Beat: Arts

FESTIVAL OUDEYAS UNDER HM KING MOHAMMED VI's PATRONAGE IN RABAT 9-12 AUGUST 26

14th Ed. CHAIRED BY OUAFAA BENNANI

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USPA NEWS - RABAT'S 14TH INTERNATIONAL ARTS & CULTURE FESTIVAL BRINGS TOGETHER MUSICAL TRADITIONS, NEW GENERATIONS AND A PUBLIC FOR WHOM CULTURE REMAINS FREE AND OPEN TO ALL CELEBRATING THE 27th CORONATION OF HM KING OF MOROCCO MOHAMED VI

There are festivals one attends as a journalist.
And there are festivals one experiences from the inside, because someone has chosen to open the door.
I attended the 14th edition of the International Arts and Culture Festival “Été des Oudayas” in Rabat after being personally invited by Wafaa Bennani, president of the festival and the widow of the late artist Hassan Megri, as well as the mother of Saad Megri. The invitation gave my presence at the festival a particularly personal dimension.
HERITAGE, FAMILY MEMORY, FUSION, GNAOUA, RAI, CHAÂBI, RAP AND THE NEW MOROCCO, BEFORE THE FIRST NOTE, A WELCOME THAT SET THE TONE
From the moment I arrived, I was received with exceptional warmth and kindness, notably by Wafaa Bennani and Saïd Gnaoui, whose attention to guests, artists, journalists and protocol was visible throughout the festival. There was Nasr Megri simply a nephew holding his uncle Mahmood's hand, whom I interviewed to be published in the next clip

REPORTING NOTE / DISCLAIMER
This article combines on-site reporting and direct observation with information provided by the festival organizers and publicly available institutional and media sources. References to accessibility reflect the reporter's personal experience as a wheelchair-using journalist reporting from the field and are presented separately from institutional claims.

AT THE 14TH ÉTÉ DES OUDAYAS, FOUR NIGHTS OF MUSIC TURNED RABAT’S WATERFRONT INTO A LIVING CONVERSATION BETWEEN HERITAGE, FAMILY MEMORY, FUSION, GNAOUA, RAI, CHAÂBI, RAP AND THE NEW MOROCCO
BEFORE THE FIRST NOTE, A WELCOME THAT SET THE TONE
There are festivals one attends as a journalist.
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I attended the 14th edition of the International Arts and Culture Festival “Été des Oudayas” in Rabat after being personally invited by Wafaa Bennani, president of the festival and the widow of the late artist Hassan Megri, as well as the mother of Saad Megri. The invitation gave my presence at the festival a particularly personal dimension.
From the moment I arrived, I was received with exceptional warmth and kindness, notably by Wafaa Bennani and Saïd Gnaoui, whose attention to guests, artists, journalists and protocol was visible throughout the festival. As a journalist and wheelchair user, I was especially sensitive to that welcome.

Not because inclusion should depend on individual goodwill, but because genuine hospitality is often revealed through practical gestures: making space, anticipating difficulties and allowing someone with a disability to participate fully rather than merely being present.
And before the festival even officially began, one of the most touching moments had already taken place.
During the interviews, photographs and photocall immediately preceding the opening-night kick-off, Mahmoud Megri, the very artist whose career was being honoured that evening, personally wanted us to take a photograph together.
Beside him was his nephew Saad, gently holding his uncle's hand and accompanying him with extraordinary tenderness. It was an intimate family gesture unfolding in the middle of a professional press sequence.
For a moment, the cameras, interviews and protocol seemed to disappear.
There was Nassr Megri simply a nephew holding his uncle's hand. And a family gathering around an artist whose name has become

part of Morocco's musical memory.
Shortly afterwards, I conducted a brief interview with him, Nassr Megri.

A longer conversation with him, together with an interview with journalist and television personality Rachid Allali, will be published separately.
Then came the music.
And it was music that would make the four evenings feel less like a succession of concerts than a journey through several generations of Moroccan and international musical memory.
The official programme had already announced the extraordinary range: Mahmoud Megri, Fouad Zbadi, Dyana Dafova, Ayoub Tijani and Fatima Zahra Laaroussi on opening night; Sami Kasba, Nostalgia, Farid Ghannam and Hamid El Kasri on the second; Uzi, Nasr Megri and 7liwa on the third; and Rachid Allali, Haj Abdelmoughit, Salaheddine Majdouli and Twam for the closing night.
But a programme can list artists.
Only being there allows you to feel what happens when they meet an audience.

A WATERFRONT TURNED INTO A MUSICAL STAGE
The setting was almost impossible to improve.
The Bouregreg waterfront, between Rabat and Salé, became a vast open-air theatre beneath the summer sky, with the historic Oudayas providing a monumental backdrop.
The festival itself has been held since 2011, when it was created by the late Hassan Megri, and has become part of Rabat's cultural calendar. Its 2026 edition was organised under the High Patronage of King Mohammed VI, with the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Communication, the National Music Committee and the support of the Rabat-Salé-Kénitra regional authorities.
The festival is free and open to the public.
That matters.
Because the atmosphere was not that of an enclosed cultural institution where an audience quietly waits for a performance to begin.
The Bouregreg belonged to everyone.
Families arrived.
Young people gathered.
Older generations recognised familiar voices.
Phones were raised.
People sang.
People danced.
And through television coverage and social media, the festival reached audiences far beyond the waterfront itself.
The result was an extraordinary mixture of intimacyand mass participation celebrating their King's party

MAHMOUD MEGRI AND A 1st NIGHT BUILT AROUND MEMORY
The opening evening placed Mahmoud Megri at the emotional centre of the festival.
The tribute recognised a career associated with the evolution of Moroccan popular music and with a musical language that brought Moroccan song into dialogue with rock and modern arrangements. Fouad Zbadi also received the Festival Trophy for his contribution to Moroccan and Arab music.
But the tribute was not frozen in the past.
Around Mahmoud Megri came several different musical voices.
Fatima Zahra Laaroussi performed classics from the great Arab and Egyptian song tradition, bringing a repertoire immediately recognisable to several generations of Moroccan listeners.
Ayoub Tijani explored major classics of the Moroccan and wider Arab repertoire.
Fouad Zbadi continued that dialogue with the great traditions of Arab and Moroccan song, his performance rooted in a vocal tradition whose strength lies in melody, phrasing and the emotional weight of familiar repertoire.

The performances were accompanied by the Moroccan Intercultural Orchestra, conducted by maestro Hamza Amazgar, giving the evening an orchestral dimension and allowing very different musical traditions to coexist on the same stage.
Then came Dyana Dafova, bringing Bulgarian musical heritage into the Moroccan setting.
It was an elegant reminder that cultural identity does not have to mean cultural isolation.
A Bulgarian repertoire could enter a Moroccan festival without losing its character.
The result was not a museum of heritage.

It was heritage in motion.

NOSTALGIA, RAI & FUSION: THE 2nd NIGHT CROSSED GENERATIONS

The second evening changed the atmosphere.
Sami Kasba, a Moroccan-Dutch artist, received the Hassan Megri Prize and brought a contemporary fusion combining popular sounds, pop and funk.
His performance belonged neither entirely to tradition nor entirely to contemporary pop.
It inhabited the space between the two.
Then came Nostalgia, a project that reached directly into the childhood memories of an entire generation.
The performers revisited famous themes and opening songs associated with animated series and international soundtracks, adapting them into Moroccan Darija, including the unforgettable cultural memory of Goldorak.
Suddenly, the festival was no longer simply presenting Moroccan musical heritage.
It was presenting Moroccan memories of global popular culture.
The audience recognized and song in tune with their childhood’s melodies.
The memories were collective.
And nostalgia became a form of cultural translation.
Farid Ghannam then brought a very different energy, moving through highly popular songs and Rai, reconnecting the Bouregreg crowd with a musical language deeply embedded in the Maghreb's popular culture.

WHEN HAMID EL KASRI SET THE OUDEYAS ON FIRE

The night was already moving between genres.
Then Hamid El Kasri took the stage and lit it straight away as the audience was higly expecting the Ganoua seesion so dear to the moroccan’s hearts.
Hamid El Kasri did not simply close a concert.
He changed the physical temperature of the audience.
With his powerful voice and Gnaoua rhythms, the maâlem transformed the waterfront into a sea of movement.
The guembri, the repetitive rhythms and the deep vocal lines created an increasingly hypnotic atmosphere.
The crowd responded physically.
People danced so loudly and happily.
Groups moved together.
Some spectators entered states approaching trance.
The intensity became such that security and emergency teams remained particularly vigilant, with the most fragile members of the audience requiring special attention.
This was one of the moments when the festival's security operation became almost invisible but essential.
Ahmed Othmani and Officer Bahi, heads of the Ministry of Interior' security, together with their police team, helped ensure that the extraordinary energy of the crowd did not become a danger even offering me fresh water to cool up.

A FESTIVAL WHERE ACCESSIBILITY BECAME A HUMAN EXPERIENCE

One of the moments that stayed with me most strongly happened away from the stage.
Khadija, a young disabled girl attending with her mother, was welcomed into the protected area alongside me.
Her mother was herself using a manual wheelchair.
And yet she sang.
She moved.
She encouraged her daughter to enjoy the music.
At moments, she even carried her daughter and mimed walking movements for her.
It was an extraordinary image: while Gnaoua rhythms were making hundreds of people move, a mother was creating movement for her daughter through affection, imagination and sheer determination.
The security personnel remained attentive.
Ahmed even brought me a small bottle of cold water, which I passed to Khadija's mother when I saw how much she was sweating after carrying her daughter.
It was a tiny gesture.
But it captured something important about the atmosphere surrounding the festival.

The welcome I had personally received from Ouafaa Bennani and Saïd Gnaoui was echoed by the way the teams on the ground responded to people with disabilities. For a journalist who is herself a wheelchair user, those details are not peripheral.

The important point was not simply that the audience was enthusiastic.
It was that Gnaoua music transformed listening into physical experience.
The Bouregreg did not merely hear the music.
It vibrated with it.
And that vibration was one of the defining memories of the festival.

Nasr performed the famous “Lili Twil” with his cousin, bringing the family repertoire back into the centre of the festival while surrounded by the radically different language of contemporary rap.
It was almost a musical conversation across generations.
Then came Uzi and 7liwa, whose Arabic and Moroccan rap belonged unmistakably to another era.
The audience did not have to choose.
The same festival could honour Mahmoud Megri and celebrate 7liwa.
It could move from classical Arab song to Gnaoua and from Gnaoua to rap.
That was perhaps the most revealing characteristic of the entire program.

THE FINAL NIGHT RETURNED TO THE PEOPLE'S SONGS
The closing evening brought the festival back to the popular traditions of Moroccan music.
Salaheddine Majdouli brought his Rai-inflected sound.
Twam continued the festive popular energy.
And Haj Abdelmoughit, honoured with the Cheikh Chaâbi distinction, represented the enduring power of Moroccan popular song.
This was music the audience knew.
Music that did not require explanation.
People sang along because the songs already belonged to them.
That is the particular strength of chaâbi.
The artist may be on stage, but the repertoire belongs to the crowd as well.
The closing night also honoured Rachid Allali, who received the Micro d'Or for his contribution to Moroccan media and popular culture.
And here again, the Megri family was present in the story of the festival.
The same family whose artistic legacy had been celebrated at the beginning was still part of the closing narrative.
The festival had come full circle.

A SECOND STAGE EXISTED BEYOND THE BOUREGREG RIVER OS RABAT/SALE
The concerts were not confined to those physically present.
National television coverage, including SNRT and 2M, together with Facebook Lives and social-media circulation, extended the festival beyond Rabat.
Phones became small broadcasting stations.
Spectators filmed.
Shared.
Commented.
Sent performances to family members and friends elsewhere in Morocco.
The result was a second, digital Bouregreg.
The physical audience experienced the sound, the vibrations, the heat and the collective energy.
The remote audience experienced the images.
Both were participating in the same cultural moment.
And that matters for a free festival whose ambition is to reach beyond a conventional concert audience.

ONE FESTIVAL, MANY MUSICAL MOROCCO'S BEST
Seen as a whole, the four nights formed something much more coherent than a simple succession of concerts.

The first evening explored Arab and Moroccan classics, the Megri legacy and international heritage.
The second moved through fusion, nostalgia, Rai and Gnaoua.
The third connected family transmission with rap, trap and contemporary urban culture.
The final evening returned to Rai, chaâbi and popular Moroccan memory.
The result was a remarkable musical mosaic.
Mahmoud Megri.
Fatima Zahra Laaroussi.
Ayoub Tijani.
Fouad Zbadi.
Dyana Dafova.
Nostalgia.
Farid Ghannam.
Sami Kasba.
Hamid El Kasri.
Nasr Megri.
Uzi.
7liwa.
Salaheddine Majdouli.
Twam.
Haj Abdelmoughit.
Rachid Allali.

Different generations.
Different languages.
Different musical traditions.
One stage.
The official festival itself describes the event as a meeting between generations, artists and audiences, with a mission to showcase Morocco's musical diversity while remaining open to international cultures.
But the four evenings demonstrated something more tangible.
Moroccan musical heritage is not a fixed archive.
It is something people still sing, dance, reinterpret, film, share and pass on.

THE OUDAYAS FESTIVAL AS A LIVING CULTURAL CONVERSATION

For four nights, the OUDEYAS Festival, in Rabat became more than a concert venue.
It became a meeting point between generations, memories and musical identities.
For me, the festival also carried a personal dimension: from the warm welcome extended by Wafaa Bennani and Saïd Gnaoui, to the touching image of Saad Megri holding his uncle Mahmoud's hand, and to the extraordinary energy of audiences who sang, danced and shared the performances far beyond the waterfront.
The Oudayas did not ask Morocco to choose between its past and its future.
It allowed both to share the same stage.
And that may be the festival's most powerful achievement.

REPORTING FROM RABAT, MOROCCO

CLOSING REPORTING NOTE

This report distinguishes between institutional information, direct observation and personal accessibility experience. The latter does not constitute a general assessment of accessibility in Rabat, but records the conditions encountered by the reporter during her on-site coverage.

OFFICIAL / PRIMARY SOURCES

- Festival Été des Oudayas, official website
- Maroc.ma, official Moroccan government portal
- Ministry of Youth, Culture and Communication / Department of Culture
- National Music Committee / International Music Council

• UNESCO / Intangible Cultural Heritage

Article online:
https://www.uspa24.com/bericht-27092/festival-oudeyas-under-hm-king-mohammed-vis-patronage-in-rabat-9-12-august-26.html

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