

# HORUS

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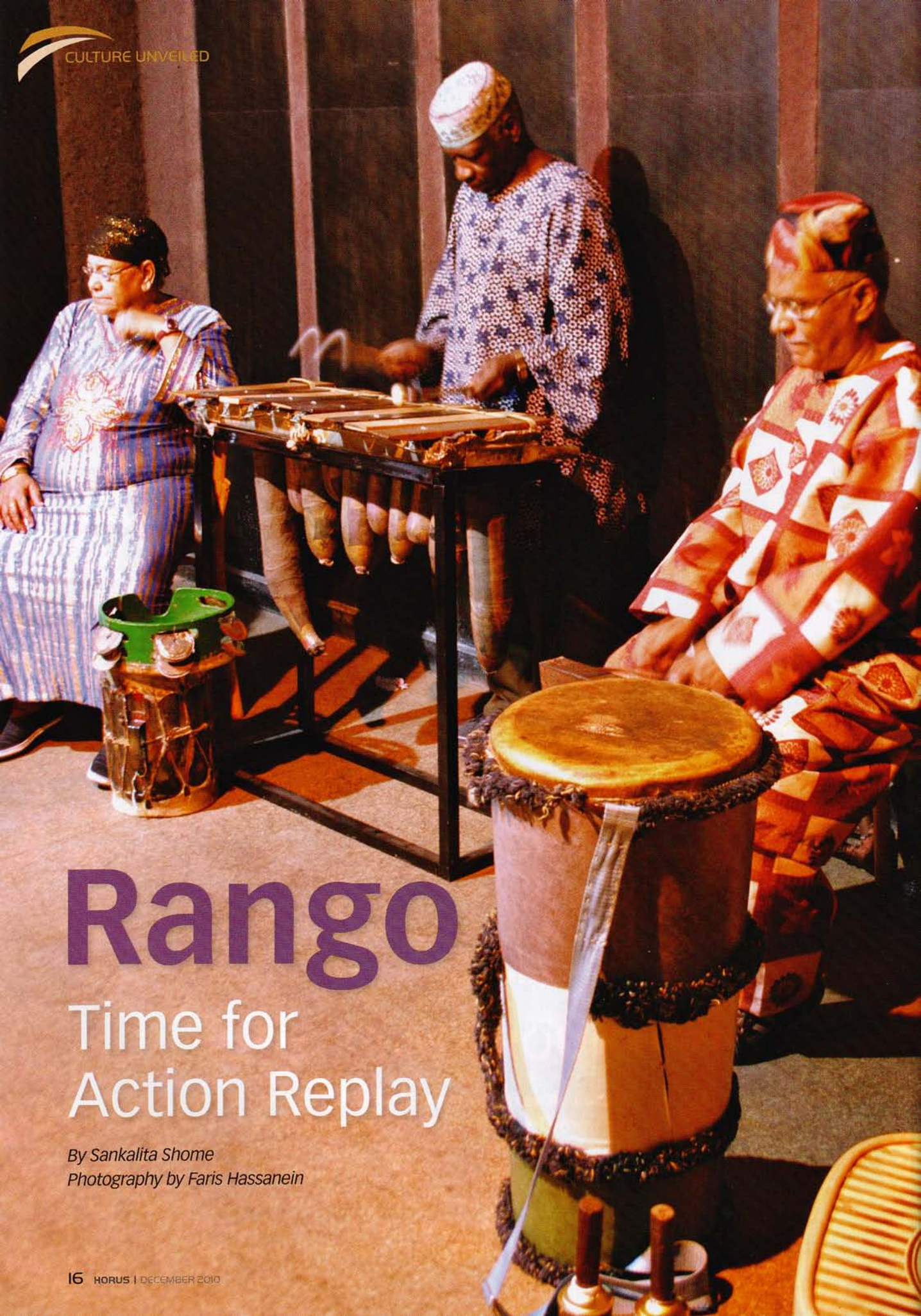
## Bahareya Treasures

The Black Desert  
Inglese Mountain  
Dessit and Maghrafa



**EGYPTAIR**

A STAR ALLIANCE MEMBER



# Rango

## Time for Action Replay

*By Sankalita Shome  
Photography by Faris Hassanein*

At the last crossing just before the Abdeen Palace, in a neighborhood in downtown Cairo, is the Tanbura Hall which hosts the last-known exponent of Rango every Thursday evening.

And no, here Rango does not refer to the upcoming computer-animated film! Rather, it is a musical instrument and the musical form that was brought to Egypt by the Sudanese people - first when they came in as conscripts into the Egyptian army in the 1820s and then later by those who were brought in to work on cotton plantations in the 1860s.

These reluctant exiles settled in the cities of Alexandria, Cairo and Ismailia, bringing their folk melodies and instruments with them, looking for solace from the loneliness and the harshness of their lives in music. At the Tanbura Hall, this repertoire of music created from exile-songs of longing to return to their homelands, humorous marching refrain and Sudanese wedding songs are performed.

The Rango ensemble, fresh from their triumphant one-month long tour of the UK in July this year, set the mood with their songs performed to "simsimiya" and "tanbura" lyres, with percussion provided by shakers made of recycled aerosol cans.

Their performance has a new exuberance; they have just heard that their debut album, Rango: Bride of the Zar, has been selected as one of the 10 best albums of 2010 in the respected London-based Songlines magazine.

But the pièce de resistance of the performance is yet to come, when the 190-year-old Rango is unveiled - literally - to an appreciative audience. The instrument deserves the ceremonial unveiling, after all, it is one of only two that can be found in Egypt.


Xylophone-like, with wooden keys and resonators fashioned out of vegetable gourds, the Rango music had faded into oblivion after the death of the last of the old masters in the year 1975.


The Rango was traditionally played along with the Tanbura at the soul cleansing and healing Zar rituals and gradually evolved to being performed at wedding celebrations and other social events. However, it could never quite shake off the stigma of being a trance-inducing and spirit-invoking music.

Ibrahim Zacharias, founder of El Mastaba, the Center for Egyptian Folk Music, decided to bring back the Rango into the public realm and to rescue it from the brink of extinction.

"I first heard about the Rango in the year 1994 from my friend, the veteran Ismaili musician El Wazery," recalls Zacharias. He had fond memories of beautiful Rango nights in Ismailia before the war of 1967 and particularly remembered Hassan Bergamon. Bergamon had moved to Cairo and taken up playing the more versatile Tanbura. Consequently, no one knew that Bergamon could play the Rango.

Zacharias finally traced him in the year 1996. "When I met him, the



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The Rango family

first thing I asked him was whether he still could play the Rango and second, whether he owned any," says Zacharias.

Since Bergamon did not own a Rango, the battle was only half won. Zacharias visited the homes of the old masters and over a period of time won the trust of their families who entrusted the last two Rango xylophones to him. Twenty-one years had elapsed since Bergamon last played the Rango, but when he laid his hands on the instrument again, he says "it was like, I had found myself again".

The Rango instrument and its player secured, the next step was

to organize the band. With veteran drummers, Zar singers and ritual dancers wearing mangor belts made from goat horns, Bergamon's Rango ensemble made their stage debut in Egypt in 2001. Energetic and frenzied, alternately foot tapping and soulful, Rango music is a cacophonous symphony. The efforts of Zacharias and Bergamon have revived Rango in Egypt.

The gourds, out of which the Rango is fashioned, can be found only in the south of Sudan and with the passing away of the old masters; knowledge to assemble the Rango has also faded. Old Rangos are fragile and may not survive the relentless pounding for a long time.

However, there is a ray of hope - El Mastaba has recently discovered an English musician, who is a specialist Rango maker and has commissioned a brand new Rango, likely to be brought to Cairo by the beginning of this month.

But again, the bigger hiccup is manifesting the spirits of the old masters from the gourds of the old Rango into the new one. "The musicians and players of Rango believe that every player who plays the Rango leaves a part of himself inside the gourds and the invisible spirits are moving around the gourds hoping for a communion with the spirits of the old masters", elaborates Zacharias. And the implications of this belief in an instrument that has been passed on from one generation to another are huge.

What about the next generation of Rango players? Bergamon, who is 62 years old today, is extremely passionate about music. He kept at it despite family opposition. In fact, as a child, he sneaked out of his house clandestinely on a number of occasions to play the music.

Surprisingly, none of his children plays the Rango. Quiz him as to why he did not share his talent with his offspring, he answers simply, "I saw the Rango and I fell in love with it; I did not see the same love in my children".



The tanbura



Bergamon performing