



**(LYRCD 7336)**

## SONGS AND RHYTHEMS OF MOROCCO

Peoples of Morocco:

Among the countries of North Africa, Morocco offers the richest, most vibrant and diversified musical tradition and the most articulated contemporary documentation of the many stylistic cultural roots of so-called White African culture. The character of the music heard today in Morocco is a result of the many complex historical vicissitudes of the country, of its ethnic make-up and geographical location.

The majority of Moroccans are Berbers, a large and varied ethnic group whose ancestors once occupied most of Northern Africa from the Atlantic coast of Mauritania to the Red Sea, and in Morocco more than anywhere else, still maintain a certain numerical consistency and a specific cultural identity despite integration with other ethnic groups. In various historical epochs the Phoenicians, Greeks, Carthaginians, Romans, Byzantines and Turks tried to occupy Berber territories, but only the Arabs managed to conquer their lands and merge with them in the late 600's, imposing profound changes in their customs and introducing them to the Islamic religion.

In order to fully understand the character of the present Berber population in Morocco (and in the Meghreb region generally) it should be remembered that even before the arrival of the Arabs and independently of other colonization's and invasions, the Berbers were subjected to the consequences of an enormous natural phenomenon that can, in part, explain several aspects of the present situation. We know, in fact, that at one time a very extended area of what is today desert was once pasture, grazing lands and savannah supporting certain now-extinct types of African fauna. Then, with a speed that we can only assume was quite rapid, the desert began to spread until eventually, it completely

destroyed the previous natural conditions. Even during the time of the Roman Empire there existed – and we have Pliny’s written testimony – vast savannahs and pasturelands where even elephants roamed. Threatened by the advancing desert sands the Berbers sought refuge in the highlands of the Atlas Mountains and settled in the areas today known as Morocco and Algiers, where in fact we can still find them in numerous and culturally compact communities. Presumably it is at the end of this process of the natural transformation of the Sahara that marks the appearance of the nomad camel-drivers that today make up, with a possible mixture of Berbers, the population of the Sahara, i.e., the Tuagegh, the Moors, the Teda and the Chaamba. This transformation appears to have taken place between the Second Century B.C. and the Third Century A.D. Where did these camel-drivers come from? Perhaps from southern Arabia, from oasis to oasis, up to the pre-Sahara lowlands of Morocco to the shores of Rio de Oro and Mauritania. And it is perhaps also during this period, or somewhat later, that the Jews arrived in the Moroccan valleys and contributed, together with the Berbers, to the Judeo-Berber culture which exists to this day.

When the first Arab legions invaded Morocco during the Seventh Century the country already presented a rather compact ethno-cultural morphology, with Berbers, Moors, Jews and probably Sudanese from Black Africa. It was on this ethnic amalgamation, dominated by Berber culture, that Arab influence was superimposed, and the result of many successive invasions that transformed the culture to an Islamic one. Hordes of Bedouins arrived between the 12th and 13th Centuries and in Morocco and Algiers joined together with the Arabs and the Iberians who had both been expelled from Spain and the Iberian Peninsula by the Spanish and Portuguese, bringing with them the wealthy and sophisticated “Andalusian” culture which still remains in the “culture” music of the Maghreb.

While it may be true that in Morocco one finds a more consistent and compact Berber culture than in any other in North African country, today it is quite difficult to detect an actual ethnic difference between Berbers and Arabs. The distinction can be made only in language differences and in the residue of pre-Islamic elements of some cultural aspects. It can be generally observed that the people who speak the Berber tongues live in the Atlas and anti-Atlas Mountain areas, while the Arab-speaking groups live in the more fertile lowlands toward the Atlantic and in the cities.

The Berber dialects (there exist, in fact, strong differences from area to area, to the point of preventing communication between groups) are only spoken, the written language, once extant, having disappeared (1) and in Morocco can be divided into three distinct groups:

The Berber dialect of the Rif mountain region (Tarifi), of Zenatiya origin, is spoken by the Rif mountain tribes, the sedentaries of eastern Morocco, the Middle Atlas region and the Figuig area (near the Algerian borders).

The Berber Braber dialect (or Tamazizt), of Sanhadjiana origin, spoken by the nomads of the Middle Atlas range, the upper eastern Atlas, and the valleys of Ziz, Gheris, Todgha Dades and Sargho.

The Berber Chleuhs (or Tachelanheit) dialect, spoken by the sedentaries of the upper central and eastern Atlas, the Sous of the anti-Atlas area and the oasis of the Bani region. While Jews of the pre-Sahara lowlands have now all emigrated to Israel, there are still groups in Morocco consisting of Moors or the so-called “blue men” whose name derives from the long, indigo-colored they wear and whose color partially stains their skin. The Moors live in the extreme south of Morocco (along the Dra River) and are nomad camel-drivers. They are completely Islamized (with traces of magico-religious elements from pre-Islamic Bedouin tradition), and speak Arab intermixed with various Berber words. About 20,000 nomad Moors live in Morocco and total about half a million dispersed throughout the five nations, besides Morocco, in Rio de Oro (Spanish Sahara), Mauritania (c. 320,000) Algerian Sahara and Mali. These “blue men” are closely related to the Tuareghs of the central Sahara.

The Music of Morocco:

It would be beyond the scope of this (or any) single recording to attempt to document all forms and modes of Moroccan music. From the voluminous material actually recorded, a careful selection has been made to particularly illustrate the characteristic aspects of peasant and pastoral traditions among the Berbers and the Moors, omitting, for the time being, both the “cultivated” (or so-called “Andalusian music”) and folk music of the Arabs. Included in this collection is the music of the peoples of the Atlas Mountain regions (Grand and Middle Atlas), the areas of Marrakech and Zagora, as well as that of the nomad Moors of the extreme South.

The Musical Instruments:

All the most important instruments used in Moroccan folk music, with particular attention to the Berber and Moorish traditions, are documented in this recording.

#### AEROPHONES

NIRA: is a generic Arab name given to various types of reed flutes, of different lengths, with five, six or seven finger-holes. The most frequently used is a vertical flute with a notched mouthpiece that can be heard on Track 1. Also frequently used is a flute with two open ends and played in an oblique position, which the Berbers call the talawat.

RHITA” is a widely used wooden oboe found throughout Morocco. It has seven finger-holes and one thumbhole. The reed is placed completely in the mouth cavity and the lips rest on an ivory disc. This instrument can be heard on Track 8, a and c.

#### CHORDAPHONES

AMZHAD: is a monochord violin used by the Berber nomads. The resonator is of wood, in a circular form (height 8, 10 cm, diameter c. 50 cm), and is covered with goatskin. The neck is relatively short and the bow (of curved wood) is made of horsehair. It can be heard accompanying a song on Track 4. Its Arab name is rbab el soussi.

GUIMBRI: is a two or three-stringed, plucked long lute and is typically Berber. Its resonator is of hollowed wood, pear-shaped, and covered with goatskin. The neck is thick and rotund. As a solo instrument it can be heard on Track 8, and as an accompaniment for a song with percussion of Track 8b.

KEMENJA: is none other, today, than an occidental viola. Like the rebec (or rhab el Fassi) it is held vertically, on the knee (if the player is seated) or on the hip (if the player is standing). It is a typically Arab instrument, used for urban, artisan music.

#### MEMBRANOPHONES

BANDIR: is a single-headed tambourine about 50 cm in diameter and 7, 9 cm in height with goatskin covering one side, without “jingles.” It is held in the left hand (with the help of a thumb-hole cut in the ring) and played with the right. The Berbers call this instrument tagnza (Grand Atlas) or allun (Middle Atlas). Several types are made with two fine gut strings (or snares) under the skin to alter resonance. Bandir groups usually comprise not only instruments of different dimensions but also of different intonation, achieved by modifying the tension of the skins (by placing the instrument near a source of heat). The bandir can be heard on Track 1 (without snares), 3 (with snares) and 5 (without snares).

DERBUA: is a generic name given to various types of drums whose bodies are made of terracotta in the form of a jug, open at both ends, but covered at one extremity by skin. There are derbuke of small dimensions (held in the fist) and larger ones (held between the knees or under the arm). The smaller types are played with one hand (the other holding the instrument) and the larger with both hands. Depending on the locale or its form the derbuka is called by different names: dumbek, tarija, agual, etc.

TBEL: is a cylindrical, wooden drum, which is hung at the neck and played with two curved sticks, and is a typical instrument of the Sudanese Gnaua. The music of the Gnauas can be heard on Track 9.

GUEDRA: is the drum of the Moors (or “blue men”). It is played with two sticks or two hands and is in the form of a terracotta oil-jug and covered with skin at one extremity. Its name is also given to one of the most typical and best known Moorish dances. It can be heard on Track 7.

#### d. IDIOPHONES

QUERQBAT: are large, double, metal castanets, typical of the Gnaua, and are played together with the tbel. These can be heard on Track 9.

MAQOUS: is the name given to any metallic object struck by one or two sticks, and can be substituted by a bottle or terracotta jug. It is heard on Track 8b.

## The Tracks:

### 1. Taskiouine - 4:21

This is exclusively a male dance, of military or war-like character, originating in the Valley of Dra, the center of which is the region between Telouet and Ourzazate. The music is played on the nira (reed flute), bindir and derbuke, and is accompanied by the clapping of hands and pounding of the dancer's feet.

### 2. Guimbri Solo - 2:08

This document is an example of the virtuoso performance, played by a Berber from the Valley of Dra. For characteristics of the instruments see preceding relative notes.

### 3. Ahidou - 4:32

Together with the Ahouach (Track 5), the Ahidou represents the most complex example of the musical and dance traditions of the Atlas mountain Berbers. The Ahidou is a typical dance of the Berber-speaking Berbers of the Middle Atlas regions. It is "performed" with the participation of the entire community, on various occasions during the calendar year, especially in conjunction with harvest rites. It is performed outdoors, and its basic pattern is that of a circle consisting of alternating men and women, with the musicians placed in the center. Melodic instruments are sometimes used, particularly flutes, but the usual, traditional instrumental group consists of only bandirs. The percussive group (sometimes made up from ten to fifteen instruments) consists of bandirs of various sizes with skins more or less taut (tension being obtained by placing the drum near a source of heat) to obtain different timbres. The bandirs found in the area of the Ahidou are almost always equipped with two fine gut strings under the drum head (snares).

The dance opens with an invocation (tamawouet) intoned by a soloist and the vocal part is then developed by way of an antiphonal pattern. The melody, based on short, strongly rhythmic and repeated phrases, is chromatic. The basic rhythm, characteristic of the Ahouach, is constructed on a pattern of  $3/8$  and  $3/4$ .

### 4. Song & Amzhad - 1:35

The performer recorded herewith both sings and plays and is a Berber nomad from the Zagora region. For characteristics of the instrument see relative notes.

### 5. Ahouach - 4:35

The Ahouach corresponds to the Ahidou of the Grand and Middle Atlas regions. It takes place inside the Kasbah, so typical of south Moroccan architecture. The rites are performed under the open sky but inside and at the foot of the high, earthen-red walls and towers that enclose and form the Kasbah. Some observers have likened the Ahouach of the Berbers from the Chleu territory to a kind of "opera," a performance that within the apparently elementary traditional canons, is a true, ritual spectacle.

Normally the Ahouach is danced only by women who are dressed in multicolored costumes decorated with their silver ornaments. This is also a circle dance with the

musicians and their bandirs in the center and the other men on the outside. Like the Ahidou the dance commences with the recitation of well-wishing, augural expressions, followed by the song, which develops, antiphonally between the men and women, mostly in the form of a diatonic melody. The basic rhythm pattern is in 2/4 time, but the rhythmic play of the various bandir, the clapping of hands and the song itself create a rather complex polyrhythmic situation.

The example documented in this recording is a typical Ahouach of the Upper Atlas, in its classic form, from Kelaa des M'Ngouna, a village in the Dades Valley, where can be found the large Kasbahs of the pre-Sahara area.

#### 6. Heddaoua - 2:21

The Heddaoua are “storytellers” of an errant religious sect who perform in the squares and market places of small Moroccan towns and villages, reciting poems, maxims, and proverbs in a strange, allusive and magical language and with a particular style of rhythmic diction. The ultimate scope of their “message” is an invitation to give one’s self up to hashish, as a source of freedom and an aid to meditation. The Heddaoua appear with their lit narghilels, crouched on a rug, having set up before themselves rows of empty bottles and vases of artificial flowers symbolizing a blossomed, magical garden, and are surrounded by live doves that often rest on the shoulders and heads of the performers. They work in couples and their form of recitation consists of questions and answers. In the document contained in this recording the two Heddaoua are citing antonyms which refer to “male” and “female” objects; the recurrent theme, however, is an invitation to “smoke”:

“Light your pipe  
Smoke your pipe:  
The Almighty will give you peace  
Smoke and drink small sips of tea  
The Almighty will free you  
From your tribulations  
Smoke and breathe deeply  
He who is jealous will know misery.

#### 7. Guedra: a.Standing Dance (2:44) b.Knee Dance (2:19) Total time - 5:06

This is one of the most characteristic and best known of the Moorish dances, its name deriving from the jug shaped drum used as its accompaniment. It is a female dance with particularly erotic and oriental connotations. The female dance soloist, who performs in the middle of a circle of both men and women, moves with alternating slow and rapid body contortions and with hand and finger figurations, first on her feet and then on her knees. This recorded document illustrates both tempi variations of the Guedra. The rhythmic scansion of the guedra drum is supported by clapping hands and by antiphonal singing between the men and women, with polyvocal patterns in the female parts (intervals of a third, fourth and fifth).

#### 8. Wedding Festivities at Tinherir - 19:54

a (6:33) b. (7:30) c. (5:41)

The three documents contained here illustrate three different parts of a wedding celebration in the home of a poor peasant family at the oasis of Tinherir. Weddings are of particular importance in Morocco and, especially among the Berbers, are usually comprised of long rituals and ceremonies of considerable portent. For several nights relatives and friends of the family gather in the house of the wedding couple and spend the entire evening singing, smoking, eating, laying and drinking mint tea. Normally the men and women are segregated from one another. These three documents were recorded during the male festivities, the first and third in the room of the elders and the second in the room where the youths were gathered. The elders are gathered around the two parents and the youths around the bridegroom (who in this particular case was about sixteen years old!). The women, in the meantime, remain in a room next to that of the men, and without being seen, observe what is happening through a grated aperture in the wall (while commenting with shrill, trilled shouts).

The rhita player (heard her in 1, a. and c.) is the eleven-year-old brother of the bridegroom. The rhythm is produced by the clapping of hands and various-sized derbuke, and the melodic instrument in 1. B is a guimbri played by the bridegroom (who also leads the song). This last example is also accompanied by a derbuka and a bottle played with a stick.

#### 9. Gnaua - 1:55

The Gnaua are Sudanese Negroes who perform as musicians and acrobatic dancers in the market places of southern Morocco. They use percussive instruments only and precisely a drum called the tbel and metal castanets called querqbat.

#### 10. Haouz Orchestra of Marrakech - 2:58

This is Arab music performed by two violas (kemenja) and several derbuke. It is typical of the Marrakech region and is of urban character, used particularly to accompany professional "belly dancers."

#### Credits:

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