

## MARSEILLE

SOUNDING OUT

## Gilles Rof reports from the multicultural French port where iconic architecture and a fine climate are the backdrop for a vibrant music scene

An electrified *kora* resonates around the corner. Two blocks away, an Algerian *oud* can be heard, followed by the voices of a men's choir,

singing original songs in Occitan – the ancient language from the South of France – as if they were rock'n'roll anthems. Take a nocturnal trip up the hill to the La Plaine area – between cours Julien and place Jean-Jaurès, a mere ten minutes walk from the Vieux-Port – for a good taste of Marseille's musical spirit. Step from one music bar to venues so small that artists can help themselves to beer while still singing on stage; you'll discover an amazing mix of urban hip-hop and Comorian *taarab* music, as if you've travelled to another continent.

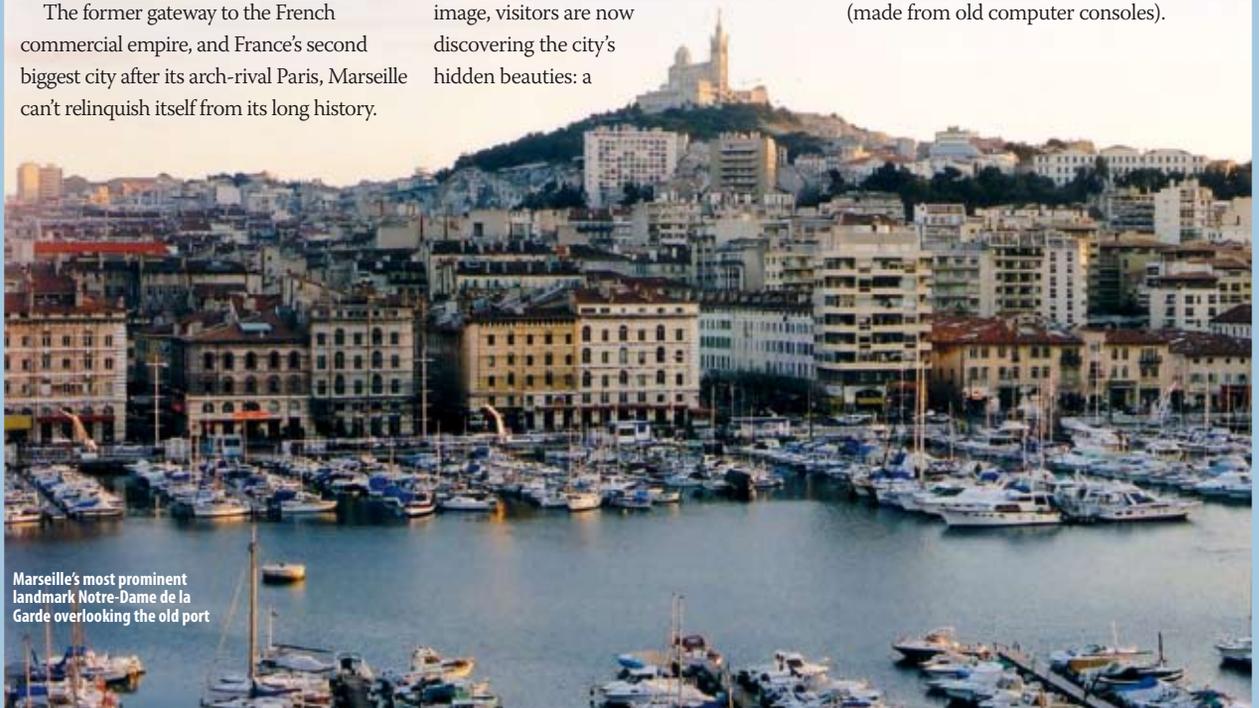
The former gateway to the French commercial empire, and France's second biggest city after its arch-rival Paris, Marseille can't relinquish itself from its long history.

For years this popular port city has been a melting pot: a place where migrants have found new opportunities to build their lives. Needless to say all these newcomers brought their cultures with them, and a few have become stars, such as Algerian *rai* singers Khaled and Cheb Mami, or Armenian *duduk* talent Levon Minassian, who has played with Sting and Peter Gabriel. Nowadays Marseille is as French as it is Spanish, Italian, Algerian, Corsican, Armenian or Comorian; its city-dwellers uphold: 'Marseille is unique.'

Since the tough years of the 1980s, when unemployment and drug trafficking were prevalent, the city has experienced great changes. As big industries slowly died, the city council began to develop tourism. In contrast to Marseille's formerly negative image, visitors are now discovering the city's hidden beauties: a

brehtaking seaside, the gorgeous old neighbourhood Le Panier, and a certain easy-going, southern way of living.

Artists from all over France initially came to the city attracted by cheap rents and the creative freedom it offered. They gave the local culture a boost and helped develop the city's fresh image. Now Marseille is much more accessible than it was ten years ago, with plenty of enchanting hotels and restaurants – it has been chosen to be the European Capital of Culture in 2013. Its real energy still comes more from individuals and small venues rather than officially planned events. Talk to the organisers of festivals like La Fiesta des Suds or Marsatac, and you will hear their frustration with the chaotic local politics. Yet they are equally passionate when describing the huge crowds which gather for the end-of-summer events, or local bands such as Sam Karpenia Trio, Lo Còr de la Plana or Oai Star – all revitalising Marseille's traditional sounds with rock, dub and chip music (made from old computer consoles).



Marseille's most prominent landmark Notre-Dame de la Garde overlooking the old port

### VENUES

#### La Cité de la Musique

This awful-looking building hides a tiny auditorium hosting some of the best world music concerts – flamenco, rumba, *taarab* and *chaoui* for serious music-lovers.

4 Rue Bernard du Bois (1st district), +33 4 91 39 28 28, [www.citemusique-marseille.com](http://www.citemusique-marseille.com)

#### Cabaret Aléatoire

A venue inside La Friche Belle de Mai, a former cigarette factory turned into one of Marseille's cultural hotspots. Young and warmly atmospheric gigs almost

every weekend.

41 rue Jobin (3rd district),  
+33 4 95 04 95 09,  
[www.cabaret-aleatoire.com](http://www.cabaret-aleatoire.com)

#### Dock des Suds

The warehouse where Babel Med and La Fiesta des Suds take place is also a concert venue. Rodrigo y Gabriela, Goran Bregović, Phoenix among others will kick-start the 2010 season.

12 rue Urbain V (2nd district),  
+33 4 91 99 00 00,  
[www.dock-des-suds.org](http://www.dock-des-suds.org)

#### Le Paradox & Le Bicok

La Plaine area has always been the live music hub of the city. In 2009, two new venues opened: Le Paradox and Le Bicok. The former offers good flamenco nights.

Le Paradox, 127 rue d'Aubagne (1st district),  
+33 4 91 63 14 65, [www.leparadox.fr](http://www.leparadox.fr)  
Le Bicok, 57 cours Julien (6th district)  
+33 4 9194 50 48, [www.lebicok.com](http://www.lebicok.com)

#### L'Eolienne

Launched by Compagnie Rassegna, a fantastic band playing Mediterranean music, l'Eolienne is a very recently opened and

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World music booms about the Dock des Suds warehouse for Babel Med Music, which combines a conference with live showcases

## FESTIVALS

### Fiesta des Suds

For the last 18 years this unique festival located in and around an old sugar warehouse hosts seven nights of great music. Acts have ranged from big French stars (Bashung, Christophe) to great African bands (Staff Benda Bilili, Seun Kuti, Salif Keita), and local heroes (Massilia Sound System, Sam Karpénia).

**Fiesta des Suds, every October. 12 rue Urbain V (2nd district), +33 4 91 99 00 00, [www.dock-des-suds.org](http://www.dock-des-suds.org)**

### Babel Med Music

La Fiesta des Suds' little brother (same place, same promoters) is growing in size year after year. A world music industry event during the day, Babel Med then turns into three nights of musical discoveries. From traditional Turkish flute to electrified Touareg blues, the future of world music can be found on one of the



three stages.

**Babel Med Music, March 25-27 2010. 12 rue Urbain V, +33 4 91 99 00 00, [www.dock-des-suds.org](http://www.dock-des-suds.org)**

### Marsatac

Formerly a hip-hop festival, Marsatac now offers everything from pop and world to electronic music. Last year's most memorable set was Franz Ferdinand sharing the stage with Orchestre Poly-Rythmo.

Attracting more than 25,000 people, this year there will be a winter edition, in addition to the regular autumn event.

**February 26-27 & September 23-25 2010 [www.marsatac.com](http://www.marsatac.com)**

### Africa Fête

This historic African festival also has a winter edition in Dakar, Senegal, every December. Held in the courtyard of a

former cigarette factory, the two-day event offers new African music and traditional food.

**June 2010, Friche Belle de Mai, 41 rue Jobin, +33 4 95 04 96 36, [www.africafete.com](http://www.africafete.com)**

### Latcho Divano

Gypsy culture is a new thing in Marseille. This festival presents incandescent brass bands from Romania and Hungary.

**March 26-April 10 2010, various venues, [www.myspace.com/latcho\\_divano](http://www.myspace.com/latcho_divano)**

### Fête du Plateau

For two days, the La Plaine area is dedicated to cultural events and live music. This free 'fiesta' organised by neighbourhood associations and small venues attracts thousands of people.

**End of September 2010, +33 4 96 12 07 76, [www.coursjulien.marsnet.org](http://www.coursjulien.marsnet.org)**

### Les Joutes Musicales de Correns

Forty-odd miles away from Marseille, in the wild Var countryside, les Joutes is an outstanding experience. For one weekend, the little medieval village of Correns is pretty much hijacked by new Mediterranean bands playing and singing in every corner of its narrow streets. From Italy, Spain, Côte d'Azur or Provence, it's a very good illustration of what southern Europe has to offer.

**May 21-23, Correns (Var), +33 4 94 59 56 49, [www.le-chantier.com](http://www.le-chantier.com)**



Cameroonian saxophonist Manu Dibango playing at the Marsatac festival



Cellar bar L'Eolienne is an intimate music venue

intimate venue. Gigs on Wednesdays and Saturdays.

**5 rue Méolan (1st district), +33 4 91 37 86 89**

### La Mesón

Offering new jazz, klezmer music, slam and *rebetika*, this very cosy venue has a devoted crowd. Clarinettist Yom, slammer Fred Nevchehirlian and famous percussionist Bijan Chemirani are regulars.

**52 rue Consolat (1st district) +33 4 50 11 61, [www.lameson.free.fr](http://www.lameson.free.fr)**

### Le Matiti

The only place where you can eat original vegetarian rasta food in Marseille. Open from Wednesday to Saturday, with intimate gigs from time to time.

**10 cours Julien (6th district), +33 4 91 94 00 17**

## LISTINGS

The most complete list of Marseille's daily gigs and events is at [www.liveinmarseille.com](http://www.liveinmarseille.com). If you're not online, you can rely on free weekly papers *Zibelina* and *Cesar*, or read the culture pages of local newspaper *La Provence*.

**[www.laprovence.com](http://www.laprovence.com)**

## RADIO

### Radio Grenouille

As multicultural as the city, Radio Grenouille broadcasts some interesting programmes such as 'Rumbaketa' (Saturday, 12-1pm) or 'Cocotte Musique'.

**88.8 FM [www.grenouille888.org](http://www.grenouille888.org)**