people who visited London.

He requested the audience to watch two short films showing the June and November 2005 murders on the streets of Addis and the defiance of the citizens.

After the films, a couple of people were given an opportunity to say few words about Tamagn. Among the people, there was a mother, who lost her nephew in the hands of Woyyane Agaazi that sent Tamagn and many of the audience to tears. She prayed to God to look after Tamagn, a proud son of Ethiopia and fight on for the freedom of our people from the grip of the ethno-apartheid dictators who made mothers like her cry continuously for the murdered youth on the streets of Addis Ababa. One by one, those who come to the floor gave their vow to Tamagn to fight on until peace, democracy, equality and justice prevailed in Ethiopia.

Towards the end, LM Abebaw Yigzaw was called upon to present a special gift to Tamagn from Ethiopians in London in recognition of the outstanding patriotism he had shown and to inspire him to continue the struggle as a brave son of his motherland. LM Abebaw handed over the gift adorned with Ethiopian flag. When the flag was carefully taken away and the present was revealed, it was a bronze figure of a lion bearing the mark of Tamagn Beyene, just as Alebachew was saying earlier.

Fighting back his tears, Tamagn again begged the standing audience to seat down and said that the gift was the heaviest burden bestowed on him, but one thing he would promise to the patriots in London would be that he would not rest a single day without fighting for justice, equality and freedom for his beloved country.

The struggle continues. The people of Ethiopia shall triumph!