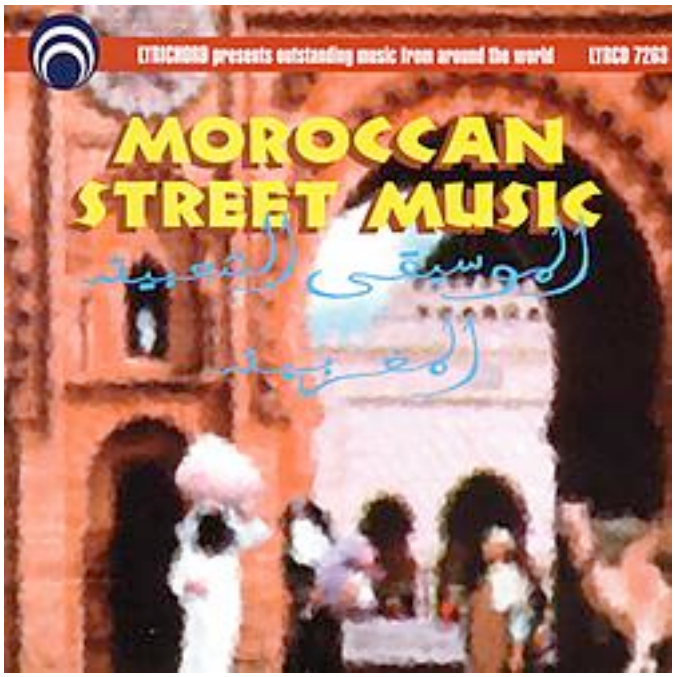

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MOROCCAN STREET MUSIC
Recorded and Produced by Philip Schuyler

To a modern westerner, the concert hall seems the most natural place to hear live music. But the concert hall is an invention of the 18th and 19th centuries. In Morocco, older traditions prevail. A feast - a wedding, circumcision or similar event – is incomplete without music. For lesser events, or for no reason at all, amateurs may get together and play for themselves and their friends.

An equally important, and far more obvious, aspect of musical performance in Morocco falls at the opposite end of the spectrum – the totally public performance. Some ensembles are designed to play outdoors with full effect (see Moroccan Sufi Music, Lyrichord 7238). But many individuals and groups with lower volume also appear outdoors, to a more intimate audience. Many musicians travel a circuit of weekly markets. In the larger traditional cities one can always find some open square, which is unofficially reserved for public entertainment. Here, between the afternoon and sunset prayers, congregate food vendors, dentists, herbalists, magicians, gamblers, jugglers, acrobats, fortune-tellers, storytellers and musicians may all be present on any given day.

The entertainer begins his performance with a great din of shouting and drumming, to attract as many spectators as possible. After every song or tale, he asks for contributions. It the entertainer is satisfied with his take, he blesses the donors and continues the performance. If he fails to collect enough he may abandon his audience and try another part of the square or await another day. The situation places great demands on a performer. With a minimum of resources he must be able to hold and audience against a hundred distractions, and then convince the people to part with their money. Furthermore,

a traveling musician must be able to adapt his style and his repertory to appeal to widely differing audiences.

The rigors of street performance have enlivened the musical scene in Morocco. Two of the most successful Moroccan popular singers, Abdelwahhab Doukali and Hamid Zahir began their respective careers in Bab I-Makina and the Jamaa I-Fna, the entertainment squares in Fes and Marrakech. The varied repertory of the traveling musicians has been fused into an amalgam of folk styles. Popular radio singers have adapted many songs of this sort, and these songs are in turn taken up by a greater number of street musicians. The end result is a truly national popular-folk style, which can be found from one end of the country to the other, existing side by side with the various unique regional styles.

THE TRACKS

1. L-Mirikan – (5:13)

This song, written by Houcine Slaoui in the early 1940s, recounts a Moroccan's view of the American invasion of North Africa in World War II. The singer remarks bemusedly about the American troops and the seemingly endless flow of dollars, chewing gum and cigarettes. That a topical song should remain quite well known for so many years is testimony both to Slaoui's song writing ability and to the impact of the American presence in Morocco.

2. L-Awsaf (‘Aita Haouzia) ‘Aita (Call) – (9:00)

‘Aita is a generic term for folk songs around the country; this ‘AIta originates from the Haouz Plain, which surrounds Marrakech. In L-Awsaf (the description) the singer describes his loved one in minute detail and rich imagery: her teeth are white as sugar, sweetening the medicinal tea which is her saliva; her breasts are smooth and firm as marble; her tattoos are as fine and intricate as mosaic tile. The lover, meanwhile, is weak and dissipated by his love for this magnificent woman. Like Flamenco or Blues, l'aita l'haouzia is a succession of verses chosen according to the mood or memory of the performer.

3. 'Awisha – (8:27)

‘Awisha is a standard with Moroccan folk and popular groups. The singer describes a typical Moroccan country courtship, with a meeting by the riverside to avoid the watchful eyes of friends and relatives. He fantasizes the courtship, culminating in the engagement feast when all will be gathered together in happy celebration.

4. Mehjuba and Moulat D-Dfina – (15:30)

Mehjuba was first recorded by popular radio singer Mohamed el-Idrissi. It was quickly taken over by traditional bands, because both the music and the message struck home. The text is a fusion of traditional and topical themes. It first extols the natural beauty of local girls – Mehjuba in particular – and how their beauty is enhanced by adornments: qaftans, belts, jellabas, vales and tattoos. Mehjjuba has forsaken all that for western temptations, most notably the mini-skirt, or “mini-jeep.” The song urges her to return to her old ways and beauty.

After an instrumental bridge the musicians move on to another song with a fashion theme. Moulat d-dfina (wearer of the dfina) has maintained tradition not only in her dress (the dfina is a diaphanous garment worn over the qaftan), but also in her attitudes towards mean outside her family. She ignores them, giving rise to the singer's plaint.

5. Muqaddima (Introduction) – (:24)
It is customary for street musicians, when receiving a donation, to emphasize their own sincerity and seriousness as well as the giver's beneficence, before calling down the blessing of a particular saint on both donor and recipient. The saint chosen for this blessing was Moulay Ali Cherif, the patron saint of the Tafilalet area and the founder of the current ruling dynasty in Morocco, the Alaouites.

6. Es-Salaam 'Aliha – (5:53)
This is a traditional wedding song from the Tafilalet. As in much traditional communal music, the bendir figures prominently. The antiphonal nature of the song is also typical of much communal music, although in a normal village setting there might be as many as 30 singers in each group.

THE INSTRUMENTS
L'UD is a round-bellied, short-necked string instrument, the direct ancestor, both in form and name, of the European lute. The Moroccan 'ud has eleven strings arranged in five double courses with a single bass string, tuned DGAdgc. The instrument is well designed for heterophonic, modal music. It is built to promote single-strings rather than chordal playing, and the fretless neck allows for practically classical and popular music and is symbolic of Arab music in general.

ED-DERBUGA is a single headed pottery vase drum, found, under various names, throughout the Middle East. Variation of pitch and timbre can be produced by different strokes on the center and edge of the skinhead. These tones can be combined to produce complex embellishments of a rhythm cycle, as well as a steady outline of the basic pattern. In the 11th century French popular musicians traveled to Muslim Spain and Morocco to purchase jus this sort of drum.

ET-TA'ARIJA is a small, hourglass shaped vase drum held in the hand rather than under the arm. It has two small snares under the single head.

I-BENDIR is a large, round frame drum, with a single head and snares. It is the most common drum for communal music in Morocco, North Africa and much of the Middle East.

ET-TARR is a small, round frame drum, with jingling disks set into the frame – in short, a tambourine. Right hand strokes on the head and disks combine with complicated twists and shakes of the left to produce a wide variety of rhythmic patterns.

CREDITS
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