

Club d'Elf and the Moroccan influence...



Founder Mike Rivard had been listening to North African music long before the inception of Club d'Elf. The trance-inducing musics of Morocco, Mauritania and Mali are fundamental to the concept of the band, adding spice to the *tagine* of jazz, electronica, hip hop and other flavors which the band incorporates.

The addition of Moroccan musician Brahim Fribgane (on oud, dumbek, bendir, qaraqab) in late 1999 allowed this influence to take on even

of Berber songs from the High & Mid Atlas Mountains. Songs from the popular Moroccan band *Nass El Ghiwane* (which hails from the same quarter of Casablanca as Fribgane), such as *Ah Ya Win A Win* and *Ghewane*, also began to appear in sets. In 2002, a Moroccan friend gave Rivard a *sintir* (also called *Guembri* or *Hejhouj*), a three-stringed bass with a camel skin top. Soon, the *sintir* began appearing in live sets and studio recordings. The instrument gave Club d'Elf's music a deeper sound drawing directly from Gnawa music. The music of the Gnawa has attracted Western musicians for decades, including such luminaries as Bill Laswell, Pharoah Sanders, Randy Weston, Ornette Coleman, the Rolling Stones and Jimi Hendrix. The Gnawa people came to Morocco from sub-Saharan Africa 500 years ago, and hold *lila derdeba* (all-night healing trance ceremonies) led by master Sufi musicians. Hassan Hakmoun, perhaps the most internationally recognized Gnawa musician, has played with Club d'Elf on numerous occasions, as have other illustrious Gnawans such as Said Hakmoun, Mohamed Tbizi & Hassan Bouhmid.

sources such as Gnawa, Berber and Howara music, mix with the band's renditions of such Gnawa "standards" as *Challaban*, and their decidedly Gnawa take on Cream's "Sunshine Of Your Love." Rivard and his musicians recognize in the music of North Africa familiar elements of trance and ecstatic involvement in the groove that they find in the funk of James Brown, the jazz of

John Coltrane, the open-string guitar blues of Mississippi Fred McDowell and the relentless driving pulse of electronica and modern dance music.

For the musicians of Club d'Elf, playing Moroccan music does not seem foreign, but feels as natural as the array of American styles they've grown up with.

Club d'Elf never fails to bring the audience into their deep feeling for this music.



“[Club d’Elf creates a] sound environment where turntables and triggered samples flit around the natural acoustics of clarinet, violin, oud, and accordion; where timeless Indian and Moroccan polyrhythms nest inside slinky, hip-hop groove; where the next turn might find the band sewn deeply in the pocket, or just as easily, teasing out some bizarre atonal curiosity.”
 –Pete Gershon, Signal to Noise Magazine

“An intoxicating, mad-chemist mix of the organic and electronic: dub-dosed acid jazz spiked with elements of trance-inducing traditional Moroccan Gnawa and Berber music.”
 –Jonathan Perry, Boston Globe“

“The music is inspired by Rivard’s study of Moroccan music, particularly the original trance music of the Gnawa... [The use of] repetitive rhythm as a foundation makes the music very accessible for participation.” –Julie Powell, Online Athens

“A gifted percussion player, Fribgane is well versed in world music, and has not only added his own styles and cultural experiences to the band but pushed the boundaries to create an even broader sound. Rivard eagerly talks of the impact Fribgane has had on both his own playing and the band’s. “Through him we started going more overtly in a North African direction...he taught us how to play it... He’s a great teacher. We started learning a lot of traditional Gnawa music, and incorporating that with some of the other things we were into, like drum n bass and trance, and it just seemed like a really natural fit.’ The discovery of Moroccan music led Rivard to add the Sintir [to his arsenal], a three string Moroccan instrument used in traditional Gnawa music.”
 –Eric Ward, Glide Magazine

“Two Fribgane titles, wrapping ancient oud, violin and vocal melodies in circular rhythms, give [Club d’Elf’s] Vassar Chapel [recording] its unique sonic flavor...”
 –Chris M. Slawacki, allaboutjazz.com

“[A] constant in the mesh of interwoven sounds is the percussive Moroccan flair based on Rivard’s study and Fribgane’s native musical tongue... Mid-set, Rivard will pick up the sintir, a three-stringed bass lute with a 500-year-old history, whose hollowed wooden body acts as drum and bass combined. He and Fribgane, a Moroccan native, invoke ancient Arabic sounds through a line-up of percussion instruments, including the bendir frame drum, lined with snare strings, and the goblet-shaped dumbek, with its deep low and crystal high extremes. But nothing is static or unrefined. As Rivard says, ‘It’s not like one of those gimmicky world music things where you draw upon a culture by using the sound of it. The Arabic and North African stuff is grounded in a deep understanding, but it also becomes another language.’ Every traditional sound is infused with the new. Every song is a flight that follows the musicians’ nightly whims.” –Brita Brundage, Fairfield County Weekly

Brahim Fribgane

Born and raised in Morocco, a country rich in musical traditions, Brahim grew up surrounded by North African, Gnawa, Berber, Arabic and Andalusian music. By sixteen he was playing guitar at weddings and parties in Casablanca, becoming a significant contributor to the development of a new style of Moroccan pop that took hold in the early ‘80s.

Influenced by the Iraqi musician, Munir Bechir, Brahim began playing oud. Brahim’s oud style, whether he’s playing folkloric Berber songs, beautifully complex and soulful Arabic music, or the fusion of jazz, samba, reggae or Indian, reveals his openness to all music and appreciation of all people and cultures.

When Brahim arrived in New York City in the late 80s he added dumbek (a traditional North African/Middle Eastern drum), to his arsenal. A remarkably creative and diverse musician, Brahim takes the dumbek to new levels, expressing the rhythmic complexities of a drum set with this one instrument. He alternately blends and contrasts rhythms while at the same time keeping his listeners and fellow musicians rhythmically secure.



Brahim Fribgane and oud



Mike Rivard and Hassan Hakmoun



Rivard, Erik Kerr, John Medeski and Fribgane



Mat Maneri, Rivard, Erik Kerr, Brahim Fribgane



Rivard and sintir

