

Samir LanGus

Morocco: Gnawa musician

Object: sintir lute

إذا حاولت الإنسلاخ عن جذورك، يوماً ما ستبحث عنهم.
(Arabic)

If you run away from your roots, one day you will come looking for them.
-Fatima Tabaamrant, Moroccan Amazighi Singer

I am an Issawa from Agadir, Morocco, but the people there thought I was a Gnawi. In my neighborhood everyone was trying to learn guitar, and if you got your own guitar, everyone is going to come and borrow it from you. So I picked up the sintir that no one is going to come and borrow. I just taught myself, because I did not want to give up my schooling and everything. So I went to YouTube and downloaded videos and listened and listened, and I started figuring out the notes.

One day, a friend said I should apply for the Green Card Lottery. Later, I received this big envelope with the United States eagle on it. My sister knew maybe that it was the Green Card Lottery. My only choice then was to study hard. That year, I changed. I stopped hanging out. I used to sit in back of the class, but now I sat in the front. I said to everybody, "Just let me study." Even the teachers were shocked. And I got the high school diploma. So everyone saw me as an example. If Samir can do it... So my friends went and studied hard and they all got their high school diplomas.

I really love this instrument, the sintir, because it was made by my idol of Gnawa music, Maalem Hamid El Kasri. He's a famous musician in Morocco. He is the one that made me love this music, and I always wanted to meet him. When I went back to Morocco I got a chance to meet him because he heard about me doing Gnawa music in NY and then invited me to stay there for three days. It was such an honor. He made two sintirs, one for me and one for him.



Bio:

Samir LanGus was born and raised in the city of Agadir, Morocco. When he was eight years old, with family roots in the Issawa Sufi tradition, he began learning Gnawa music, a spiritual trance music of the West African minority of Morocco. Often called "The Moroccan Blues," Gnawa trance music has fascinated artists, including writer/composer Paul Bowles, Randy Weston, and Jimi Hendrix. The music is played on the lute-like sintir and the metal qaraqaba castanets, with which the kouyos (chorus) keep time with clattering, hypnotic rhythms. Samir LanGus adds his own contemporary spin with additional jazz instrumentation to the traditional Gnawa repertoire. Langus has performed at Lincoln Center, the Music Hall of Williamsburg, Brooklyn Bowl, Barbès, and Terminal 5, as well as the Kennedy Center, Red Rocks Amphitheater, and the Coachella Festival. He is a founding member of the New York City based Innov Gnawa ensemble.