

SOUNDING OUT...

# BRUSSELS

Brussels isn't just about European bureaucrats and sprouts. James Lehmann delves into the music scene of the vibrant metropolis

Grand-Place (Brussels Jazz Mar)

**B**russels has rather unfairly become synonymous with remote, sprawling bureaucracies such as the European Commission, and the Belgian capital is all too easily written off as a colourless, chaotic conurbation with an identity crisis. However, the more patient visitor will uncover a city awash with different languages, cultures and traditions, and nowhere is this diversity more apparent than in a music scene that displays a profound depth of integration across the board. Groups ranging from classical to experimental and from jazz to electronic include musicians from several different countries. With sizeable Congolese, North African, Turkish, Hispanic and Eastern European communities, Brussels can boast a uniquely vibrant mix of sounds that other cities would be hard pushed to rival.

Brussels' other assets from a world music perspective are geographical location, an agglomeration of international agencies and festival organisers, cheap rents, competitive recording studios and renowned gastronomy.

## MUSIC & MUSICIANS

Brussels is a convenient northern European base for nomadic artists such as Taraf de Haidouks, Algerian *mandole* player Abdelli and master Guinean percussionist Mamady Keita. It is also home to Belgium's best-known world music export Zap Mama, as well as other bands such as Foofango, a Belgian-

Burkina Faso group; Ialma, who fuse Galician vocals with Belgian folk instrumentation; Tan, a unique Turkish/Belgian/Israeli assembly, and inventive singers like Marlene Dorcena and Ghaliya Benali from Haiti and Tunisia respectively.

Of course, Brussels has its own rich musical heritage, leading exponents of which include the traditional Flemish dance band Brabants Volksorkest, popular folksters Ambrozijn, Lais, a trio of Flemish female singers, the Walloon pipers Les Muchards, the violin-based Trio Trad, and accordion bands such as Tref and Deux Accords Diron.

Jazz has always been subject to a fluid, multicultural interpretation in Brussels as shown by enterprising collectives such as Musique à 9 and Rêve d'Elephant Orchestre, whilst on-the-edge outfits such as Jaune Toujours and Orange Kazoo almost defy categorisation. Flying the Celtic flag are Shantalla, a group of ex-patriot Irish musicians, and the highly-rated Orion, who feature Irish, Breton and Scottish players around a core of Belgians.

## ON THE RADIO

➤ **Le Monde Est Un Village** is Didier Mélon's daily slot on national radio and a key forum for local artists; 7pm-8pm, Mon-Fri, RTBF La Premier 92.5MHz FM. The programme has also given rise to a series of compilation CDs of the same name, featuring many of the aforementioned groups.

## WORLD MUSIC FOR THE PEOPLE

➤ **Muziekpublique** is a non-profit organisation, run entirely by volunteers, that organises concerts, promotes local artists and programmes world music courses throughout the year. Check their website at [www.muziekpublique.be](http://www.muziekpublique.be) for upcoming concerts and extensive links to many Brussels-based bands, festivals and venues.

## WHAT'S ON?

Indispensable is the Wednesday arts supplement of **Le Soir** (aka **Le Mad**) which contains listings. Cafés, bars and public buildings always display a *publicité* rack somewhere stuffed full of concert flyers and venue agendas.

## VENUES

Brussels' venues are as wildly diverse as the music they present – grandiose concert halls, cultural centres, cafés, bars, theatres, parks, churches, disused railway stations, old factories and a myriad of other progressively unlikely performance spaces – even the busy city trams can feature all manner of random live musical entertainment!

### THE A-LIST

➤ **The Palais des Beaux Arts** is Brussels' premier classical music venue, but also has a monthly slot for world music concerts. (rue Ravenstein 23, +32 (0)2 507 8200,

www.pbapsk.be)

↳ **Espace Senghor** consistently programmes quality world music concerts. (av. de Maelbeek 18, +32 (0)2 230 3140)

↳ **The Ancienne Belgique** is better known as a rock/pop venue, but their agenda is widely varied and many world artists perform there. (bd Anspach 110, +32 (0)2 548 2400, www.abconcerts.be)

↳ **Le Botanique** contains several unusual performance spaces in pleasant, horticulturally-inspired surroundings. (rue Royale 236, +32 (0)2 218 3732, www.botanique.be)

↳ **Les Halles de Schaerbeek** is a recently renovated covered market now devoted to arts and culture. (rue Royale Ste Marie 22b, +32 (0)2 218 2107, www.halles.be)

### THE REST

↳ **Sounds** (rue de la Tulipe 28, +32 (0)2 512 9250) has concerts or jam sessions most nights of the week that feature a wide range of global jazz flavours. For other places it's usually weekends only: North African – **Bazaar** (rue des Capucins 63, +32 (0)2 511 2600), Central African – **L'Horloge du Sud** (rue du Trone 141, +32 (0)2 512 1864), Turkish – **A Table** (rue Royale 290 +32 (0)2 223 4868), South American – **El Metteko** (88 bd Anspach), Spanish – **El Rincón de Espana** (rue de l'Abattoir 43, +32 (0)2 512 8256), Irish – **James Joyce** (rue Archimede 34) and **The Bank** (rue du Bailli 79), USA/UK – **Toogenblik** (Cortenbachstraat 11, +32 (0)2 215 9966), various – **Centre des**



Jacques Brel (J-P Leloir)

**Riches-Claire** (rue des Riches-Claire 24, +32 (0)2 548 2580).

## FESTIVALS

↳ **Brussels Jazz Marathon**, May 23-25. Dozens of homegrown bands serve up jazz, salsa, Afro, folk, Dixieland, Gypsy and everything in-between at more than 50 venues across the city. (+32 (0)2 456 0485, www.brusselsjazzmarathon.be)

↳ **Couleur Café**, June 27-29. Tour et Taxis, a vast old customs building near the city centre, is home to this popular world music festival. (www.couleurcafe.org)

↳ **Brosella**, July 12-13. Brosella is a free folk and jazz festival held in Ossegem Park, near Brussels' most distinctive landmark the Atomium. (+32 (0)2 270 98 56, www.brosella.com)

↳ **Klinkende Munt**, July. Ten days of free concerts in either the Place de la Monnaie or the Beursschouwburg (rue de la Caserne 37, +32 (0)2 513 8290, www.beursschouwburg.be/klinkendemunt)

↳ **Audi Jazz Festival**, mid October-mid November. High profile jazz festival that last

year included the likes of Gilberto Gil and Rabih Abou-Khalil so definitely merits inclusion here. (+32 (0)2 456 0487, www.audijazz.be)

### OTHER FESTIVALS

There's a colourful array of other festivals, parades and cultural events in the Brussels calendar many of which feature live music of all descriptions, such as the traditional **Ommegang** in July, this year's over-arching **Africalia**, and the biennial **Zinneke** in May. (Brussels Tourist Information, www.tib.be). Also this year is the 25th anniversary of the death of **Jacques Brel** – Belgium's most famous singer/songwriter. Check out www.brel-2003.be for more details.

### IF YOU STILL WANT MORE...

It's well worth a visit to the **Musical Instrument Museum**, which houses a fine collection of European folk instruments. (rue Montagne de la Cour 2, +32 (0)2 5450130, www.mim.fgov.be/home\_uk.htm)

Also recommended is a trip to **FNAC** which features a vast selection of world music CDs, as well as information and tickets for most major venues in Belgium. (City 2, rue Neuve, +32 (0)2 275 1111, www.fnac.be).

Antwerp is less than an hour's journey from Brussels so the **Zuiderpershuis** (aka the Centre for World Cultures) is worth a trip. It's one of Belgium's only dedicated world music venues (Waalse Kaai 14, +32 (0)3 248 0100, www.zuiderpershuis.be).

Antwerp hosts one of Europe's top world music festivals **Sfinks** (see details on p57).

COMPETITION

# WIN A WEEKEND FOR TWO TO BRUSSELS

Simply answer the following question:

**When did Jacques Brel die?**

Prize is for weekend of June 27-June 29 and includes two first-class Eurostar tickets, on-board three course meal with wine and two nights accommodation at the Novotel Brussels Centre-Tour Noire hotel, plus two three-day passes to the Couleur Café festival.

Send your answer on a postcard, with your name, address and daytime telephone number to: Brussels comp, *Songlines*, PO Box 2521, Windsor, SL4 1YF.

Closing date May 30 2003. Winners will be chosen at random. Only one entry per household. No cash alternative is available. Please note, we occasionally allow carefully selected companies to mail details of their products to our readers. If you would like to exclude your name from this list, please state clearly on your entry.

For more details on Brussels, check out [www.belgiumthelaceto.be](http://www.belgiumthelaceto.be) and for Eurostar information visit [www.eurostar.com](http://www.eurostar.com)







Couleur Café (Thyl Beniest)