

BERKLEE

AT THE **GNAOUA** 2026
& WORLD MUSIC FESTIVAL

JUNE 22-27

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PRESS RELEASE

BERKLEE COLLEGE OF MUSIC RETURNS TO ESSAOUIRA FOR THE 3RD EDITION OF THE « BERKLEE AT THE GNAOUA AND WORLD MUSIC FESTIVAL »

Casablanca, March 12, 2026 – The Gnaoua and World Music Festival of Essaouira and Berklee College of Music announce the opening of applications for the third edition of the «Berklee at the Gnaoua and World Music Festival» program, which will take place from June 22 to June 27, 2026, in Essaouira, ahead of the 27th edition of the Festival.

This immersive six-day experience is designed for professional and semi-professional musicians age 18 and older, at various stages of their artistic development, who seek to deepen their musicianship in a rigorous cross-cultural environment. Open to instrumentalists and vocalists from **classical, Gnaoua, and contemporary traditions - including jazz, pop, rock, and global music styles** - the program offers a learning experience grounded in active listening, experimentation, and meaningful artistic exchange.

Since the program's launch in 2024, **118 musicians** from **30 countries** have participated in **Berklee at the Gnaoua and World Music Festival**. Among them are **29 Moroccan musicians**, alongside artists from several African countries, including Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Sierra Leone, South Sudan, and Zambia, as well as participants from Europe, the Americas, and Asia. This significant growth across the first two editions reflects the program's expanding international reach and its ability to connect artists from diverse musical backgrounds.

“With this third edition, Berklee at the Gnaoua and World Music Festival confirms the strength of our vision and the value of perseverance, anchoring this partnership for the long term. The Gnaoua artists contribute to positioning Essaouira as a global capital of music,” said Neila Tazi, President of A3 Communication and Producer of the Festival. *“This partnership with Berklee strengthens the Festival’s role as a laboratory of creation and transmission. By bringing together musicians from Morocco and around the world, we are helping build a unique space of excellence and intercultural dialogue on the continent.”*

Under the academic direction of **Leo Blanco, Professor of Piano and Africana Studies** at Berklee College of Music, the 2026 edition will center on the theme **Listening with a Global Ear - Playing with a Global Concept**. The program will emphasize deep listening, an expanded understanding of global rhythmic and harmonic frameworks, and the ability to integrate these influences into one's own musical language.

“Essaouira is a unique place to experience this program,” said Blanco. *“Participants not only study concepts - they engage with them through direct collaboration and the energy of the Festival. Our goal is to support them in authentically integrating these influences into their own artistic identity”*

Alongside Blanco, the faculty will include **Fernando Huergo (Professor of Bass)**, **Nadia Washington (Assistant Professor of Ear Training)**, **Jason Camelio (Assistant Vice President, Global Programs and Partnerships)**, and **Bri Tagliaferro (Associate Director of Global Programs and Partnerships)**.

Sessions will be conducted in English, with Arabic and French translation to ensure broad accessibility, and will conclude with a final showcase performance. Selected participants will also receive access to concerts during the **27th Gnaoua and World Music Festival, taking place June 25-27, 2026.**

Applicants must submit an online application along with three videos demonstrating their musical and technical skills on their principal instrument.

The application deadline is Monday, April 20, 2026.

Tuition for the program is \$450 (4500 MAD). Participants are responsible for travel and lodging arrangements for the duration of the program.

[Click here for more information](#)

About the Gnaoua and World Music Festival of Essaouira

Founded in 1998, the Festival transforms Essaouira into an international crossroads of artistic exchange, celebrating encounters between **the Gnaoua tradition - inscribed on UNESCO’s Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity - and global music traditions.** Beyond concerts, the Festival develops initiatives dedicated to training, transmission, and reflection on contemporary cultural dynamics.

About Berklee College of Music

Berklee College of Music is the preeminent institute of contemporary music, **offering undergraduate, graduate degree programs, and other capacity building programs at its campuses in Boston, New York City, and Valencia, Spain,** and through Berklee Online. Dedicated to nurturing the creative and career potential of the world’s most inspired artists, Berklee’s commitment to arts education is reflected in the work of its students, faculty, and alumni, hundreds of whom have been recognized with **Grammys, Emmys, Tonys, and Academy Awards.**

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