



SOUAD MASSI

She is a leading light among the young Algerian artists. She sings the Arabic language with a sweet and pure voice. Her songs are of folk rock rhythms (besides she is often compared to Joan Baez or Tracy Chapman). Her activism, popularity and courage brought her into the limelight. Souad Massi, 32, is basically free and generous. She has a golden voice and a sparkling talent. She creates a delicate and harmonious Algerian folk rock with activist and sensitive lyrics. Souad comes from a family of performers. She was born in Algier on August 23, 1972. Her elder brother is a composer, her younger brother does new jack music and her little sister is a dancer...As for her, she always knew she would become a singer. She studied Arabo-Andalousian classical music, music theory and universal classical music. When she was 17, she performed on many stages with only her guitar. But at the same time, she was in a flamenco band "Les Trianas d'Algier". It was a real flop. After this defeat she went to pieces and decided to give up. Fortunately, her younger brother pushed her into going on. With her band "Atakor" Souad Massi travelled through Algeria. Their rock music (close to hard rock music) echoed in the whole country. But things became more and more difficult for Souad. Further to many political pressure, the cabinet of town and country planning she worked in (Souad has an engineer degree) decided to dismiss her.

Then she has been through a difficult period, financially as well as psychologically. And while the young singer was just about to give up, she was offered to join in the "Femmes d'Algérie / Women from Algeria" Festival. This show which was initiated by Allalou (a former radio and television reporter) and the "Bled-Connection" association, set up in Paris at the Cabaret Sauvage.

On January 10, 1999, Souad arrived in France. There was a great atmosphere in the Cabaret Sauvage where all these Algerian musical women got together. Never mind the age or their regional roots, they were all united in their daily fight for Freedom. The show mixed together the feast (it was Ramadan) and the battle against fundamentalists. Paris audiences saw Souad Massi. They were astounded by her performance and deeply moved by her voice as well as her fantastic capacity to pass on feelings beyond the language barriers. Following this concert, Souad Massi signed a contract with the record label Island-Mercury. In order to keep Souad's music and poetic world, Bob Coke (who previously worked with Ben Harper) is asked to carry out the artistic production. To preserve both Souad's energy and emotion, Bob Coke decided to make a genuine live album. Thus he just managed to snatch the recording of the last song "Matebkiche" which was then kept unprocessed. Electric and acoustic instruments were skilfully measured out. And altogether they made a true box where strong melodies and more especially Souad's pure and moving voice could open out. Her music atmospheres which wavered between rock and traditional music, mixed together electric and flamenco guitars, Arabic lute, battery, gumbri (Saharan acoustic bass), karkabous (Saharan metal castanets)...

... Each song was particular and reminded us of Joan Baez' and Tracy Chapman's rebellious and melodious worlds. The achievement of all these efforts was a magnificent album, where many different music styles (folk, chaâbi, rock) came closer. Moreover it reflected all her talents and gave the opportunity to travel through her songs in a comprehensive way. Souad used to put the finishing touches to her songs when she was on tour. Indeed while she was recording her album, she had one concert after another. She increased performances, especially famous opening shows : Orchestre National de Barbès, Thierry Titi Robin, Geoffrey Oreyma...and above all Idir. Indeed the latest offered her the opportunity to open his concert at the Olympia on December 13, 1999 (less than a year after she arrived in France). She has also been performing on Saez' tour for some months. Thus she could meet a new rock audience who was immediately seduced by this young activist singer.

But though she now lives in Paris, she does not forget her native country. Algeria is always in the heart of both her music and life. And she carries on fighting even over the Mediterranean sea. Even if her family is still there she wants to take advantage of the freedom of expression she is given in Europe to say aloud what she has been singing for many years. She explains with accuracy and consciousness what happens in Algeria everyday and keeps on denouncing the oppressors without being boastful nor activist. "Remain silent would mean that terrorists have won and that all the intellectuals they murdered, died for nothing." And she says that in a tone of evidence as if she were used to it!