

BEGINNER'S GUIDE

Andy Morgan has the low-down on the king of rai

KHALED

Khaled is to Algerian *rai* music what Elvis Presley was to rock 'n' roll – the don, the king, the cool ruler, the indisputable icon of the genre. Others have made their contribution with scattered moments of artistic brilliance, but no one has yet seriously challenged Khaled's position as *rai*'s number one.

This kind of rarefied fame hasn't come cheap. Khaled escaped zero opportunity, compulsory army draft and moralising fundamentalists in his native Algeria to start a new life in France in the mid-80s. Unlike many of his fellow *rai* hopefuls, Khaled decided to trust the Western music industry and he signed a deal with the venerable French label Barclay in 1992. This opened the door to expensive studio time and the chance to work with top-flight international producers. It also brought a swarm of jealous whispers from many in the North African community to the effect that Khaled had lost touch with his roots and was just flogging old tunes to the gullible West.

Yet none of this stopped Khaled from pushing the boundaries of the *rai* genre, conquering new audiences, and scoring hits and sales of which other *rai* singers could only dream. It all boils down to the simple fact that Khaled has a voice that trounces all challengers in the *rai* arena. Its soaring Arabic arpeggios and raw unleashed passion has established the archetype, the model for all other *rai* singers to follow.

BEST ALBUM

***Khaled* (Barclay / Universal France, 1992)**

OOO This was the album which launched Khaled's international career and made him more famous than Michael Jackson in certain corners of the globe, notably India and North Africa. Its anthemic opening broadside 'Didi' quickly became the monster hit that *rai* music had been seeking for years. Other tracks like 'Wahrane', a



homage to Khaled's hometown of Oran, and 'El Arbi' are also evergreen *rai* classics. Although subsequent releases like *Sahra* sold more in the wider pop market, *Khaled*, produced by Don Was and Michael Brook, remains a pivotal moment in *rai* history when the sounds of the North African ghetto put on a bright new technological garb and went out to conquer the world.

BEST COMPILATION

***Young Khaled* (CMM / Buda, 1978)**

OOO Recommending a good Khaled compilation is tricky because Barclay/Universal France, Khaled's label for the past decade, has never seen the logic of putting all his greatest post-Algeria songs on one 'Best of' CD. Khaled released up to 50 cassettes with various North African 'ghetto' producers before signing to Barclay and opportunist labels have been quick to plunder this huge archive and throw together dubious Greatest Hits type packages. Their sound quality is almost always rough but there are some classic tunes like 'Sidi Boumedienne' and 'Ya Loulid' from this period which are worth tracking down. The problem is that no one compilation includes them all. *Young*

Khaled just gives a good snapshot of the *rai* legend at his rawest and includes the aforementioned 'Sidi Boumedienne', a tribute to one of Algeria's great *marabouts* and religious warriors.

WHAT ELSE?

***Kutché* (Stern's Africa, 1988)**

OOO Before signing with Barclay, Khaled teamed up with Algerian jazz composer Safy Boutella and French producer Martin Meissonnier to make this excellent album, which, at the time, was a revelation of *rai*'s future potential.

WHAT TO AVOID

***Haffa* (Barclay / Universal France, 1998)**

OOO A fairly pointless live album which has been definitively dwarfed by the epic *1-2-3 Soleils* (Barclay) live recording of the North African titans; Khaled, Rachid Taha and Faudel at Paris' Bercy stadium in 1998.

LIKE KHALED? TRY...

☆ Cheb Mami *Meli Meli*
(Totem/Virgin France, 1998)