

MARIEM HASSAN

EL AAIUN EGDAT (El Aaiún On Fire)



In 2012 **Mariem Hassan** gives her music a new twist. The events of the last months, the "Arab Spring" and the indomitable Sahrawi struggle for independence, are the subjects of her new songs. Rooted in the bases of the Haul, Mariem explores blues, jazz and contemporary sounds as no other Sahrawi musician ever has.

The album, **El Aaiún Egdad** (El Aaiún on Fire), which is scheduled for release in late March, embodies her fresh stylistic exploration. The Sahrawi diva is accompanied once again by **Vadiya Mint El Hanevi**, on tebals (drums) and choruses, by **Luis Giménez** on electric guitar, mbira and harmonica, by **Hugo Westerdahl** on bass, and **Gabriel Flores** on saxophone and flutes.

The group is bounded by their love and knowledge of the music of Western Sahara. The Alicantino from Villena, Luis Gimenez, first heard the scales and the rhythms of the Haul music during his visit in the refugee camps some years before, which inspired his documentary **The seas of the desert**. Gabriel Flores from Mexico, is one of the directors of **Enamus**, the first national music school in the Sahrawi refugee camp "February 27". Hugo Westerdahl, from the Canarian islands, met many musicians from Western Sahara while they were recording their albums for the label Nubenegra in his studio **AXIS**. This experience infected him with an interest in the haul music, eventually bearing the album **Western Sahara**, in memory of the Sahrawi guitarist, Baba Salama, who died in 2005.

On her new album, Mariem integrates divergent themes and musical expressions into her traditional rhythms driven by the haul. Most arresting perhaps are the tracks **El Aaiun Egdad**, the two songs that refer to the **Gdeim Izik** camp, the **Arab Spring** or the **Victory**, whose verses are written by renowned Sahrawi poets in exile: **Beibuh**, **Ali Bachir** and **Lamin Allal**. Mariem's voice signals the seriousness of the moment with all the passion only her throat and her heart can transmit.

Other tracks, such as **Ana Saharaia** (I'm Sahrawi) - a reaffirmation of her identity - and **The Martyrs Rest in Peace** - a jazz-tinged vision of the jaima (Sahrawi tent) tranquil beneath the warm moonlight in the desert - reveal a sweeter side to the lacerating vocals Mariem has offered us in the past. Singular are also **Melfa**, about her traditional clothing, and **The Legacy** which offers Mariem's perspective on the bloodless battles between tradition and modernity with which her culture has always grappled.

The quintet of Mariem Hassan will begin touring in spring 2012 **El Aaiún On Fire**.

Manuel Domínguez.

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