

Interview with :

Messaoud Bellemou: The father of Rai music

Lira's reporter Said Chaouch meets Messaoud Bellemou, father of Rai, in his hometown Ain Temouchent (Algeria)

WM Oasis: How did your career started?

M. Bellemou : In the 70's I created a small band and started playing at weddings and other parties. We made great success. We got full of gigs. I developed the band by bringing a singer called Hamani Hadjoun and later the band was further strengthened with the artist Bouteldja Belkacem, which is today considered among one of the important names in the Rai music history.



WM Oasis: You are called the father of Rai, can you explain me the reason?

M. Bellemou : It was me who was the first to modernize the rai music in the 70s. I replaced the old bamboo flute Gasba used by the cheikhs with the trumpet, added tenor saxophone, accordion, synthesizer and got through that a start for a new rai music style.

There was another group at the same time as us in our city Ain Témouchent with artists as Benfissa Younés & Boutaiba Hfif who also modernized rai music in their own way. But it was us who managed to become most popular and with our first single released in 1974, the demand for concerts became bigger. The success of our music reached even our community in France. I named our music style for Pop rai, because it was during the American pop era that this music was created.

WM Oasis: What about the rai music today?

M. Bellemou : The new Rai generation was unable to continue carrying the Rai's torch for several reasons. They didn't get the public's expectations. They have completely derailed from the music we created and paved the way for. The quality of the music was not good. Producers and bookers wanted quick money and had artists in queue to be produced and booked for concerts for small compensations

WM Oasis: Why the Rai music was forbidden in the beginning?

M. Bellemou : In the beginning we had obviously used some vulgar words in our songs. We were young and never expected that our music will get so much success and attention. When we realized that Raien had become so popular, we gradually changed the lyrics to romantic. So our music could be heard by everyone.

WM Oasis: What have become of all these Rai artists?

M. Bellemou : The Rai pioneers are still and ready for any invitation from anyone interested, but don't want to accept the bad conditions the producers offer them. We do not want to lower our status. We just want to be respected for what we deserve and are worth.

WM Oasis: How come you are among the few artists who have chosen to stay in Algeria?

M. Bellemou : Unfortunately, I can't handle the emigration. I'm too nostalgic. Ain Temouchent is my city, my soul.

WM Oasis: What does Cheikha Remitti and Khaled means to you?

M. Bellemou : Khaled is a great artist who deserves all the respect. Cheikha Remitti is our mother, our source of inspiration.

WM Oasis: Any artists that meant a lot to Rai music?

M. Bellemou : Hamani, Bouteldja Belkacem, Cheb Mami, Cheb Khaled, Houari Benchenet, Cheb Sahraoui, Chaba Fadhela, Boutaiba Seghir. Boutaiba hfif, Cheb mami

WM Oasis: Have you been in Sweden?

M. Bellemou : Yes! Stockholm 1998 at Re ORIENT!

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WM Oasis: What have become of all these Rai artists?

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