

ESSAOUIRA
Gnaoua
& World Music Festival

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



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GNAOUA 2025 **A CITY IN TRANCE, A WORLD IN FUSION**

More than a Festival, a breath of fresh air. More than a celebration, a vision. From the 19th to the 21st of June, Essaouira will become the beating heart of global musical creation, where Gnaoua Maâlems, true guardians of trance, welcome major voices from around the world for three days of sound experiences, human encounters, and shared freedom. An event that burns with pure emotion, at the crossroads where spirituality, youth, and artistic activism come together.



A musical celebration without borders

It all begins with an **opening parade** rich in rhythms and symbols, where all of the Gnaoua Maâlems gather in the streets of Essaouira for a wonderful moment of communion and folk celebration. This procession will kick off the Festival in a resolutely universal atmosphere of joy and spirituality.

Immediately after the parade, an exceptional **opening concert** will take place on the Moulay Hassan stage, bringing together the emblematic voice of the Moroccan Gnaoui **Maâlem Hamid El Kasri**, and the **Bakalama company** from Senegal, a major reference in traditional West African percussion and dance. The singular voices of **Abir El Abed** and **Kya Loum** will join them to weave a powerful sonic cartography, vibing between Moroccan spirituality, Sabar rhythms, and contemporary adventure. A masterful opening, like the Festival itself: ***bold, rooted, and open.***

Throughout the festival, musical fusions follow each other with rare intensity: **Maâlem Houssam Gania** crosses his guembri with the free drums of New Yorker **Marcus Gilmore**, **Morad El Marjan** enters into a spiritual dialogue with **Dhafer Youssef**, the great figure of mystical jazz, and **Asmaa Hamzaoui & Bnat Timbouktou** weave a song of resistance and sorority with **Rokia Koné**, Mali's powerful voice, honed by tradition and commitment. Also not to be missed: **Maâlem Mohamed Boumezzough** and his original creation, featuring **Anas Chlih, Aly Keïta, Tao Ehrlich, Martin Guerpin, Quentin Ghomari, and Hajar Alaoui**, for a sonic encounter between Morocco, Mali, and France, where balafon, guembri, and brass blend into a galvanizing collective energy.

In addition to these extraordinary artistic encounters will be the great voices of the African and Afro-diasporic scene: **Cimafunk**, a rising star on the Afro-Cuban scene, activist reggae legend **Tiken Jah Fakoly**, and **CKay**, the Nigerian phenomenon with an introspective pop sound, will all step forward to meet an intergenerational audience. And don't forget the **young generation of Gnaoua**, brilliantly represented this year on the Beach Stage with confirmed masters at their side.

And because the Festival is also a land of bold innovation, **Fehd Benchemsi & The Lallas, DuOud, Nishtiman Project, The Leila, and Ribab Fusion** will electrify the Essaouira stages with their singular performances, blending local roots, modern mixes, and powerful commitments to sound.

350 artists—including **40 Gnaoua Maâlems**—will perform in **54 concerts** over three intense days, at various times of day or night, ranging from large-scale open-air shows to intimate sets and performances in heritage sites.

Thinking differently about the world: the Human Rights Forum

The **Human Rights Forum**—which returns for a **12th edition devoted to human mobilities and cultural dynamics**, is a highlight of the Festival. For two days, writers, historians, filmmakers, thinkers, and artists—including **Andrea Rea, Elia Suleiman, Véronique Tadjo, Karim Bouamrane, Kassie Freeman, Faouzi Bensaïdi, Pascal Blanchard, Rim Najmi, and Barthélémy Toguo**—will discuss the profound connections between migration, narratives, artistic creation, and identity. An agora of free thought, at the crossroads of knowledge, the arts, and human experience.

Investing in the future: transmission and creation

The **Berklee at Gnaoua and World Music Festival program**, in partnership with the prestigious **Berklee College of Music**, returns for a **second edition June 16-21**. The program offers young musicians from **23 countries** the chance to train alongside major figures on the international scene. Conceived as a living laboratory for learning and collaboration, this program fully embodies the spirit of the Festival: **transmission, transcendence, audacity**.

In the same spirit, the creation of the “**Chair of Cross Cultures and Globalization**”, backed by a **cultural hybridization laboratory** run in collaboration with **Mohammed VI Polytechnic University**, will inspire two public round tables during the Festival. Researchers, artists, and thinkers will explore intersecting spiritualities, the resonance of Gnaoua ritual, and contemporary forms of musical fusion.

The **Arbre à Palabres (Talking Tree)**, an African-inspired forum for free speech, the «**Entre jeu et mémoire**» (**Between Play and Memory**) exhibition at the **Borj Bab Marrakech**, street concerts and workshops open to the public are also part of the programme of events, providing valuable respite from the hustle and bustle of the Festival.

Three days to feel, think, and marvel. Three days to reconnect with all that is essential. The Gnaoua Festival awaits you. In Essaouira, what the world breaks apart, music will bring together.

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