



AZIZ SAHMAOUI BEST & UNIVERSITY OF GNAWA

1. Un Homme Bon *	A Good Man	4'39	رجل زوين
2. Ana Hayou	Ana Hayou	4'32	أنهيو
3. Alf Hilat	Thousand Tricks	5'28	الف حيلة
4. Janna Ifrikia	African Paradise	5'29	جنة افريقية
5. Kahina	The Priestess	4'26	كاهنة
6. Lawah-Lawah	Lawah-Lawah	5'58	لواه لواه
7. Entre Voisins	Among Neighbours	4'51	بين الجيران
8. Maktoube ?	Destiny ?	3'54	مكتوب ؟
9. Firdawss	Eden	4'43	فردوس
10. Mazal	Mazal	4'34	ما زال
11. Miskina	The Poor	4'08	مسكينة
12. Nouria	Luminous	4'27	نورية
13. Soudani ya yemma	Soudani ya yemma	9'31	سوداني
14. Yasmine	Yasmine	6'54	ياسمين
15. Afrikia *	Afrikia	3'35	افريقيا

* Bonus tracks

ALBUM RELEASE ON 27TH MARCH 2020

Aziz Sahmaoui's University of Gnawa is ten years old - a golden opportunity to look back and celebrate the group's recorded output in an anniversary 'Best Of'. Comprising fifteen songs (including some new versions and unreleased tracks), Best of University of Gnawa condenses a decade of musical adventures, from the Atlas Mountains of Morocco to the stages of the world, all in one 'guided tour'.

The band have always had a dual ambition : to revive their heritage and to imbue modernity with a little more soul. Their interpretation of the classic '*Soudani ya yemma*', which has opened University's live set since forever, is a perfect illustration of that intention. The innovations on the track are numerous : the *ngoni*, a Manding lute instrument from West Africa, is re-purposed by Aziz and played like the North African *gumbri*, whose tones are perfectly attuned to the groovy bass of Alune. When it comes to the *kora* of the hyper-talented Cheikh Diallo, you'd be forgiven for thinking that the song had been written for him. Aziz's arrangement is masterful, the groove fiendishly effective and then the song's climax hits you like an electric shock. The same audacious approach can be heard on the classic, vitaminised '*Ana Hayou*', which often closes the band's live show, with its Hendrix-like solo courtesy of Hervé Samb, one of Africa's most talented guitarists. The band also re-recorded one of its classic tunes, '*Lawah-Lawah*', which is now live and groovier than ever, propelled by the awesome duo of Jon Grandcamp on drums and Adhil Mirghani on percussion, '*Alf Hilat*' is inspired by chaabi, the popular music of the Casbah of Algiers. Aziz has kept certain aspects of the original, but has added contemporary elements, such as vocal harmonies that feature the magnificent voices of Alune and Cheikh, amongst others. Also present is '*Firdawss*', a track that stands out from the rest of the band's discography. With its subtle arrangements, the song showcases harmony vocals, strings and a magnificent flute solo to maximum effect.

Two un-released tracks round off this 'Best Of'. First, '*Un Homme bon*'. The song exemplifies Aziz Sahmaoui to perfection. A mystical melody, an uncharacteristically bassy voice, a general impression of mystery, lyrics with great poetic and spiritual reach and a rare power... And to decorate all that, musicians who put their virtuosity to one side to render Aziz's melody in the simplest, subtlest way possible. Then there's the festive and spiced-up '*Afrikia*', a veritable fusion between North and West Africa played on four hands by Alune and Aziz to showcase that unique blend of sounds that's one of the trademarks of the band.

But dance and trance aren't everything. This is music that thinks, music that you can read. Aziz Sahmaoui's lyrics turn the album into a portrait of a boiling, suffering and hoping world, the soundtrack of a story that runs from the post-independence period to the Arab springs via the Gulf wars. Aziz Sahmaoui takes a lucid look at the world and sings with eyes open, and with the power and elegance of a great poet. His songs speak of the misery of children ('*Miskina*'), of a neighbourhood quarrel ('*Entre Voisins*'), of the Iraq war ('*Maktoube ?*'), of the failings of governments ('*Kahina*'), often in the form of stories. The blossoming of a revolution in Tunisia, for example, evokes the perfume of a woman's first name ('*Yasmine*'). In fact, women are omnipresent in Aziz Sahmaoui's songs - as is the love of women, of music and of that native earth, as in the song '*Mazal*', or in the features of the sensual and mysterious '*Nouria*'. By way of contrast, '*Janna Ifrikia*' is a hymn to Africa and its beauties, objects of all desire and lust. Beneath the wings of that love, Aziz Sahmaoui has found refuge and learned a great deal. These 15 songs are proof of that.

Aziz Sahmaoui : lead vocals, mandole, n'goni
Alune Wade : bass, vocals (all tracks)
Hervé Samb : guitar, vocals (all tracks)
Amen Vianna : guitar, vocals (Un Homme bon, Janna Ifrikia, Entre Voisins, Nouria, Soudani ya yemma)
Adhil Mirghani : percussions, vocals (Janna Ifrikia, Lawah-Lawah, Entre Voisins, Nouria, Soudani ya yemma, Afrikia)
Cheikh Diallo : keyboards, kora, vocals (all tracks)
Jon Grandcamp : drums (Un Homme bon, Entre Voisins, Soudani ya yemma)
Cyril Atef : drums (Janna Ifrikia, Nouria)
Rime Sahmaoui : choirs (Janna Ifrikia, Nouria, Miskina)
Amar Chaoui : karkabou (Ana Hayou), tar & derbouka (Alf Hilat), cachichi (Kahina), bendir (Miskina), tar (Mazal)
Guillaume Pihet : calabash (Ana Hayou, Alf Hilat, Maktoube, Miskina), drums (Kahina)
Stefan Heckel : accordéon (Miskina)
Nino Josele : flamenco guitar (Yasmine)
Naissam Jalal : flute (Firdawss)
Michael Nick : violin (Firdawss)

Lyrics and compositions by **Aziz Sahmaoui** except :
Nouria : Lyrics by **Aziz Sahmaoui, Cheikh Diallo**
Ana Hayou : Traditional Gnawa, arrangements by **Aziz Sahmaoui**
Alf Hilat : Arrangements by **Alioune Wade**
Soudani ya yemma : Traditional Gnawa, arrangements by **Aziz Sahmaoui**

Bonus tracks : Un Homme bon & Afrikia
 New recording : Lawah-Lawah
 Recording **Matthias Weber - Midilive Studio, Villeteuse**
 Mixing by **Matthias Weber, Aziz Sahmaoui & Alune Wade - Homestudio, Paris**
 Tracks remastered album University of Gnawa 2011 : Ana Hayou - Alf Hilat - Kahina - Maktoube - Miskina
 Tracks remastered album Mazal 2014 : Firdawss - Mazal - Yasmine
 Tracks remastered album Poetic Trance 2019 : Janna Ifrikia - Entre Voisins - Nouria - Soudani ya yemma
 Mastering Bonus tracks & Re-mastering all other tracks by **Tony Cousins - Metropolis Studio, London**
 Best-of album production by **Zahora**
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