



*el*  
**GUSTO** ★

HISTORY TORE THEM APART, MUSIC REUNITED THEM

# el GUSTO

*The word El Gusto, is Spanish for 'the taste'.*

This phrase traveled through the Maures in North Africa and like many other Spanish words joined the Algerian dialect. In the language of Algiers, El Gusto became a true expression to describe 'good humor' and 'joy of life.'

The band was called El Gusto precisely because its musicians embody the joie de vivre of the city, that of getting together with friends to sing the chaabi music that is so dear to the people of Algiers.

As Mr. Bernaoui, one of the members of the orchestra, loves to say «*My gusto is chaabi*».

## SYNOPSIS

El Gusto is the story of a group of Jewish and Muslim musicians who were separated by history over 50 years ago and today have been reunited to share once again their common passion: Chaabi music.

**Format:** DCP/HD CAM

**Duration:** 93 minutes

**Budget:** 2.5 million €

**Produced by:** Quidam Production El Gusto (Ireland)  
Eikosi Productions (Algeria)

**Release Date:** 11 January 2012

**In Co-Production with:** The Irish Film Board, SANAD fund  
Abu Dhabi, Babylon Productions, ENTV Algeria

**Written and Directed by** Safinez Bousbia

**Produced by:** Safinez Bousbia and Heidi Egger

**Editors:** Françoise Bonnot A.C.E. and Julien Villacampa

**Original Language:** French – Arabic

**Release Date:** 11 janvier 2012

**Distributed by:** France – UGC Ph: abrune@ugc.fr,  
Internationally – Fortissimo Films: nelleke@fortissimo.nl

## AWARDS

**Audience Award** (« Arabian Sights » International Film Festival, in Washington D.C 2012)

**Award for Best Director** (Abu Dhabi International Film Festival 2011)

**FIPRESCI Award** (Abu Dhabi International Film Festival 2011)

## THE STORY OF EL GUSTO

It all started when the director Safinez Bousbia, during a walk in the Casbah of Algiers, wandered into a shop to buy a mirror. The craftsman Mr. Ferkioui in his enthusiasm to tell his story to the young woman completely forgot to sell her a mirror. He invited Safinez to sit and listen, telling her of his glorious past as a conductor and musician. He showed Safinez pictures of his scattered and lost musician friends, Jews and Muslims, who had attended the first Chaabi music class with him at the Municipal Conservatory of Algiers, led by the founder of Chaabi music, the Master El Anka.

The Director was so moved by Mr. Ferkioui's recounting of the golden age of Algerian popular music and by his deep longing to find his scattered friends and musicians – that she decided to help him find them. In the Conservatory of Algiers she found all of their names listed and begun to track them down. And what should have been a simple, once off reunion concert in 2007 in Marseille, instead became the re-birth of Chaabi music and the founding of the El Gusto orchestra consisting of 42 musicians.

Out of this emotional and human adventure came a real life success story: The El Gusto orchestra; who have gone on to record two successful albums and play in many prestigious venues around the world.



## THE STORY OF THE DIRECTOR

El Gusto is the first film of Director Safinez Bousbia, a nomad with a very cosmopolitan background: Safinez was born in Algiers, but has never lived there; she has lived and worked in Switzerland, the United Kingdom, Ireland, France and the UAE.

After studying architecture in Oxford, she pursued a Master of Design in Dublin. Then in 2003, during a trip to Algeria, she stumbled upon the world of the masters of Chaabi music. Moved by the fate of these inspiring musicians, she felt the need to share their story on the big screen. This changed her life radically and caused her to enter the world of cinema.

During the adventure of El Gusto, Safinez Bousbia, the producer and director of the documentary, has also been involved in the production of the orchestras two albums and remains to this day the band's manager.

El Gusto was a great adventure for Safinez. The masters of Chaabi have become her family over the past eight years and she now works alongside them helping to bring the El Gusto project to international audiences.





### CHAABI MUSIC AND BERBER AND ANDALUSIAN AND RELIGIOUS SONGS

Born in the mid-1920s, Chaabi music comes from several influences (Berber and Andalusian religious songs). The inventor of this unpublished musical cocktail was called El Anka (El Hadj Mohammed El Anka, 1907-1978).

This new popular music; - «Chaab» meaning the people – was mainly popular with the working class of the Casbah and found refuge in the underground world of the city.

Chaabi music has also been called «The Casbah Blues” or «North African Jazz», in reference to its composition, which allows for a lot of improvisation and musical freedom.

### THE EL GUSTO ALBUMS

El Gusto is made up of several legendary names of Chaabi music: all of whom have enriched the cultural and musical palettes of Algeria, well before the creation of the group. Since its formation in 2006, under the name El Gusto the orchestra has produced two albums and a third to be released in October 2014.



> **Their third studio album** is currently being recorded in France, Algeria and Israel. It will be a compilation of the classical Malhoun Chaabi repertoire from the 1920's and the Algerian Music Hall Chaabi style from the 1940's and 1950's -never recorded before.



> **El Gusto Soundtrack** - produced by Sodi (producer of Femi Kuti) under the label of Remark Records, distributed by Warner Music, released on January 2nd of 2012 .



> **Abdel Hadi Halo & The El Gusto Orchestra of Algiers** - a studio album produced by Damon Albarn (Blur/Gorillaz) under his label Honest Jons and distributed by EMI in 2007.

# el GUSTO

Traditionally, Chaabi bands are composed of five to ten musicians but now and for the first time, the El Gusto Orchestra presents an incredible twenty member orchestra, bringing to its audience the good mood and spirit of Algiers. Together, with banjos, mandoles, quanoun, and darbuka, they perform songs that tell tales of life in the Casbah, taking its audience on a musical journey, where they experience the intimate atmosphere of the cafes, the weddings, and the lives of the dock workers. It's a great insight into the North African Blues.

## 2007/2010

- Les Nuits du Ramadan - Palais Omnisports de Paris Bercy (Paris - France)
- Opening of the Berlin Jazz Festival (Berlin - Germany)
- The Barbican (London - England)
- Les Nuits de Fourvière (Lyon - France)
- Festival des Andalousies Atlantique (Essaouira - Morocco)



## 2013

- 27/11: La Halle aux grains, résidence de l'Orchestre National du Capitole, Toulouse
- 19/10: Grand Théâtre La Coursive, Scène Nationale, La Rochelle.
- 17/10: Festival des Libertés, Théâtre National de Bruxelles.
- 11/08: Green Music Center (Rohnert Park, CA)
- 10/08: Grand Performances (Los Angeles)
- 06/08: Kennedy Center (Washington D.C)
- 03/08: Lincoln Center (New York)
- 15/06: Fes Festival - Morocco
- 03/06: The Barbican - London (England)
- 02/06: Holland Festival Amsterdam - Theatre Carre - Amsterdam (Netherlands)
- 31/05: Mawazine - Theatre Mohamed - Rabat (Morocco)

## 2012

- 30/10: World Music Festival in Oslo (Oslo - Norway)
- 27/10: The Colosseum (Roubais - France)
- 24 & 25/10: MC2 (Grenoble - France)
- 21/10: La Paloma (Nimes - France)
- 20/10: Les Docks du Sud (Marseille - France)
- 18/10: Le Mals (Sochaux - France)
- 30/09: Art and History Jewish Museum (Paris - France)
- 09/08: Les Nuits du Sud (Vence - France)
- 07/08: Fiest'A Festival Sète, Théâtre de la Mer (Sete - France)
- 05/08: Festival du Bout du Monde (Crozon - France)
- 04/08: Festival Esperanzah (Namur - Belgium)
- 13/07: Les Suds a Arles (Arles - France)
- 11/07: Scenes d'etes (Geneva - Switzerland)
- 06/07: Les Hauts de Garonne (Bordeaux - France)
- 12/01: Palais des Beaux Arts (Brussels - Belgium)

For more information, contact: [touring@quidam.ie](mailto:touring@quidam.ie)  
For bookings, contact: [claire@planete-aurora.com](mailto:claire@planete-aurora.com)



## INTERNATIONAL PRESS

### THE HOLLYWOOD REPORTER

*"Taking the Buena Vista Social Club formula to rewarding new territory, Safinez Bousbia's vibrant El Gusto offers not just music and the pleasure of reuniting long-separated friends but a novel angle on Muslim/Jewish relations."* - John DeFore

### VARIETY

*"Toe-tapping and infectious on emotional and intellectual levels."* Jay Weissberg

### HUFFINGTON POST

*"Safinez Bousbia's El Gusto: Film as a Movement to change lives"* - E. Nina Rothe

### NEW YORK TIMES

*"It has revived friendships where religion, class and ethnicity have no meaning, and reincarnated the old men as artists worthy of respect."* -  
October 12th 2012, Elaine Sciolino

### INDIEWIRE :

*"This spirited documentary is a celebration of the power of music to transcend national, social, and religious boundaries."* - DB Borroughs

### SONGLINES

*« In El Gusto you see an Imam and a Rabbin singing together. »* - Nigel Williamson

### THE TIMES\*\*\*\*

*« (...) an extraordinarily moving occasion. »* -  
Clive Davis

### THE GUARDIAN

*« An Algerian revolution : a remarkable project that bridges the divide between Jewish and Muslim musicians. »* - Robin Denselow

### THE NEW YORK TIMES

*« It's a bewitching record (...) with gorgeous naturalroom sound and powerful, guttural singing. »* -  
Ben Ratliffe

### EVENING STANDARD \*\*\*\*

*« Arab and jew united by Algeria orchestra »* -  
Jane Cornwell

## OTHER MEDIA

### NPR PUBLIC RADIO

*« these artists played the secular, popular music of Algeria known as Chaabi. It's what they call music of the streets — songs about love, joy, misery, and everything in between ».*  
Anastasia Tsioulcas

### VOICES OF AMERICA

*« the music of these passionate men, will inspire future generations to continue the Chaabi tradition »*  
Carol Castiel

### CNN

*« the sound of 'chaabi' music, a famous musical group reborn after 50 years »*  
Hala Gorani

### BBC WORLD SERVICE RADIO

*« the call-and-response lines are suitably poetic, traversing the heights and depths of extreme emotional states' »*  
Said Chitour



**Mamad Haïder BENCHAOUC** / Violon

« The Son of the Good Family », a descendant of a grand Andalusian bourgeois family, he rebelled from his heavy roots and freed his mind and fingers with Chaabi improvisation.

**Rachid BERKANI** / Luth

« The Handsome », he played with Farid el ATRACHE and is convinced that just like the old days, that artists should have elegance and prestige.

**Ahmed BERNAOUI** / mandole

« The Fighter », a mystic man who never stopped playing music, even after severe physical disabilities left as a reminder of the war of independence.

**Robert CASTEL** / Singer & Violin

« The Comedian », son of a legend of Chaabi, the master Lili el ABBASSI, and a much loved comedian and actor in France, he started playing music again at the age of 57 after the death of his beloved father.

**Abdelkader CHERCHAM** / Mandolin

« The Academic », the professor of Chaabi at the Conservatoire of Music, he represents continuity between generations at this famous school of Chaabi in Algiers.

**Luc CHERKI** / Singer & Guitar

« The Nostalgic », forced to stop singing in Arabic during the war of independence, he left Algiers in 1954 for France and became the incarnation of the Pied-noir singer. He continues to play Chaabi to this day, his songs full of nostalgia.

**Maurice EL MEDIONI** / Piano

« The Mediterranean », he's a star of the 1940s and 50s fashion of modernising Chaabi music with Lili Boniche and Salim el Hallali. He lives in Marseille because it's closer to his heart, the sun.

**Mohamed FERKIOUI** / Accordion

« The Mirror Maker », his boutique in the Casbah is the place where his memory and stories sparked the moment that formed El Gusto.

**ABDELRAHMANE GUELLATI** / Banjo

« The Artist », everybody calls him Manou, he doesn't worry about too much, he just wants to play music and enjoy his little pets, birds and cats.

**Joseph HADJAJ** / Multi-instrumentalist

« The Optimist », Nicknamed José de Souza, originally from Algeria, life has brought him from Algiers in the 1940s with Blond Blonde, he settled and wrote many songs for Algerian music.

**Liamine HAIMOUN** / Mandolin

« The Tender », after having lost his two sons in the terrorist years of the 1990s, he stopped singing and playing music. He picked up his mandole again in 2005, for the love of his friends and for El Gusto.

**El Hadi HALO** / Piano

« The Godfather », the son of the legendary creator of Chaabi, el Hadj Mohamed El Anka, he is also professor in the Conservatoire.

**Abdelmadjid MESKOUD** / Mandolin

« The Joker », always getting the crowd on their feet, enjoying the show, he represents the newer generation of Algiers Chaabi.

**Mustapha TAHMI** / Guitar

« The Joker », Always wearing a blue chinese-style tunic, with one hand a glass of red wine and the other a guitar, he improvises his life between the joy that this music gives him and the bitterness of everyday. He personifies Chaabi.



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