Beat: Entertainment

WHEN GNAOUA MAESTRO HAMID EL KASRI MADE THE OUDAYA BOUREGREG VIBRATE IN RABAT

NASR MEGRI HONOURS HIS FAMILY

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USPA NEWS - There is a moment in some concerts when applause becomes irrelevant.
The audience stops merely listening.
It begins to move.
At the Été des Oudayas, Hamid El Kasri created precisely such a moment.
The second evening brought together Sami Kasba, recipient of the Hassan Megri Prize, the Nostalgia project, Farid Ghannam and the Gnaoua maâlem Hamid El Kasri.
But the night ultimately belonged to rhythm.
The Gnaoua repertoire gradually altered the atmosphere.
The repetition of sacred refrains created a hypnotic structure.
The audience answered physically.
Women with long hair danced.
Groups entered increasingly intense states of movement.
Some spectators went into trance.
And the emergency teams were already prepared.
Civil protection, police and security personnel stood nearby, ready to intervene if anyone lost consciousness. Stretchers were available because the physical intensity of the experience was real.
For an international observer, the scene might have seemed extraordinary.
For Morocco, it was also a deeply familiar cultural phenomenon: music as spiritual passage, rhythm as collective memory, repetition as a route toward trance.
The security response was equally remarkable.

WHEN HAMID EL KASRI TURNED MUSIC INTO A PHYSICAL EXPERIENCE

By the time Hamid El Kasri took the stage, the atmosphere at the Bouregreg waterfront had already reached an extraordinary intensity.

But the Gnaoua maâlem pushed it somewhere else entirely.

His powerful voice, the hypnotic repetition of the rhythms and the deep resonance of the traditional Gnaoua repertoire gradually transformed the relationship between the audience and the stage.

People did not simply listen.

They moved.

Groups entered increasingly intense states of movement.

Some spectators appeared to enter states approaching trance.

The repetitive rhythms, the physicality of the dance and the collective energy created an atmosphere in which the boundary between spectator and performer seemed to disappear.

For an international observer, the scene might have appeared extraordinary.

For Morocco, it was also a deeply familiar cultural phenomenon: music as spiritual passage, rhythm as collective memory, repetition as

a route toward trance.

The experience was not merely visual.

It was physical.

The music seemed to travel through the crowd. And the crowd answered with its bodies.

FROM CHAÂBI TO THE MICRO D'OR (GOLDEN MICROPHONE) AWARDING RACHID ALLALI: THE OUDAYAS END WITH A CELEBRATION OF MOROCCAN POPULAR MEMORY

At one point, a bottle of cold water brought by Ahmed was passed to me then to Khadija's mother. The gesture lasted seconds.
Its meaning lasted much longer. The Oudayas were not merely vibrating because of the music.
They were vibrating because people were experiencing the music together. And there was something almost poetic in Nasr Megri presenting the distinction.
The festival had begun with the Megri family at the centre of an homage to Mahmoud.
It ended with another member of that family handing a microphone-related distinction to a major figure of Moroccan television.
Nasr Megri presented the trophy, while artist-painter Naim Chamaou offered a tribute to Allali's career in Moroccan media. The public reception was particularly warm. The inonic Rachdi Allali of "Rachid Show", Moroccan television presenter and producer, known notably for Najm Chaabi, received the Micro d'Or.

The circle had closed.
But the music continued.
Twam and Salaheddine Majdouli kept the popular register alive, while Abdelmoughit's chaâbi anchored the final evening in a tradition whose strength lies precisely in its ability to make a crowd sing together.
The waterfront was alive.
The sea air softened the August heat.
Across the Bouregreg, Rabat and Salé were illuminated.
The audience filmed the final moments.
Television cameras carried the images elsewhere.
Social networks carried them further still.
And the Oudayas, once again, demonstrated that Moroccan heritage is not a relic.
It is something people still sing, dance, film, share and reinvent.

WHEN THE ENERGY OF THE CROWD REQUIRED A SECOND KIND OF PERFORMANCE

The intensity was such that emergency preparedness became part of the invisible architecture of the evening.

Civil protection, police and security personnel remained nearby, ready to intervene if anyone lost consciousness. Stretchers were available because the physical intensity of the experience was real.

Yet remarkably, the security operation never became a spectacle in itself.

Ahmed Al Othmani and Mr Bahi, responsible for the festival's security operation, managed to protect the audience without disrupting the atmosphere.

There was no confrontation.

No arrest.

No incident that interrupted the performance.

The security teams remained present without imposing themselves between the audience and the music.

That balance is not insignificant.

At a mass cultural event, particularly one involving intense physical and emotional reactions, security can easily become intrusive.

Here, it remained largely invisible.

The music remained at the centre.

KHADIJA AND HER MOTHER: ANOTHER FORM OF MOVEMENT

And then came another, quieter scene.

Khadija and her mother were brought into the protected VIP area.

Khadija, a young disabled girl seated in a wheelchair, watched the stage alongside her mother.

Her mother sang.

She danced.

She carried her daughter.

And at moments, she tried to reproduce the movements of walking although she herself could not walk.

The contrast was unforgettable.

On stage, a centuries-old spiritual musical tradition was provoking physical movement among hundreds of spectators.

Beside the stage, a mother was creating movement for her daughter through love, imagination and determination.

At one point, a bottle of cold water brought by Ahmed Al Othmani was passed to Khadija's mother.

The gesture lasted seconds.

Its meaning lasted much longer.

Because it was one of those small moments in which the broader meaning of the evening became visible.

The festival was not only about what happened on stage.

It was also about how people treated one another around the stage.

And as a wheelchair user myself, I could not experience that scene without noticing it.

The Oudayas were not merely vibrating because of the music.

They were vibrating because people were experiencing the music together. THE CLOSING NIGHT: FROM CHAÂBI TO THE MICRO D'OR
A FESTIVAL RETURNS TO THE PEOPLE'S MUSIC

The final evening brought the festival back to one of the deepest roots of Moroccan popular culture.

Twam.

Salaheddine Majdouli.

Abdelmoughit.

And, alongside the musical programme, an emotional tribute to Rachid Allali.

After the spiritual intensity of Gnaoua, the closing programme deliberately returned to the popular traditions of Moroccan music, particularly chaâbi, the repertoire that has the extraordinary ability to turn an audience into a choir.

When Abdelmoughit took the stage, the atmosphere became immediately communal.

The audience knew the songs.

They sang along.

They moved with the music.

The distance between performer and spectator almost disappeared.

That is perhaps what separates popular music from a formal concert:

the audience does not simply wait to be entertained. It already owns part of the repertoire.

Abdelmoughit's performance therefore felt less like a recital than a collective memory being reopened.

TV STAR RACHID ALLALI GOT THE GOLDEN MICROPHONE & PASSED IT FROM ONE GENERATION TO ANOTHER

The tribute to National Moroccan Tv Star Rachid Allali added another dimension to the closing evening.

The television presenter and producer, known notably for Najm Chaabi, received the Micro d'Or, recognising his contribution to Moroccan media and popular culture.

And the choice of presenter made the moment particularly meaningful.

Nasr Megri presented the trophy to Rachid Allali.

Artist-painter Naim Chamaou also paid tribute to Allali's career.

The public reception was warm and enthusiastic.

But there was something almost poetic in seeing Nasr Megri hand the distinction to Allali.

The festival had begun with the Megri family at the centre of an homage to Mahmoud Megri.

And now, as the festival reached its conclusion, another member of that family was presenting a major distinction to one of the most recognisable figures of Moroccan television and popular entertainment.

The circle had closed.

Not through nostalgia alone, but through transmission.

One generation recognising another.

One cultural memory passing into another pair of hands.

THE FINAL NIGHT BELONGED TO THE AUDIENCE

Twam and Salaheddine Majdouli kept the popular register alive, while Abdelmoughit's chaâbi anchored the final evening in a tradition whose strength lies precisely in its ability to make a crowd sing together.

The waterfront was alive.

The August air moved across the Bouregreg.

Across the river, Rabat and Salé were illuminated.

Phones were raised everywhere.

Spectators filmed the final moments.

Television cameras carried the images beyond the waterfront.

Social networks carried them further still.

The festival therefore had two audiences:

the people physically gathered at the Oudayas, and the much larger audience watching, sharing and commenting from elsewhere in Morocco and beyond.

The final images were not simply those of artists leaving the stage.

They were images of people reluctant to leave it.

FROM GNAOUA TRANCE TO CHAÂBI MEMORY, A FESTIVAL THAT REFUSED TO STAND STILL

What made the 14th Été des Oudayas remarkable was not simply the number of artists or the diversity of the programme.

It was the way the festival allowed apparently distant musical worlds to exist within the same cultural space.

Gnaoua could lead an audience toward trance.

Chaâbi could make thousands sing together.

Rai could connect generations across the Maghreb.

Rap could speak to contemporary Moroccan youth.

The Megri repertoire could carry family memory forward.

And television, photography and social media could transmit all of it beyond the Bouregreg.

The festival's most powerful images were therefore not necessarily the most spectacular ones.

They were the moments in between:

Hamid El Kasri's rhythms moving through the crowd.

Security teams quietly watching over the most vulnerable spectators.

A mother carrying her daughter while trying to make her dance.

Nasr Megri presenting the Micro d'Or to Rachid Allali.

And an audience singing songs it already considered its own.

MOROCCO UNVEILS SOFTLY ITS CULTURE THAT LIVES BECAUSE PEOPLE KEEP IT ALIVE

The 2026 Été des Oudayas ended where it had begun: with music, memory and people gathered together.

But after four nights, one conclusion seemed difficult to avoid.

Moroccan musical heritage does not survive because it is preserved. It survives because it is lived.

It is sung by one generation, reinvented by another, danced by the audience, transmitted through families, amplified by television and carried across social networks.

From the spiritual intensity of Hamid El Kasri's Gnaoua to the popular celebration of Abdelmoughit's chaâbi, from Nasr Megri presenting the Micro d'Or to Rachid Allali to the thousands of spectators moving together beneath the Rabat sky, the Oudayas demonstrated that tradition is not the opposite of modernity.

Tradition becomes modern every time a new generation makes it its own.

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