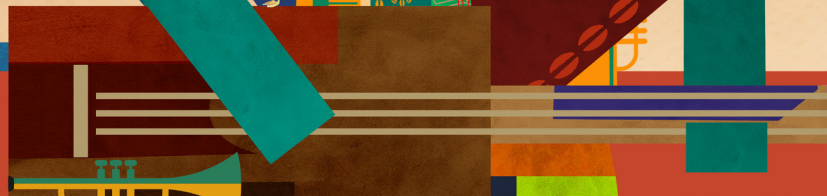
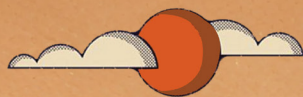


ESSAOUIRA
Gnaoua
& World Music Festival

26th EDITION
19th TO 21st
JUNE 2025
ESSAOUIRA - MOROCCO



PRESS RELEASE
CASABLANCA - JUNE 23, 2025



IT'S A WRAP GNAOUA AND WORLD MUSIC FESTIVAL 2025

Essaouira, three days and three nights of fervour, rhythm, and cultural fusion

From **June 19 to 21**, Essaouira once again transformed into a vast space for celebration, dialogue, and communion. A space suspended in time, entirely devoted to music, encounters, and togetherness. From the ramparts of the medina to the beach, guembris called out to saxophones, Mandinka songs mingled with Afro-Cuban rhythms, and Gnaoua voices vibrated to the beat of Senegalese drums.

The **26th edition of the Gnaoua and World Music Festival** came to a close on a powerful note, pulsing with groove, memory, and humanity. **More than 300,000 festival-goers** answered the call of this grand celebration of music and cultural diversity.

Fusion on stage, artists in a state of grace

From the opening parade led by the Maâlems in a whirlwind of colour, the tone was set: festive, generous, intense. On the Moulay Hassan main stage, concerts followed one another in a perfectly orchestrated musical crescendo.

The Moroccan-Senegalese opening act — Hamid El Kasri, Compagnie Bakalama, Abir El Abed, Kya Loum — set the bar very high from the outset. Then came a series of eclectic musical fusions: **Houssam Gania** and **Marcus Gilmore** delivered a tight and inspired jazz-Gnaoua performance; **Dhafer Youssef** and **Maâlem Morad El Marjani** explored a mystical space, at once vibrant and meditative. On Saturday night, **Cimafunk** and **Khalid Sansi** unleashed a human tidal wave. And **CKay's** concert drew out a young, connected, dancing, and cosmopolitan crowd.

In total, **350 artists from over a dozen countries (Senegal, USA, Tunisia, Nigeria, France, Mali, Cuba, Syria, Turkey, Iraq, Côte d'Ivoire, and more)** performed across the festival's stages, including **40 Gnaoua Maâlems** — legendary masters and rising stars alike.

A loyal and eclectic audience, eager to participate

Students, families, curious young people, and festival-goers from the very first edition — they were all there. In the queues, cafés, and winding alleys of the medina, you could hear as many languages as you could see smiles. In Essaouira, as always, music brings people together — across origins, borders, and generations.

The Gnaoua Festival audience is never passive: they listen, dance, question, and vibrate. They are active participants in a living memory, in a collective momentum.

A forum rich in meaning, rooted in the world

For its 12th edition, the **Human Rights Forum**, organised in partnership with the **Council of the Moroccan Community Abroad (CCME)**, once again lived up to its promise. Under the theme “**Human Mobility and Cultural Dynamics**,” writers, researchers, filmmakers, and artists explored the complex relationships between migration, creativity, and belonging.

Highlights included presentations by Franco-Ivorian poet **Véronique Tadjo**, historian **Pascal Blanchard** (a specialist in colonial studies), filmmaker **Faouzi Bensaïdi**, writer **Elgas**, and Palestinian director **Elia Suleiman**, whose deeply personal and sincere testimony left a lasting impression.

Participants noted the urgent need for humans to move and migrate despite barriers and restrictions. This mobility has various motivations, chief among them the search for a dignified life.

This mobility is often associated with pain and suffering, but is almost always accompanied by strong, hybrid cultural dynamics that convey powerful messages of politics and identity. In the context of migration, cultural production is an act of resistance, integration, and self-affirmation.

A university chair in dialogue with the Maâlems

As part of the **UM6P Chair of Cross Cultures and Globalization**, two groundbreaking roundtables created a rare and precious moment of exchange between researchers, scholars, and Gnaoua Maâlems. In a deep, unfiltered dialogue, academic knowledge met embodied knowledge — of trance, rhythm, and oral transmission.

It was a profoundly human conversation, guided by mutual respect, curiosity, and active listening. A moment suspended in time, where scholarly discourse met lived experience — together rethinking the role of living heritage in today’s world. Not as an archive, but as a vibrant, evolving force, rooted in the present and open to the future.

Inhabited places, a city transformed

Essaouira became one big stage. **Intimate concerts** in the **zaouias** and at **Bayt Dakira**, Kurdish melodies at **Borj Bab Marrakech**, Berber grooves and electric oud... and on **the beach**, young Maâlems took the spotlight before an enchanted crowd.

An unforgettable moment: the concert by **Fehd Benchemsi & The Lallas**. A sea of people stretching to the shoreline, swept up in a generous set blending rock, Gnaoua, and chaabi. A poetic and festive communion that united generations.

Sustainable connections and reaffirmed commitments

The Festival continues its long-standing commitment to education, transmission, and research.

The **Berklee at Gnaoua Festival programme** — in partnership for the **second year** with **Berklee College of Music** — brought together **74 young musicians** from **23 countries** for a week of creative residency, training, and exchange, led by world-class faculty.

When influence transcends borders

The Gnaoua Festival is also a major media event. For this **26th edition**, **250 journalists and media crews** from **120 outlets** covered the festival from *Morocco, France, Spain, Germany, Italy, Australia, India, Portugal, Turkey, the United States, the United Kingdom, Norway, and the United Arab Emirates.*

The momentum continues

The **2025 Gnaoua Festival** reaffirmed its purpose: to make music a shared language, to turn Essaouira into a laboratory of cultural fusion, and to treat heritage as a living, breathing force. This edition was generous, bold, and essential.

See you at the 27th edition, from June 25 to 27, 2026, with the same promise: to unleash rhythms that no border can contain..

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