

MUSIC

Western Sahara Studio time for refugees

A new project to bring mobile recording studios to Saharawi refugee camps in Algeria aims to boost the music industry and give young musicians a voice

In 2007, a group of musicians picked from refugee camps in south-western Algeria made one of Africa's best albums of the year, with songs that mixed chants from the Sahara desert with local styles, jazz, R&B and flamenco. The album, *Sandtracks* by Tiris, was followed by international tours, and it was re-released last year.

Though the Sahara desert has produced global hits from the likes of Tuareg rockers Tinariwen, very little has emerged from Western Sahara. A large number of Saharawi people have fled Morocco-controlled Western Sahara and live in refugee camps in Algeria. Along with singers Mariem Hassan and Aziza Brahim, Tiris was one of the only groups representing Saharawi culture outside of their homeland.

The organisation behind the group's formation has a new project to open up recording studios and to help put Saharawi music on the map. Providing training and basic materials, it hopes to help build a local music industry, something which neighbouring countries such as Mali and Morocco have done so successfully.

"Music has been a keystone for expressing the [political] struggle," says Danielle Smith from Sandblast Arts, the UK-based organisation running the Studio-Live project. "But 70% of the population are under the age of 25. They've lost touch with their roots through being educated abroad, from migration, from television. They lack a voice and they don't



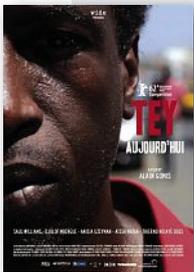
DANIELLE SMITH

Studio-Live aims to set up studios in five refugee camps and facilities to rent amplifiers and microphones cheaply

have a platform on which to express themselves." Over the next three years, Studio-Live aims to set up a music centre in each of the five camps, complete with recording equipment. Work has already started at 27 February Camp in Algeria. It could provide a platform for new bands to emerge, and for old bands, such as the fabled El Wali, to regroup. There will also be a mobile library so that musicians can rent amplifiers and microphones cheaply.

"Young Saharawis have a hard time even hearing Saharawi music," says Smith. "There's criticism that their music is heavily influenced by Mauritanian music, but that's because they can't hear their own music. There's an urgency to record their music from the war period. People feel they could lose all their oral culture in the next generation." ● **Rama Ba** in London

► FILM REVIEWS



Tey Alain Gomis

Tey (Today) is a meditation on life and death set in a dreamy Dakar of half-built buildings and suspended futures. Satché, a graduate recently returned from the US, wakes up to the announcement that he

will die today. As he floats from friends to old lovers hour by hour, there is restlessness and frustration: despite being aware of the time of his death, he must wait for it. *Tey* is Senegalese director Alain Gomis's third film, a sort of protocol of extraordinary affairs that explores the difficulty of leaving when everybody knows you are going. Hypnotic and visually stunning, *Tey* is a slow and intriguing film with a well executed rhythm. ●

Farewell Exile Lamia Alami

The Moroccan short *Farewell Exile* is a gut-wrenching warning to would-be-opportunist drug mules. A young mother, Fatima, wants to join her husband in France, but news arrives that her visa will be delayed by two years. Desperate and broke, Fatima turns to a local drug dealer for help. Fatima negotiates a stow-away ride for her and her son, but only in exchange for the dealer's demands, ensuring a dramatic showdown at customs.



Farewell Exile won Best Short at The Abu Dhabi Film Festival 2011 and the same award at The Women's Independent Film Festival 2012. ●

Nairobi Half Life David Gitonga



Mwas, a young entertainer who spends his days recounting the tale of Spartacus to anyone who will listen, has a dream: to go to Nairobi

and become an actor. But when he reaches the big city, the aspiring thespian is beaten and robbed. He soon finds himself arrested and thrown into a crowded prison. On the inside he meets Ito, a local gang leader, and so begins a journey that leads Mwas into a spiral of crime. Director David Gitonga brings an engaging Nairobi to the screen while actors Joseph Wairimu and Olwenya Maina add powerful performances. ●