



## MAALEM HAMID EL KASRI

### Program Information

Gnawa music is a mixture of African, Berber and Arabic songs and rhythms. It combines music and acrobatic dancing. Gnawa sits at the crossroads between a variety of music - the deep spiritual cry of the blues, improvised ragas, and the cyclical trance of minimal techno- and has gained increasing international recognition as a key Moroccan art form.

Gnawa music is both a prayer and a celebration of life. The Gnawa combine elements of African tradition with Islamic folklore during their nighttime trance rituals called "lila". "Lila" generally last throughout the night and are filled with dancing, chants, and other ceremonies to encourage spirits inhabiting a human body to connect with and cure the soul.

Gnawa music is rooted in the African identity of Morocco and its relationship with the depths of the Sahara. Though many of the influences that formed this music can be traced to sub-Saharan Africa, and specifically, the Western Sahel, its practice is concentrated in North Africa, mainly Morocco. The Gnawa are part of the myriad of musical traditions in Morocco, from centuries ago when the first "Gnawi" used to travel between the villages with their warm songs, their energetic, lively and vibrant dances.

In a Gnawa song, similar to American pop music, one phrase or a few lines are repeated consistently regardless of how short or long the song may be.

Ancestral traditions point the way for becoming a Maalem (master) of Gnawa. Becoming a Mâalem not only requires being able to play for hours straight, it also requires a surgical knowledge of the repertoire. This includes knowing song orders (which vary from city to city), which incense to use, and the ability to play every instrument in the ensemble.

Despite its deep traditions, modern Gnawa is evolving. Firstly, a growing number of international collaborations have melded the genre with Afrobeat, techno, jazz, and more. The emergence of female Gnawa masters is also a welcomed milestone in this art.