



TRAVELER

SOUND JOURNEYS

THE MUSIC ISSUE

18 MELODIC
ADVENTURES
AROUND
THE WORLD



Spotify playlists to
inspire trips to the
Sahara & beyond

HEAR THE WORLD IN...

Morocco • Corsica • California • England • Greece
India • Norway • Croatia • Tanzania • Mexico • Australia

EDITOR'S NOTE BY GEORGE!

A landscape in California's Joshua Tree National Park lends itself to quiet contemplation.



Traveling to Listen

Let music guide your way around the world

Music is sound organized into a harmonious composition. It's the art of the muses, the rhythm of poetry, the scale of inspiration. In classical Greece, music was embodied by the muse Euterpe, the "giver of delight." In ancient times, music was the beat of a drum and the tone of a flute; before that it was the staccato of raindrops, the rush of a river, the song of a bird. Sound is all around us, and yet it can become so layered and discordant that we stop listening. For travelers, the sense of sound is one of our best tools for discovering the world in all its dimensions. This issue is about exploring with ears first—it's about listening to destinations as much as looking at them. We visit musical places such as Morocco and Corsica, where traditional forms are finding contemporary audiences. We break sonic barriers with gong rocks in Tanzania, a whispering gallery in India, echoes at a mosque in Iran, singing seals in Svalbard, and a sea organ in Croatia. We find silence amid the booming sand dunes of California. Some sounds lead inward on meditative journeys; other sounds carry us far afield on expeditions in search of harmonic convergences. If you really want to hear the world, we discovered, you've got to travel in the key of curiosity. Thanks for tuning in! —George W. Stone, Editor in Chief

Nat Geo Highlights

GLOBE-TROT WITH GORDON RAMSAY

For National Geographic's new TV series *Gordon Ramsay: Uncharted*, the famed chef embarks on adventures in six destinations around the world to find culinary inspiration in local flavors. See page 38 for his travel tips, and catch the premiere July 21.

"QUEENS OF EGYPT"

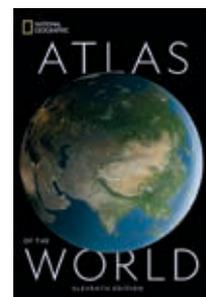
Nefertiti, Hatshepsut, and other fierce females star in this multisensory exhibition at the National Geographic Museum in Washington, D.C., through September 2. Go to natgeo.org/dc.

EXPLORATION HAPPENS BECAUSE OF YOU

When you read, watch, shop, or travel with us, you help advance the work of our scientists, explorers, and educators around the world. To learn more, visit natgeo.com/info.

ATLAS OF THE WORLD

Study the planet and get travel insight from the 11th edition of this classic reference book that reflects the state of the world today with authoritative maps, data-driven graphics, and global trends: shopng.com/books.



SOUNDSCAPES

15 WAYS TO HEAR THE WORLD

*Plan an acoustic
journey to the
planet's most
musical spaces*

By **Trevor Cox**

SONIC WONDERS

In a world dominated by spectacle, what are the auditory equivalents of the Eiffel Tower, Stonehenge, or the Grand Canyon? Searching for an answer, we tuned into Trevor Cox, a British professor of acoustic engineering and an explorer of Earth's most amazing sound sites. "On vacation some years ago, I was leafing through a travel guide for sights to see and experiences to be had," he tells us. "It suddenly struck me that the book mentioned nothing about sound. It's easy to overlook how important what we hear is to our travels. After all, we have no 'earlids' and so our brain is always listening to the soundscape. If your ears chose your next holiday destination, where would they go?" Here he reveals 15 of his favorite places to visit for extraordinary sounds.



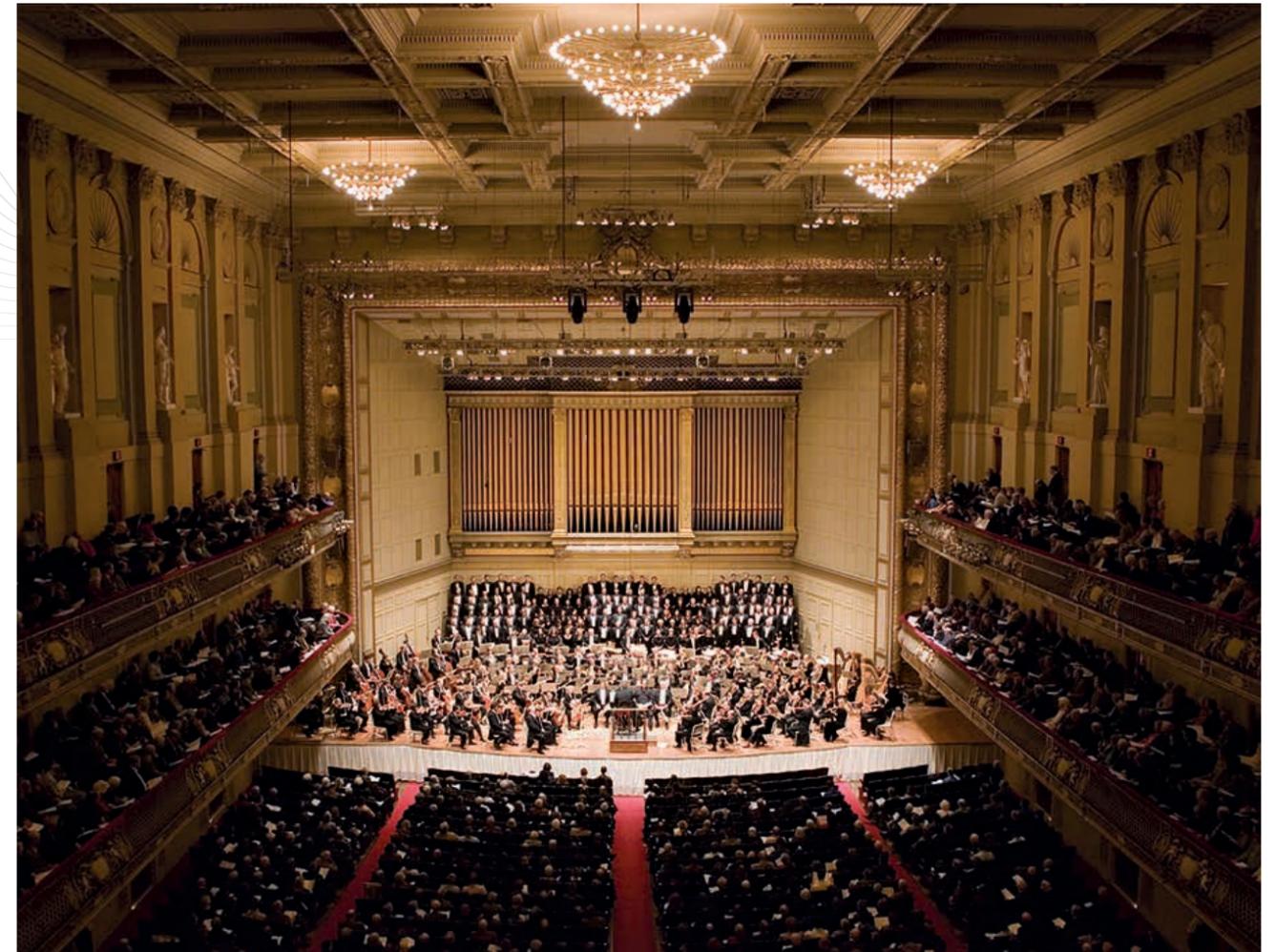
● The red dot on the volume control knob indicates where each sound experience falls on our scale of quiet (left) to loud (right).



1. SERENGETI, TANZANIA Gong Rocks

A xylophone made from stone might seem an unusual musical instrument, more likely to produce a disappointing clunk than a sonorous bong, but certain stones can make beautiful notes if the microscopic structure of the rock is right. Strike the rock gongs in the Serengeti, and you get a wonderful metallic clang. These large boulders are covered in percussive marks from thousands of years of use. Such "rock music" provides some of the earliest evidence of sounds our ancestors made.

DAVID PLUTH/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC IMAGE COLLECTION (GONG ROCKS); MICHAEL J. LUTCH/HALL; SERGEY LOBODENKO/GETTY IMAGES (ALL ILLUSTRATIONS); PREVIOUS PAGES: NEVENA TSVETANOVA



2. EPIDAUROS, GREECE Ancient theater

Dating from the fourth century B.C., the ancient theater at Epidaurus (shown on pages 46-47) is a Greek architectural masterpiece and one of the earliest structures that we know was designed with sound in mind. The steep banking and semi-circular shape get the audience as close to the stage as possible, in order to hear the performers better. Tour guides delight in demonstrating the theater's "perfect" acoustics, astonishing visitors as a pin dropped on the stage is heard toward the back of the vast amphitheater of stone seats.



3. VIJAYAPURA, INDIA Whispering gallery, Gol Gumbaz

The grand 17th-century mausoleum of Gol Gumbaz is a testament to the power of Sultan Adil Shah, ruler of Bijapur, who is buried here. With its slender octagonal turrets at each of its four corners and a circular dome above, the tomb is a majestic sight. But people travel here for the chance to shout in its famed whispering gallery. Make a sound near the inside walls of the dome, and it will hug the concave surface, repeating your voice over and over as the sound does laps around the roof.



4. OSLO, NORWAY Emanuel Vigeland Mausoleum

Artist Emanuel Vigeland (1875-1948) originally built Tomba Emmanuelle in 1926 as a museum for his works. But when he decided the building should also serve as his tomb, he transformed the soaring barrel-vaulted main hall into a dimly lit space covered in frescoes depicting every aspect of life, from conception to death, including some extremely explicit images. The space is wonderfully responsive to sound. Sing a note, and it reverberates around the room and cascades gently from the arched roof.



5. BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS Symphony Hall

Home to the Boston Symphony Orchestra, Symphony Hall is a mecca for someone like me who is fascinated by aural architecture. Completed in 1900, it was the first auditorium where modern science helped make a great-sounding venue. When I visited, I reveled in how the hall's acoustics enhanced the orchestra's music. As the 20th-century conductor Sir Adrian Boult put it, "The ideal concert hall is obviously that into which you make a not very pleasant sound, and the audience receives something that is quite beautiful."



Ready for some mood music? Scan the QR code on the left on the Spotify app to take you to *National Geographic Traveler's* custom playlists that accompany this issue's stories on Morocco, Corsica, and California.



6. ZADAR, CROATIA
Sea Organ

Built into Zadar's promenade are 35 organ pipes that sound while waves lap against the shore; as you walk along the seafront, the melody and harmonies change. The waves' movement pushes air in and out of the organ pipes to create the notes at random, but overall what is heard is surprisingly pleasing because the pipes have been tuned to harmonies used in local folk music. You can visit other wave organs in San Francisco, California, and Blackpool, England.



7. LURAY, VIRGINIA

Great Stalacpipe Organ

Luray Caverns has the most amazing stalactites and stalagmites. I went there to hear a sonic treasure, an organ that creates music by tapping the cave formations. Tunes take on an ethereal quality as the sound echoes around the large cavern. Created back in the 1950s, it was the brainchild of Leland W. Sprinkle. He spent three years armed with a small hammer and a tuning fork, searching for the right cave formations to make each note.



8. YORKSHIRE, ENGLAND

Thurgoland railway tunnel

Tunnels are lots of fun to shout in, as any toddler will readily demonstrate, but here is one whose sound is particularly unusual. This disused railway tunnel now forms part of the U.K.'s National Cycle Network. Constructed in the 1940s, it has an unusual cross-section with bulging walls that form a horseshoe shape. Along with the very smooth and thick concrete walls, this creates an aural treat. Shout in the tunnel and you hear an extraordinary metallic flutter as the sound bounces around and slowly dies away.



9. SOUTHEAST AUSTRALIA

Superb lyrebird

The superb lyrebird is one of the world's most skillful vocal impersonators. It can mimic the calls of about 20 other species it hears in the rainforest, including whip birds and kookaburras. This strange amalgamation of sounds is sung to impress possible mates, with the male performing from a stage it builds on the rainforest floor. Even more remarkably, birds brought up in captivity impersonate man-made sounds, like car alarms, chainsaws, and the click of camera shutters.



KENT KOBERSTEEN/NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC IMAGE COLLECTION



10. ISFAHAN, IRAN
Imam (Shah) Mosque

Constructed in the 17th century, this building is stunning, with dazzling blue Islamic tiles. The huge domed roof is what creates this sonic wonder. Tour guides will stand underneath the dome and flick a piece of paper to create about seven quick-fire echoes: "clack, clack, clack..." Sound bounces back and forth between the floor and ceiling, with the curved dome focusing the echo, forcing it to keep moving up and down in a regimented fashion.



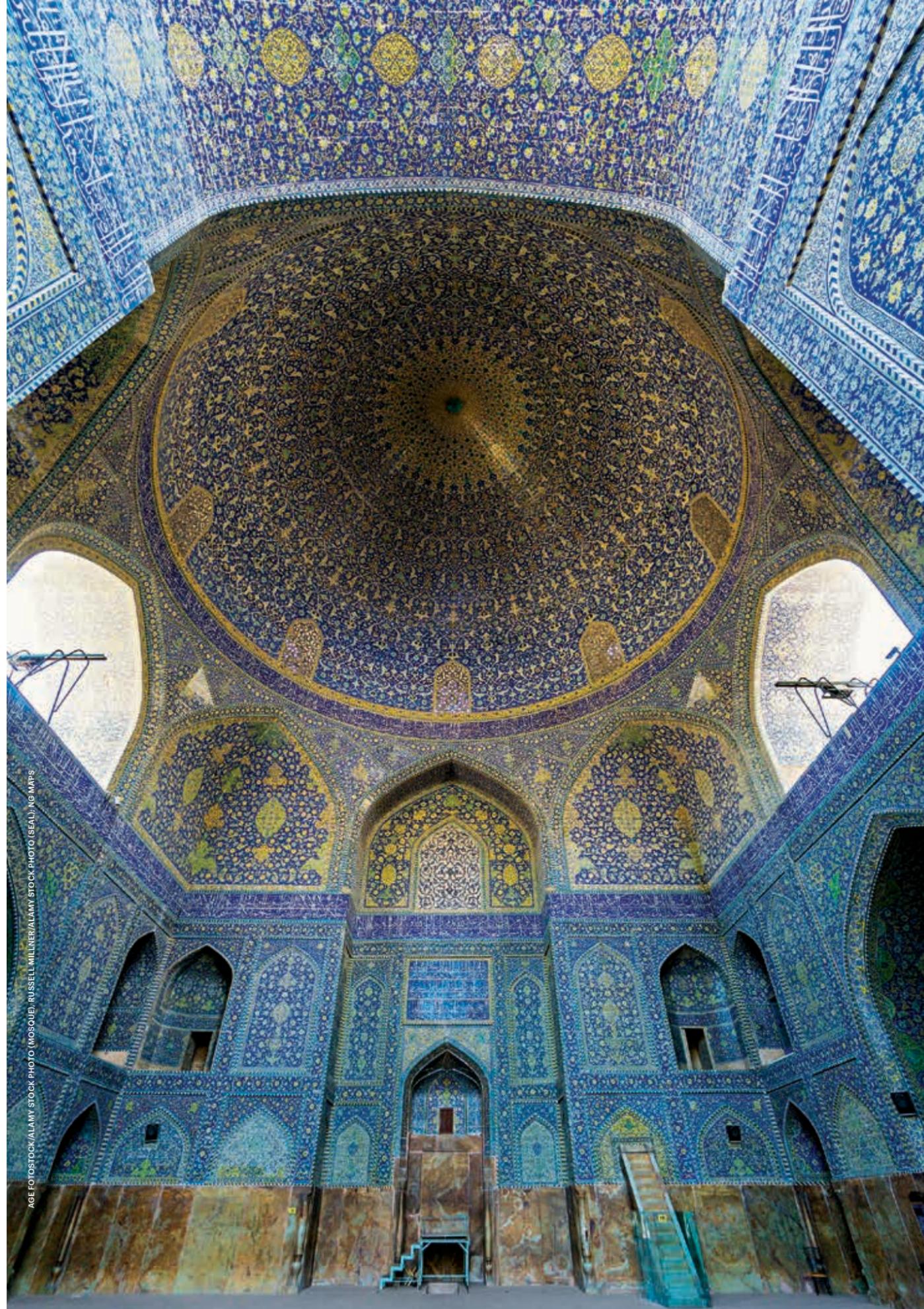
11. ALTYN-EMEL, KAZAKHSTAN
Singing sand dune

Marco Polo ascribed the boom of sand dunes to mischievous spirits creating music with the beat of drums and the clash of arms. When you slide down this dune in Altyn-Emel National Park and create a sand avalanche, you'll feel the surface quaking beneath you as a loud drone fills the air. Only a few dunes have just the right type of sand, as thousands of grains synchronize their movements and sing in a coordinated choir.



12. LANCASTER, CALIFORNIA
Musical road

This peculiar stretch of road creates a rendition of Rossini's *William Tell* overture (used as the theme song for *The Lone Ranger*). The musical notes are created by a set of grooves that vibrate the car wheels like a rumble strip. To get a melody, the Lancaster road has some grooves bunched close together to get high notes, and ones farther apart to get low ones. The fidelity might be poor and the melody out of tune, but I found it impossible not to smile while driving over it.



AGE FOTOSTOCK/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO (MOSQUE); RUSSELL MILLNER/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO (SEAL); NG MAPS



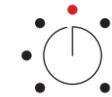
13. CHICHÉN ITZÁ, MEXICO
Kukulkan Pyramid

The 79-foot Maya step pyramid Kukulkan, aka "El Castillo" (the castle), sits at the center of the archaeological site of Chichén Itzá. If you stand at the bottom of the steps and clap your hands, you get this incredible chirping sound. Whether it was constructed deliberately to make this noise or the sound is an accidental sonic marvel remains a matter of debate. The regular pattern of sound bouncing off the treads of the staircase is responsible for the chirp.



14. SALFORD, ENGLAND
Silent anechoic chamber

In this ultrasilent room, sound does not reflect from the foam-studded walls. But you don't hear silence. Instead you often get the disconcerting experience of hearing body sounds like your blood pumping. It's an oppressive place in which some people last only a few minutes. The chamber at the University of Salford is open to the public a couple of days a year. Chambers can also be found in Minnesota and California.



15. SVALBARD, NORWAY
Bearded seals

Listen to the call of a bearded seal, and it's hard to believe that this is natural. It sounds more like a sound effect from a sci-fi movie. Male bearded seals descend underwater in spirals, singing and releasing bubbles. They create long drawn-out whistling glissandi, with the pitch of the sound gradually dropping. It's thought that the longer the glissando, the more attractive the male is to females. To hear this sound, you need to use a hydrophone, an underwater microphone.



1. Gong Rocks, Serengeti, Tanzania
2. Ancient theater, Epidaurus, Greece
3. Gol Gumbaz, Vijayapura, India
4. Emanuel Vigeland Mausoleum, Oslo, Norway
5. Symphony Hall, Boston, MA
6. Sea Organ, Zadar, Croatia
7. Great Stalacpipe Organ, Luray, VA
8. Thurgoland railway tunnel, Yorkshire, England
9. Superb lyrebird, Australia
10. Imam Mosque, Isfahan, Iran
11. Singing sand dune, Altyn-Emel, Kazakhstan
12. Musical road, Lancaster, CA
13. Kukulkan Pyramid, Chichén Itzá, Mexico
14. Silent anechoic chamber, Salford, England
15. Bearded seals, Svalbard, Norway

TREVOR COX (@trevor_cox) is a professor of acoustic engineering at the University of Salford, U.K., and author of *The Sound Book*.



OBSESSIONS MUSICMAKERS

Instrumental Exploits

How to bring global sounds home—from Vietnamese guitars to Russian accordions

By Robert Reid

A quarter century ago, while living in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, I saw an old blind man sitting in the middle of a busy intersection. As a stream of motorbikes and trucks spewing black exhaust whirred past, he plucked on an unusual electric guitar that had strings suspended above a carved-out fretboard. The melody was hauntingly beautiful. Spare notes, emanating from a miniature bullhorn, seemed to hang midair like a hummingbird before darting away. I had no idea what kind of music it was. But I've wanted one of those guitars ever since.

This is how I approach souvenirs when I travel. Instead of T-shirts, regional syrups, or customized belts from fifth-generation beltmakers, I buy local instruments. Many have found their way home with me: an Ethiopian lyrelike *krar*, a South African drum, an Indian wood flute, a Vietnamese *dan bau* zither, a Hong Kong gong, even an archaic Soviet hand-clap machine. This collection isn't

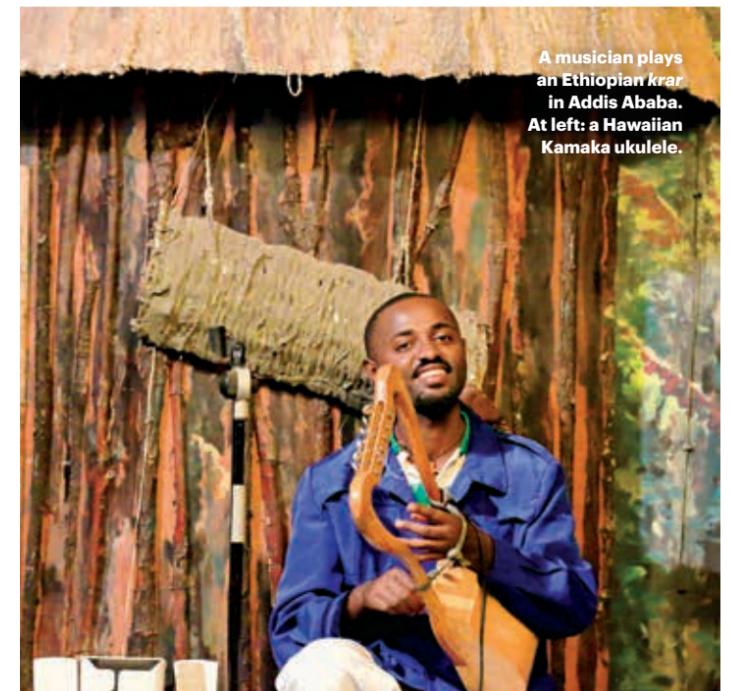
some mad attempt to build a museum of world music or even to master any new instrument I acquire (in more than three decades I've only learned a few chords on a guitar). It's become more about the chase itself.

In 1992 I enrolled in a Russian study-abroad program just after the fall of the U.S.S.R. I'd heard you could trade "Western" items for all sorts of things, so I packed some old jeans, cassette tapes, and—the big prize—a stained MTV jacket. One Saturday at the sprawling Izmailovsky Flea Market on Moscow's outskirts, I poked through random electronic parts, colorful polyester outfits, and assorted Soviet kitsch before coming across something truly glorious: a green push-button harmonium. Russians love accordions like these. The vendor's eyes opened as wide as mine when he saw the MTV jacket, and we quickly agreed to an even swap. And my travel obsession came to life.

I'm not the only one who chases music to its source. American banjo player Béla Fleck, for example, took his instrument to four countries in Africa, where the instrument's early origins began, to play it with local musicians. (It led to a couple of albums and the charming documentary *Throw Down Your Heart* a decade ago.) Around the same time, a Winnipeg couple discovered a music tourist milling about their front yard: Bob Dylan. He had come to Neil Young's childhood home to see if he could look out from Neil's bedroom window. They let him in. After all, who says no to Dylan?

I've always said that anyone looking to get a deeper sense of local life should simply follow a travel writer's approach. That is, treat an itinerary as a quest to try to learn or build something important to you. My quests tend to be musical. I made a road trip to Long Island, New York, based on Billy Joel lyrics, and created a (bad) rap song based on locals' descriptions of Saskatoon, Canada. Once I randomly took a cheap sky-blue clarinet to St. Lucia's jazz festival to see if I could get a lesson. The hunt ended at the Castries police station, where the police band clarinetist showed me how to play some Mozart.

Soon after moving back to Ho Chi Minh City last year, I started my hunt for that guitar I saw the blind man play all those years ago. Turns out, it wasn't hard to find. The murky origins of the *phim lom* (sunken fret) guitar, likely brought by the French in the 19th century, have been linked with Spain and possibly Indian *vina* music. In Vietnam it's still used for *vong co* (nostalgia for the past) music, which plays an integral role in a traditional Mekong Delta opera form called *cai luong*. (This year is the opera genre's centennial.)



A musician plays an Ethiopian *krar* in Addis Ababa. At left: a Hawaiian Kamaka ukulele.

Musical Sources

These three well-known instrument companies offer tours or exhibits. For additional music factories, visit natgeotravel.com.

STEINWAY & SONS

A German immigrant named Steinweg, who was a bugler at the Battle of Waterloo, started making pianos in New York in 1853. See Steinways being made at their factory in Queens.

C.F. MARTIN & CO.

In Nazareth, Pennsylvania, this German-American company has been producing acoustic guitars since the Andrew Jackson administration. Tours show the 300 steps it still takes to handcraft one.

KAMAKA UKULELE

Kamaka has been making Hawaiian ukuleles—an instrument adapted from Portuguese machete guitars—since 1916. The family-run factory operates in Honolulu.

You can easily buy these guitars online of course, or at Ho Chi Minh City music shops (one central street has more than two dozen luthiers making regular acoustic guitars). But I feel—and this could be the obsession talking—getting one just anywhere wouldn't be right.

In his book *How Music Works*, David Byrne (of Talking Heads fame) writes that environments specifically shape how music and instruments are born in a place. Experiencing them personally, he says, "tells us how other people view the world." Yes, I want a scalloped-fret guitar, but I want to find it in the place for which that guitar's quivering melody truly speaks.

To track down the heart of this guitar's music means taking a trip to Bac Lieu, a Mekong Delta town of 150,000 about five hours' drive from Ho Chi Minh City. They take music seriously. Google Maps photos show its central square dotted with oversize monuments of traditional instruments as well as a grand, modern theater honoring Cao Van Lau. This hometown hero put the genre on the music map. One of his most enduring folk songs—about a wife's lament for a husband away at war—is still regularly played on TV and at concerts today.

So I'm planning to visit Bac Lieu to see if one of those weird-looking guitars has my name on it. Even if I don't find one, I love knowing that the blind man's song is still floating in the Vietnamese air.

ROBERT REID (@reidontravel) is an editor at large for *Traveler*. He writes about travel and music on Tinkertowners.com.

C O R S I C A

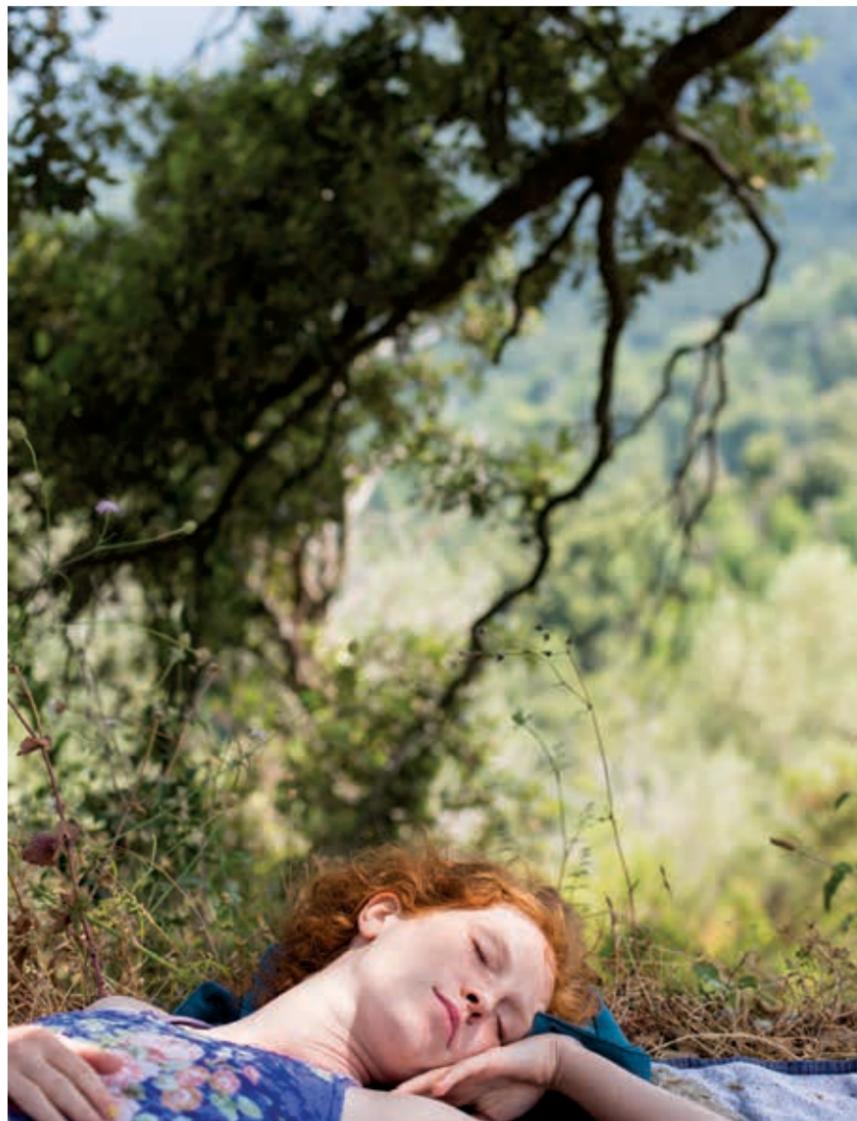
SINGING FROM THE HEART

*A search for perfect harmony lures
an American musician to this timeless and
untamable Mediterranean island*

By **Dessa**

In the sleepy ancient
fishing village of
Erbalunga, in northern
Corsica, life moves at
an adagio tempo.

A B E A U T I F U L



singing voice is alchemic—you pull a lungful of air through the human machine and it leaves, like magic, as music on the exhale. I’m a singer, so probably biased, but I don’t believe we’ve managed to design an instrument that rivals the reed we’ve got built in.

A young woman relaxes in countryside (left) blanketed by the maquis, a wild scrubland of superfragrant plants that covers 20 percent of Corsica, from the mountains to coastal towns such as Tiuccia (right).

TEGRA STONE/INESS (GIRL); VINCENT MIGEAT/AGENCE VU/REDUX (WINDOW); PREVIOUS PAGES: JUAN MANUEL CASTRO PRIETO/AGENCE VU/REDUX (COAST); SERGEY LOBODENKO/GITTY IMAGES (ALL ILLUSTRATIONS)



I was first introduced to the vocal group A Filetta by a listener at one of my own concerts, a poorly attended show in Germany. To distract the crowd from its own size, my bandmate Aby and I crammed everyone into a stairwell, then sang Leonard Cohen’s “Hallelujah” in harmony, a cappella.

Afterward I received an email from a man named Christian: *In a very, very quiet moment, please watch this.* A link led to a video in which a man wearing a gold chain and a black dress shirt, open at the collar, held a tuning fork to his right ear before dropping it into his breast pocket. Gray-haired and trim, he moved with a relaxed, animal athleticism.

When his mouth opened, his eyes shut, as if wired on a shared circuit. The sound he emitted matched his physical aspect—it was a boxer’s voice, abraded by time or suffering or both. The melody was both mournful and urgent, like a funeral song for someone not quite dead. It featured the tense, fast vocal trills

of tragic Portuguese fado or a muezzin’s call to prayer.

After the first phrase, half a dozen other male voices joined in; the camera panned across their faces, dark lashes edging their closed eyes. Some sang in close harmony, some sang long vowels, like a bed of strings.

I couldn’t understand the words, couldn’t even identify the language. But I knew I’d never seen such undisguised passion in the faces of singers making such a religious sound. This was not a church pew prayer. This was a bathroom floor prayer. I played it again and again.

Googling, I learned A Filetta is from Corsica, a Mediterranean island territory of France. The group’s charismatic leader is Jean-Claude Acquaviva.

I checked the band website, hoping to find U.S. tour dates. Nothing. I checked again the next summer—no luck. Five years later, I was still checking, and then found that, to celebrate the



At Corsica's southern tip, the Plage de Sutta Rocca is a narrow pebbly beach below the towering limestone cliffs of the town of Bonifacio.



Jean-Claude Acquaviva (left, at center), the leader of singing group A Filetta, has described the vocal music of Corsica as a shared quest for perfect harmony.

Many travelers arrive in Corsica via its main port, Bastia. Victor Hugo lived in the old quarter (opposite) as a child.

to consider it more like an occupied territory—misunderstood and mistreated by federal powers. Corsican pride is untamable; Corsicans' allegiance is to their own flag, their own traditions, their own mountain. You can leash a wolf to a stake in the yard, but it's nobody's pet.

The proprietor sets down a plate of bread and meat. Corsicans are uncom-

promising about food—cheese and meat in particular. Earlier that day, at restaurant Le Don Quichotte, I'd marveled at ribbons of pancetta shaved so fine I could read the newspaper through them. The medallion of warm chèvre on my toast was so flavorful and so yielding, I wasn't even sure it was cheese. The restaurant's chalkboard menu listed the name of the shepherdess who'd supplied it, and I spent a few minutes admiring online photos of Johanna, goat kid in her arms.

Two men enter the bar and join the conversation, one a Corsican language teacher, the other a professor of philosophy. In fast French, Nico explains the American is a writer and musician, here to see A Filetta. Both seem surprised a traveler from so far would be familiar with Corsican music. I get a round of approving nods.

The Corsican teacher asks if I know what A Filetta means. I do not. The Fern, he says. There is a story, but the details escape him and the conversation proves difficult to translate. I nod, pretending to understand more than I do, and make a note to look it up.

IN THE DAYS before the concert, I do what tourists do. I walk through Plaza Foch, the open-air food market where vendors sell hanging sausages, nuts, and small jars of candied fruit that shine like oiled gemstones. Corsican fare relies on simple combinations of local, fresh ingredients—citrus pulled from trees in the garden; olive oil pressed from local groves; and *brocciu*, a soft white cheese made from the milk of goats or sheep.

But if the Corsican dinner table had a protagonist, it would be the chestnut. It's ground into

band's 40th anniversary, a concert would be performed in the Corsican capital of Ajaccio. I bought a plane ticket.

MAPS CAN'T TELL the truth about Corsica. From above, it looks like any other island: a patch of green against the blue. But Corsica is first and foremost a mountain—sheer cliffs rise from the surface of the Mediterranean as if it's just cut its way out of the sea. The truth of the place is visible only in profile.

I arrive in Ajaccio a few days before the show with plans to meet a Corsican filmmaker named Nico de Susini—the friend of a cousin of a friend who graciously agreed to orient me to the island.

Nico is tall and lean with silver curls, a French accent, and almost always a cigarette—lit or unlit—in his right hand. (“We are like an old place: Everybody smoke here.”) Over beers in a little bar, Nico introduces me to the culture: “Respect. It is the first and most important word in our parents' mouths.” As in Sicily, Nico says, traditional family values prevail. Toddling Corsicans are instructed to respect mothers, fathers, siblings, neighbors, the elderly. “When we cross the road with old people in the street, we take the bags.”

He stresses that Corsicans cannot be understood as islanders or fisherfolk: “We come—all of us—from the mountain.” The cigarette gestures inland. They may work on the coasts, but all have ties to a family village in the interior. Historically the mountain also provided a strategic position from which to defend against invasion; the island's geographical position made it a tempting conquest. Although it's been a region of France for more than 200 years, most residents seem



flour for sweet *canistrelli* biscuits, turned into paste to spread on fresh bread, made into liqueur, baked into a savory polenta-like pudding, and enthusiastically consumed not only by the human residents of the island, but also by *sangliers*, semiwild boars, whose meat is flavored by their predilection for the nut.

I buy two jars of honey. Tapping one of the lids, the vendor says, “Strong.” When I sample it, I let out an involuntary “Whoa,” surprised by a completely un-honeylike bite. Instead of a round sweetness, this honey came armed with a sharp, astringent note of ... Marmite? Makeup remover? Even before I can properly

I'd never seen such undisguised passion in the faces of singers making such a religious sound. This was not a church pew prayer. This was a bathroom floor prayer.



ARMAND LUCIANI (SINGERS); CARLOTTA CARDANA (STREET); NG MAPS AND CRAIG MOLYNEUX, CARTIBECO; PREVIOUS PAGES: NORBERT EISELE-HEINVISUM/REDUX (BEACH)

The pink mausoleum of the influential Piccioni family lies sheltered beneath pine trees in the northern mountains.



A set of 19th-century playing cards (below left) depict Napoleon Bonaparte and his extended family. Napoleon was born in Ajaccio, Corsica's capital, where a reenactor (below right) dresses as a member of the Imperial Guard. Opposite: A visitor admires the paintings in the 19th-century Greek Byzantine Catholic Church of St. Spyridon in the town of Cargèse, founded by Greek settlers on the west coast.



decide if I like it or not, I help myself to a generous second serving. I take a late afternoon bus to Pointe de la Parata to see Îles Sanguinaires, the “bloody islands” of red rock just off the coast. Gravel crunches beneath my work boots on the path up. The view at the top is a postcard in every direction: The clouds are sun roasted, the islands stark against the pastel wash of sea and sky. The pink light doesn't seem



ARCHIVIO GBB/CONTRASTO/REDUX (CARDS); PAOLO VERZONE/AGENCE VU/REDUX (REENACTOR); PREVIOUS PAGES: PAOLO VERZONE/AGENCE VU/REDUX (MAUSOLEUM)

VINCENT MIGEAT/AGENCE VU/REDUX (CHURCH)

to hit the rock, but feels attached to the air itself somehow, like vaporized rosé.

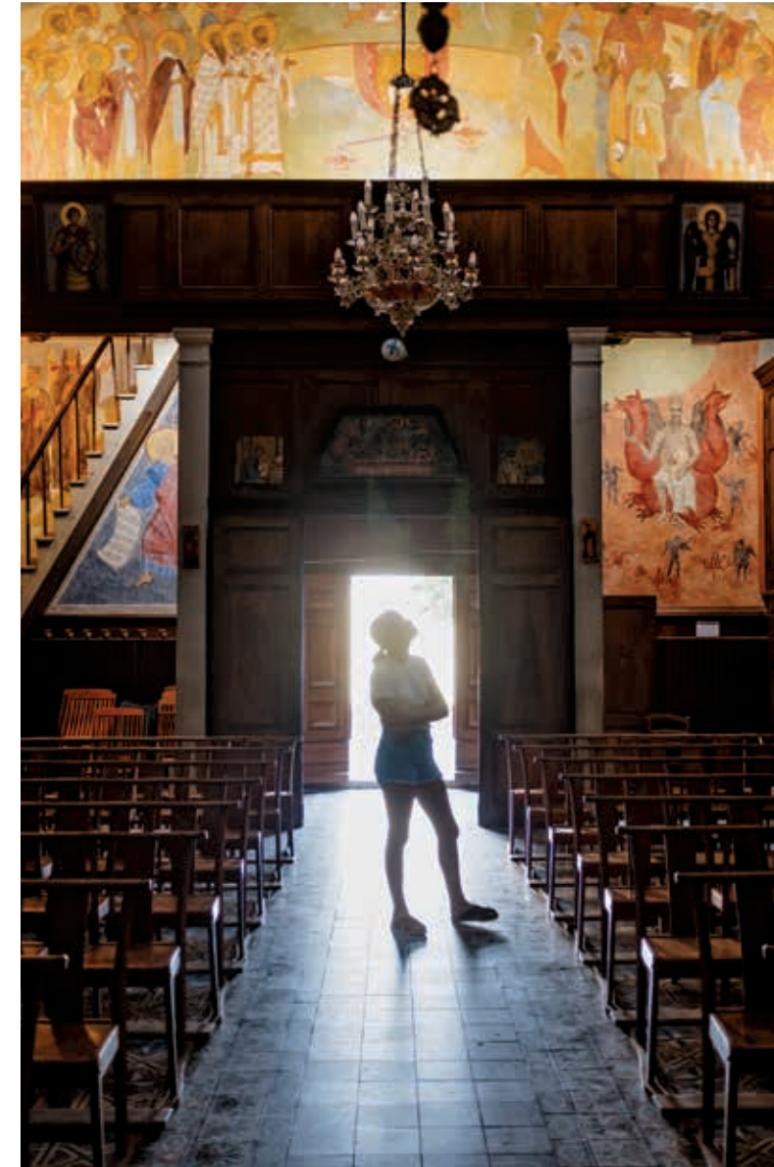
I visit the little resort town of Porticcio, a 20-minute ferry ride away, to meet a cutler who has agreed to show me his workshop and explain the tradition of Corsican knives. Simon Ceccaldi is sinewy and handsome with a quick laugh that he uses like mortar to fill holes in conversation. Standing in his one-room storefront, he explains that the Corsican knife began as a shepherd's tool; a herdsman would bring a horn from one of his animals to be fashioned into a handle and fitted with a blade. More recently, however, the vendetta knife has captured the imaginations of Corsica's visitors—a dagger purportedly used to settle feuds on the island (though that account might have more marketing appeal than historical veracity).

The knives are displayed like jewelry, propped up in flattering postures. Some blades feature fine stripes of alternating black and silver, in liquid patterns. “Damascus steel,” Simon explains, has been heated and folded many times, forming hundreds of tight layers. I watch his hands as he gestures; the right palm is traversed with a thin white line across the meat of his thumb. When I ask about it, he traces a finger down the scar and confirms it's the product of a rare careless moment with one of his own blades.

We enter the workshop behind the store, walking past sanding belts, blade templates, and a machine that cuts steel with a jet of water. Blocks of ebony, oak, boxwood, and walnut sit on shelves, waiting to become handles. We follow the sound of metal clanging to the forge where a man, backlit by fire, is battering a knife into existence.

THE NIGHT OF THE CONCERT I trudge uphill in the dark toward the venue printed on my ticket: L'Aghja. I'm eager to see what sort of Corsican will be in attendance—old people who remember the band as a soundtrack to their youth? Young families? Hipsters?

The big sign for L'Aghja comes into view, and my heart seizes. The windows are dark, the parking lot empty. A poster of A Filetta, elegant in their concert blacks, has been plastered over with a piece of printer paper and French words I don't know. I check the time: 30 minutes until the concert begins. And this sign, I'd wager, announces a change of venue. I've been waiting to see this band for seven years, I've traveled around the



world—and the thought of missing it makes me sick with panic. Across the street, I see a man and three women, walking briskly. In manic, awful French, I shout, “HELLO! I'M SORRY! DO YOU SPEAK ENGLISH!” The man turns. As I sprint toward him, backpack bouncing, I think, I would never talk to a stranger behaving the way that I am right now.

Luckily, the man is more generous with agitated strangers than I am. His name is Matthew Bertrand-Venturini. Within a minute, I'm in the back seat of a little red car, all of us heading to see A Filetta. Had the concert been moved to a larger venue? Was the ticket just misleading? It's unclear, but relief snuffs out my curiosity, as we drive away, as all Corsicans do, very fast.



VINCENT MIGEAT/AGENCE VU/REDUX (CHILD); JEAN-DANIEL SUDRES, VOYAGE GOURMAND/ARS (CLEMENTINE)



The Corsican clementine is mainly grown on the island's east side and is a staple of French markets between November and January. Opposite: A child plays around in the seaside town of Tiuccia.

Surf crashing on granite headlands provides the western Corsica coastline with its own native music.



Corsican voices: Scan the QR code at left on the Spotify app to access our curated playlist for this story.

We find our seats beside one another in the darkness of the new venue, a black box with a stage elevated a few feet off the floor and folding chairs aligned in tight rows. Haze wafts through the ray of the spotlight. Jean-Claude takes the stage and welcomes the crowd, which eagerly responds.

When the music begins, the basses resonate in such low registers, it seems impossible such sounds could issue from the body of a man built to normal scale. Jean-Claude delivers the melody in his fighter's timbre, flanked by tenors who sing harmonies so clear and sweet they almost hurt to hear. Just as in the video, the singers cup a hand around one ear to better discern their own voices in the tidal swell; they stagger their breathing so that long notes hold unbroken. I find it hard to imagine someone writing these songs, in the same way it is difficult to imagine someone inventing the bowl or the door—they seem so elemental, more a feature of the natural world than the designed.

Between songs, Jean-Claude talks about freedom and recent political events. When the group formed in the late '70s, it was born out of a movement for social and political resistance; Matthew leans over to translate when he can. But even without the exposition, the melodies are decipherable: There is love and loss and inextinguishable longing. Matthew and I agree that the best are the a cappella songs. When I hear Matthew sniffing beside me, I don't bother drying my own cheeks. I let the song dissolve the ceiling and turn the square black room into a vaulted cathedral. Jean-Claude and his men take hold of one another's forearms to raise their voices together, lifting and darting like birds, then diving in a sudden decrescendo that ends the song by guillotine.

I LEAVE CORSICA the way that everyone does—be it visitor, resident, or rebuffed invader. With plans to return.

When I look it up back at home, I learn A Filetta is named for a Corsican fern. The root structures grow horizontally, making the plant exceedingly difficult to pull or displace. No matter what army might roll in or whose flag they unfurl, the fern is resolute. It will not be moved.

I realize how fitting it is that the songs of Corsica—anthems of a robust, defiant cultural identity—should be performed by the human voice. It is the only instrument inseparable from its player, rooted firmly in the body from which it cannot be removed without a fight.

DESSA (@dessa) is a rapper, singer, and the author of *My Own Devices: True Stories From the Road on Music, Science, and Senseless Love*. *Music and tour dates at dessawander.com.*

Travel Wise: Ajaccio, Corsica

WHERE TO STAY

Hotel Napoleon is a clean and modest spot centrally located in Ajaccio. Look for the metal container labeled "Ambra Nera" by the front desk and help yourself to a honey-colored nugget of fragrant amber. en.hotel-napoleon-ajaccio.fr

WHERE TO EAT AND DRINK

Corsicans eat local and fresh. Trust the recommendations of your server, and survey neighboring tables to see what the regulars are ordering. Bakeries are plentiful and tempting. *Beignets au brocciu* are sugared pastries with a bite of soft white cheese at the center; the mild *canistrelli* biscuits are made from chestnut flour, sometimes flavored with white wine or chocolate.

If you like limoncello, look for homemade fare in unlabeled bottles. The local myrtle and maquis plants are

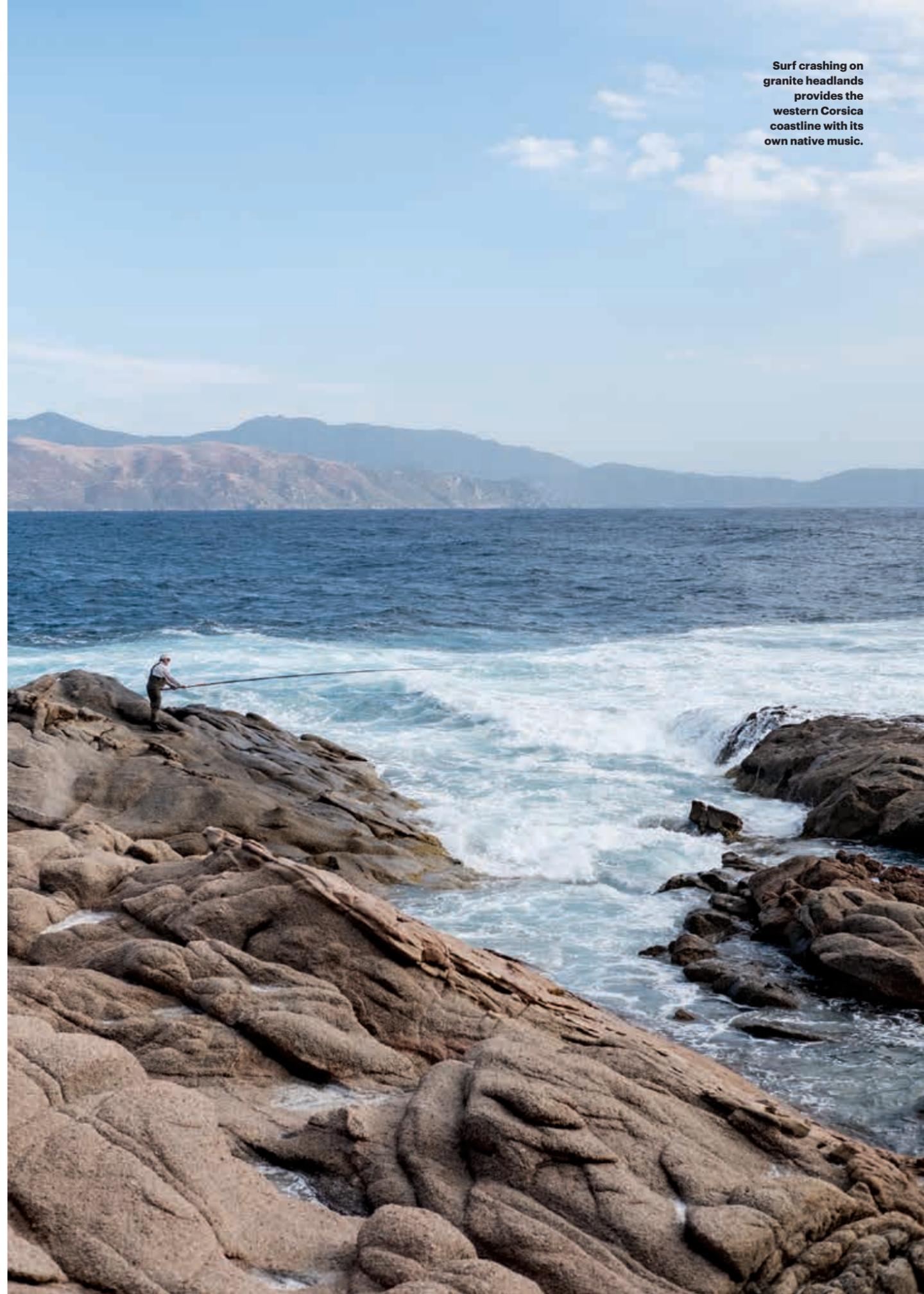
also made into sweet liqueurs.

In Ajaccio, take an evening walk down Roi de Rome, a few blocks lined with eateries, bars, and smoking Corsicans. Celebrated restaurant **Le 20123** is named after a village postcode. Next door, at **L'8 Dicembri**, male singers sometimes gather to sing Corsican songs in masterful harmony, accompanying themselves with a guitar and reading lyrics from iPhones. If you're indulging with friends, **Bar a Vin 1755** is the spot for late-night, high-calorie tapas to be shared by the table.

GO WITH NAT GEO

National Geographic Expeditions offers a "Corsica and Sardinia: Sailing the Mediterranean" cruise aboard a four-masted sailing yacht. Stops include Bonifacio and Ajaccio. natgeoexpeditions.com/explore; 888-966-8687

CHRISTINA ANZENBERGER-FINK/ANZENBERGER/REDUX (FISHERMAN); NG MAPS AND CRAIG MOLYNEUX, CARTDECO; MAP DATA © OPENSTREETMAP CONTRIBUTORS. AVAILABLE UNDER OPEN DATABASE LICENSE: OPENSTREETMAP/NG/COPYRIGHT



*Sacred. Healing. Loud.
Morocco's music scene draws
on ancient roots—and drums up
modern dance beats*

By **Mickey Rapkin**



M O R O C C O



T H I S

story begins like all good ones do, with a 66-year-old man standing on stage, dressed as a goat.

It is late March, and I've come to Morocco, in part, to see a rare public performance by the Master Musicians of Joujouka, a group of traditional Sufi trance artists from a remote corner south of the Rif Mountains who have nevertheless captivated the world. Brian Jones of the Rolling Stones recorded the Masters in their village in the late '60s. William S. Burroughs and Timothy Leary famously dubbed them "the 4,000-year-old rock band." More recently, Billy Corgan of the Smashing Pumpkins spent a week just observing them.

The Masters' brand of ancient trance isn't simply entertaining. It's also said to have healing powers. The half man, half goat who is part of their act is called Bou Jeloud, and according to folklore, if he hits you with a stick during a performance, you *will* get pregnant. More on that soon.

The plan was to spend a week exploring Morocco through its music, which is as varied as its landscapes—from the Atlas Mountains to the red walls of Marrakech to the expansive deserts, where the sound takes on a shape and color all its own. Here, Berber drums beat in surprising rhythms, and music played on ouds, an instrument like an 11-string lute, reflects the country's Arabic roots. Here, Gnawa music emerged from the country's slave-trading past, carried over on slave ships from West Africa that docked in Mogador, now called Essaouira. Taken together, the music provides a soundtrack to the country's rich and complicated history, and a creative tool to shape an itinerary.

It wasn't my idea, exactly. Paul Bowles did it first. In 1957 the author of *The Sheltering Sky* asked the Library of Congress to sponsor a recording expedition across Morocco. He hoped to preserve the country's music before foreign influence muddied the waters. (He was also maybe a colonialist who never wanted

MARC SETHI (FESTIVAL); PREVIOUS PAGES: ALLAL FADLI (BOYS); SERGEY LOBODEVKO/GETTY IMAGES (ALL ILLUSTRATIONS)



The Beat Hotel Marrakech is one of the newest of Morocco's live music fests that attract global crowds. Previous pages: A love of music propels these boys from Tinghir Province. The two on the left hold versions of a *guembri*, a lute-like instrument.



KRISTA ROSSOW (MOSQUE); NG MAPS AND CRAIG MOLYNEUX, CARTDECO

DON'T MISS IN MARRAKECH

Presumably there's an Arabic word for "bored," but why learn it? From lavish desert gardens to live music in surprising venues, Marrakech will keep you moving all day—and all night.

Musée de Mouassine

This *riad* inside the medina dating from the 17th century was painstakingly restored, revealing gorgeous plaster, pink gypsum walls, and brightly colored pillars. The painter Abdelhay Mellakh was born in the house. The building was reborn as a museum with some choice Berber artifacts, and it also hosts live music three nights a week. Monday night is oud music, Wednesday is Gnawa, and Friday is Berber. museedemouassine.com

Café Clock

An all-female band called B'net Houariyat performs traditional anthems every Saturday night at 6 p.m. These women from the Houara region sit in a corner and perform at full volume to the beat of Berber drums. Note: There's no alcohol here. Entry is five dollars. cafeclock.com

Les Nomades de Marrakech

Shops are plentiful in the souk, but Les Nomades de Marrakech is a two-floor mecca inside the medina. Sit down, and the staff will bring you a glass of mint tea, then present you with vintage Berber rugs in every shade, Beni Ourain classics in lush patterns, and contemporary pieces woven on-site. lesnomadesdemarrakech.com

La Maison Arabe

This iconic boutique hotel offers a four-hour cooking class led by a *dada* (traditional Moroccan cook), using equipment you likely already have at home. The classes are small (no more than 10 students), and at the end of the class you'll eat what you made—maybe a perfect tagine. Daily live Gnawa music takes place in the lobby from 3 to 6 p.m. lamaisonarabe.com

Jardin Majorelle

Yves Saint Laurent purchased these enchanted gardens in the center of the city in 1980. The complex, painted an intense azure named Majorelle blue, inspired the designer, who fell in love with Morocco and incorporated the color into his collections. After his death in 2008, his partner donated the gardens to their nonprofit foundation in Paris. There's now a small Berber museum on-site, with an impressive jewelry room. Pro tip? Hire a guide. The joint is often packed from early morning. But local guides have access to a separate ticket window, and you can basically walk right in. jardinmajorelle.com

GO WITH NAT GEO

National Geographic Expeditions offers several Morocco trips, including the 12-day "Legendary Cities and the Sahara," which includes a Sufi musical performance and a stay at Kasbah du Toubkal. natgeoexpeditions.com/explore; 888-966-8687

Morocco to evolve.) But his expedition proved fruitful. For four months he and his assistant hauled bulky recording equipment across more than 1,100 miles—capturing folkloric sing-alongs, sword dances, percussion on goatskin drums, and even the final call to prayer delivered in Tangier without speaker wires.

I didn't need reel-to-reel tape. I had an iPhone. As I'd discover over this unlikely week of travels—which included the Master Musicians of Joujouka as the surprising headliners of a hip, new electronic music festival—neither these layered musical traditions nor the young people populating today's scene are stuck in amber. The past very much informs the present, with a new generation of artists emerging in thrilling ways. This revolution will be livestreamed.

From the moment I touch down, it's easy to see why Bowles was captivated by the music. In Marrakech, musicians and snake charmers gather on the famous square, Djemaa el Fna, the sound of horns echoing off the walls of the old city. Scooters rip-roar through increasingly narrow streets, like its own percussion. The Islamic call to prayer—the *adhan*—bellows out five times a day.

Down a twisty side street (as everything must be in the Red City), I sit for a cup of tea with a Gnawa master named Mohammed Sudani, whose official job is to keep the fires of a local hammam burning. He sits on a carpet in what feels like a cave, strumming a *guembri*—a hollowed-out, single piece of wood covered in camel skin and shaped like a canoe—and singing in Tamazight (the language group of the Berber people, the indigenous tribes whose traditions long predate the arrival of the Arab people in Morocco). The string of his fez spins atop his head like a ceiling fan.

Through a translator, he tells me: "The music is spiritual. The music is a doctor." He isn't exaggerating. The healing power of music will be a running theme. My guide explains the Gnawa ceremony of *lila*, which is said to force out the evil spirits, the bad jinn. A pioneering female Gnawa musician named Khadija El Warzazia will later echo this point, telling me how she once cured a Swiss man of his persistent erectile dysfunction (!) during a powerful *lila* that began with a goat sacrifice. She also tells me she's clairvoyant. What does she see for my future? She smiles: "Only good things."

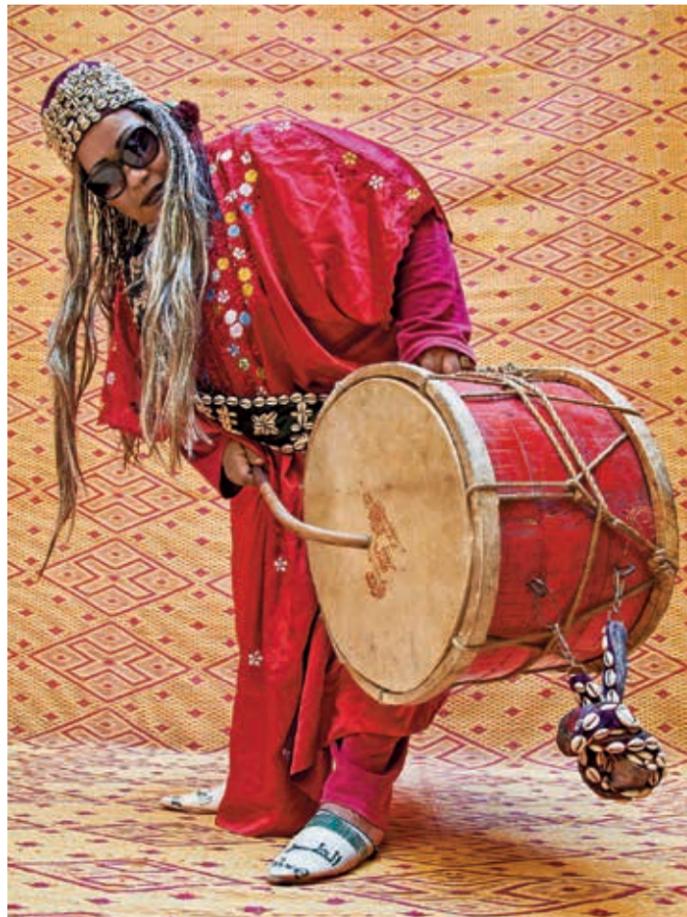
Eager to take a break from the kinetic energy of Marrakech—and wanting to dig deeper into the country's musical



In Casablanca, the Hassan II Mosque features elaborate artisanship in its hand-carved stone, gilded cedar ceilings, marble floors, and mosaic tilework. It's all a gorgeous feat of human engineering and imagination, with a retractable roof that opens in five minutes.



Four hours' drive southeast of Marrakech, the oasis town of Ouarzazate and its surroundings have become a popular filming location.



TOP MUSIC FESTIVALS

There's been a burst of live music festivals in Morocco. Here are seven to plan a trip around. And for additional insight into the mix of past and present in Moroccan music, check out musician Hatim Belyamani's website, remix-culture.org.

MARRAKECH The Beat Hotel

[MARCH] The new festival was held for the first time in 2019 at the Fellah Hotel, a 20-minute drive from the medina. This initial outing was popular with British party kids excited to binge on sunshine and (comparatively) cheap booze. Asked about her musical inspirations, Yasmean, a DJ from Casablanca who performed at the festival, said that growing up, she had "a bunch of tapes with Gnawa music, but the influence was minimal on me. I was more influenced by the sound of jazz and later built my taste in electronic music. Thank God for the internet." beat-hotel.com

RABAT Festival de Mawazine

[JUNE] Ninety acts play on six stages at Mawazine, which is presided over by the Moroccan king's personal secretary. One of the largest music festivals in the world, it drew 2.5 million people in 2013. How big is it? One of last year's headliners was Bruno Mars. mawazine.ma

ESSAOUIRA Gnaoua & World Music Festival

[JUNE] Launched in 1998, this four-day fest (held in the city's UNESCO World Heritage-inscribed medina) features Gnawa music, brought north by sub-Saharan slaves in the 16th century. It can get hot in June, so you'll be thankful for Essaouira's famous ocean breeze. festival-gnaoua.net

FÈS

Fès Festival of World Sacred Music

[JUNE] Ben Harper, Björk, and Patti Smith have all played at this festival, which aims to cross cultural boundaries and create harmony with... harmony. Come for the big names, stay for the Sufi trance. fesfestival.com

CASABLANCA Jazzablanca

[JULY] This annual showcase of jazz (and jazz fusion, funk, blues, rock, soul, pop, and electronic) hosts some 75,000 fans, with a spotlight on local Moroccan acts. jazzablanca.com

MARRAKECH Atlas Electronic

[AUGUST] Atlas Electronic aims to bring a fifty-fifty mix of local acts and international talent to an ecolodge 20 minutes outside Marrakech. When British DJ James Holden, who performed at the festival in 2016, was asked about the alleged healing powers of Gnawa music, he didn't shy away from the magic. "I think that's why I like music anyway," he said. "It doesn't cure headaches. But when I was a kid, if I played nice chords for an hour, it felt pretty good." Imagine how good four days will make you feel. atlas-electronic.com

MARRAKECH Oasis

[SEPTEMBER] The slogan is descriptive: "Dance somewhere different." Oasis has top-tier production and was among the first to bring big international acts to Morocco, taking over Marrakech's Fellah Hotel. This cosmopolitan festival will challenge your assumptions about Moroccan youth culture. theoasisfest.com

traditions—I ask Sarah Casewit, co-founder of the experiential travel outfit Naya Traveler, to arrange a music lesson for me at a small Berber village in the High Atlas Mountains.

The drive is stunning. These mountains begin at the Atlantic Ocean and stretch across to the Algerian border. Marrakech's red walls quickly give way to olive tree groves and then snow-capped peaks. An hour into the journey, we stop for tea at an open-air Berber market in a town called Tahannawt. My tour guide, Mohammed—ruggedly handsome despite a very '90s soul patch growing on his chin—came armed with jokes.

"Did you see the Berber 4x4s outside?" he says, pointing to a row of donkeys.

The market (open only on Tuesday mornings) is filled with vendors selling vegetables and juicy strawberries, which are gloriously in season. Charcoal clouds from small grills waft through the tight aisles of the market. Spice vendors lead to clothing stalls and finally to a meat-and-fish market, where you can buy a whole goat—slaughtered and cleaned—but with its hairy face still attached. Proof you're getting what you paid for.

Mohammed haggles over the price of the tea leaves we're about to brew. Why argue over such a small purchase? He laughs, telling me haggling makes mundane tasks exciting: "It makes it tasty." Which is the best explanation I've ever heard and also an invitation for everyone to play the game with confidence. When the tea is properly steeped, Mohammed raises the kettle high in the air and shows me how to pour a cup. One should never announce that tea is ready, he says. Simply start pouring and let the bubbling sound be the siren call. There is music everywhere.

As promised, the village of Anraz (population around 600) is seriously remote. The Soul Patch and I hike through lush green hills dotted with white cherry blossoms, walking past a dozen sheep out for a leisurely stroll. Finally we arrive at a rustic hilltop village of adobe huts and low doorways. At first glance, little appears to have changed in decades. Or so I think. Until the local kids greet me as modern kids do everywhere: by staring down, their faces glued to the glowing screens of their smartphones.

I'd read up on Berber history at the tour operator's behest. Sarah had grown up in Morocco, and she'd told me there was a movement away from the term "Berber," which had been thrust upon the tribes by the Romans, taken from the word "barbarian." The locals preferred to be called Amazigh, or "free people." And their music has been one of the most prominent ways of maintaining their identity. (A must-see museum of Amazigh history is housed in the Jardin Majorelle in Marrakech; elsewhere, the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture launched in 2001, aiming to bring the Tamazight language and music to public schools.)

Hassan Hajjaj is a Moroccan artist, photographer, and designer whose My Maroc Stars portrait series showcases Moroccan cultural influencers, including (clockwise from top left) singer Hindi Zahra, Khadija El Warzazia of the all-female Berber ensemble B'net Houariyat, a member of the Arfoud Brothers band, and guembri-playing Simo Lagnawi.



HASSAN HAJJAJ (ALL PORTRAITS); PREVIOUS PAGES: © MASSIMO RIPANISIME/ISTOCK PHOTO (CITYSCAPE)

Filled with smoke, sound, and spectacle, Djemaa el Fna has been a trade and social center of Marrakech's medina (Arab quarter) since medieval times.





FOOD + DRINK

Morocco is a feast for the eyes, ears, and taste buds. There's street food fit for a king, and rooftop restaurants take you beyond the tagine.

MARRAKECH

Royal Mansour

This stunning hotel property, set on five acres of lush grounds, often houses guests of King Mohammed VI. Even if you can't afford to stay here, it's worth coming by for a drink, and maybe a snack from Michelin-starred chef Yannick Alléno. royalmansour.com

MARRAKECH

Shtatto

In Marrakech, it's all about the rooftop view. Shtatto offers a stunning one. Sip a green juice, and post a photo to Instagram. *81 Derb Nkhal, Rahba Lakdima*

MARRAKECH

Chez Lamine Hadj Mustapha

For less than five dollars, you can eat lamb that has been slow-cooked underground for 10 hours. Sprinkle cumin on top, and eat it with your fingers. *18-26 Souk Ablouh*

CASABLANCA

Bazaar Dinner Club

At this Moroccan take on a gastropub, the dining room turns into a late-night dance floor. *57 Avenue Hassan Souktani Gauthier*

MARRAKECH

Le Salama

A stylish, three-story delight with a delicious tagine and a wine list, this is one of very few restaurants with a liquor license. *40 Rue des Banques*

if I am an eagle flying over rivers or a falcon pretending to be a man—before letting the *tap-tap-tap* of the rain lull me to sleep.

return to Marrakech just in time to see the Master Musicians of Joujouka perform at the Beat Hotel festival, held on the grounds of a chic 27-acre boutique hotel outside of town. In addition to the Masters, the lineup includes upstart DJs from Casablanca, pop-up restaurants, and a spa tent offering yoga. The transition is jarring. British party kids with sunburned skin and vape pens sit around a pool. The Wi-Fi password is MOONLIGHT. This isn't what Burroughs or the Beat poets imagined. But it is a bold mash-up of genres and experiences come to life.

The Masters—who range in age from late 40s to 86—take the stage after ten o'clock, under a white tent with a top-tier sound system and a serious light rig. The 13 men are dressed in jellabas. They carry drums and reed instruments and sit in a single row of chairs facing the crowd. The music is visceral, the high-pitch whir of the *lira* flutes like a snake worming its way through my earholes and taking hold of my brain stem. Historically, this brand of Sufi trance had been used to entertain the court of the sultan. It was also performed to inspire soldiers prior to battle. Which makes sense. It is that loud from the first drumbeat.

The Masters play nonstop for two hours, with more energy than men half their age. An hour into the show, Bou Jeloud—the half man, half goat—finally appears. The man under all that goatskin is called Mohamed El Hatmi. He's 66 years old, and he's been dressing up as this furry icon for more than 35 years. He measures a hair under five feet tall. But he is superhuman, climbing down into the crowd and running back and forth among the people, shaking his sticks in the air.

We're in the presence of great power, a friend whispers. "People that have mental problems or feel possessed by some affliction come to the village of Joujouka," he says, adding: "Close your eyes." I don't get pregnant. But I am changed.

When Brian Jones recorded the Master Musicians of Joujouka 51 years ago, it basically launched the category we call "world music." But there's a vibrant, creative class on display at the Beat Hotel and elsewhere in Morocco—a new generation of artists challenging cultural norms and carving out their own landscape. Maalem Houssam Guinia, son of the late Gnawa legend Maalem Mahmoud Guinia, performs at the festival with the celebrated British DJ James Holden. The bill also includes two young DJs, Kosh and Driss Bennis. Driss is the founder of electronic label Casa Voyager, named for a train station in their native Casablanca. But their major influence, they tell me, wasn't Berber folkloric music but rather the Detroit electronic and techno scene.

Simmer and sizzle (clockwise from top left): Mint tea refreshes at Le Jardin des Biehn, a boutique hotel in Fès; a caretaker stokes the fires of a hammam in Marrakech's medina; the tagine, a lidded earthenware pot that is a staple of Moroccan kitchens, slow-cooks meats, vegetables, and stews; food stalls pack Marrakech's Djemaa el Fna.



FRANCESCO LASTRUCCI (TEA), KRISTA ROSSOW (HAMMAM), TAGINE, VENDORI; PREVIOUS PAGES: RAINER JAHNS (SQUARE)

There is more tea awaiting—with mountains of white sugar cubes—as four men dressed in flowing jellabas and four women in head scarves and lace skirts prepare to perform. One of the men is warming the skin of his drum over an open fire; the goat-skin can get tight in the cold, and the sound resonates better with a little heat. I ask what the songs are about. The drummer shrugs, then says, "Love and history." What else is there to sing about?

The ritual music—which is usually performed at weddings and at important life events or simply around the house—rings out in a gleeful call-and-response. Sometimes the women hold hands; other times they shimmy and laugh. Seated on the floor, my guide whispers that this particular song is about masculinity—about striving to be an "eagle that crosses the ocean" and not "a falcon that merely crosses a river." We should all be eagles, he says. Which is the opposite of how I feel when the men pull me into the circle, dress me in a jellaba, and hand me a drum. While the rhythm eludes me, the joy does not.

That evening, I check into Kasbah du Toubkal, an Amazigh retreat some 6,000 feet above sea level, on the edge of Toubkal National Park, in the small town of Imlil. There is no road up to the front door. A driver drops me off in town, where a donkey takes my luggage on a 15-minute trek to the hotel's gate.

It is seriously cold that night, and it pours a near-biblical flood. I am startled by a sudden knock at the door. My host has brought me a hot water bottle to warm the bed, which, I can attest, is truly one of life's great lo-fi pleasures. In bed I wonder

Driss admits this has sometimes been a problem for them from a marketing standpoint. The press, he says, always wants there to be some hipster Gnawa backstory to their journey. “The cliché of the local Africans that play ethnic and fusion music,” Driss says. “But that’s not what we do.”

“I didn’t have Gnawa music on my iPod growing up,” says Kosh. “When I was a teenager, it was Iron Maiden, Metallica.” This is part of the reason Driss started Casa Voyager.

“The label is a way of documenting a moment,” Driss says. “We are here in Morocco. In Casablanca. In 2019. Making records. We want to break this colonial dynamic.” Translation: Thank you, Paul Bowles, but we’ll take the mic now.

I feel as if I am witnessing a revolution or perhaps an emancipation from expectation. The very existence of this festival—and others like it in Morocco—is proof that this generation is already seizing the throne. Early in the trip, I was introduced to two hip Moroccan cats, Reda Kadmiri and Karim Mrabti, who are consultants for the Beat Hotel, after Karim founded his own groundbreaking festival, Atlas Electronic, four years earlier.

Reda grew up partially in Montreal; Karim was raised in Rotterdam. It was that outsider mentality that partly inspired Karim to get Atlas Electronic off the ground. Dressed in an orange sweatshirt, black jeans, thin gold chain, and Adidas sneakers, Karim recalled the uphill battle they’d faced. Was it safe? Would people come? But he’d pushed back, saying, “If there can be a wedding of 500 people in Morocco, there can also be a festival.” Or a dozen of them.

Reda is standing next to me while the Master Musicians of Joujouka play. He’s traveled to Joujouka four times to stay with the Masters. And he greets them with arms wide open. Reda had returned to his native Morocco with a purpose, and the music he championed has a healing power all its own. “Culturally,” he says, “Morocco has been through many changes in the 63 years since independence. But today we see a generation of young Moroccans torn between two different appeals: one of conservatism and one of progressive emancipation. And those two currents are very strong. There are times in history where the balance could go [either] way. And it just seems the cause is so close and every hand is important on deck right now.”

Traditional zellij mosaic and marble decorate the central courtyard of Riad Dar Seffarine, a 600-year-old guesthouse in the medina of Fès.

STAY

Lodging in Morocco ranges from boutique riads behind city walls to hilltop escapes where the view is the only decor you need. What these hotels all have in common is the element of surprise.

MARRAKECH

Riad Farnatchi

Everyone should stay inside the walls of the medina at least once. The streets of Marrakech are a twisty maze, with donkeys sharing narrow passages with motorbikes. But behind the hulking wooden door of Riad Farnatchi—one of the first boutique riads in town—stands a 10-suite hideaway with a tranquil courtyard and an adjoining spa. riadfarnatchi.com

IMLIL

Kasbah du Toubkal

This 14-room eco-sanctuary is a National Geographic Unique Lodge, in the High Atlas Mountains. Here you can dine under snowcapped peaks that could be in Bhutan. (So much so that Martin Scorsese shot parts of his Dalai Lama film, *Kundun*, here.) Enjoy soaking in a traditional hammam, or go for a walk with one of the local guides. natgeolodges.com

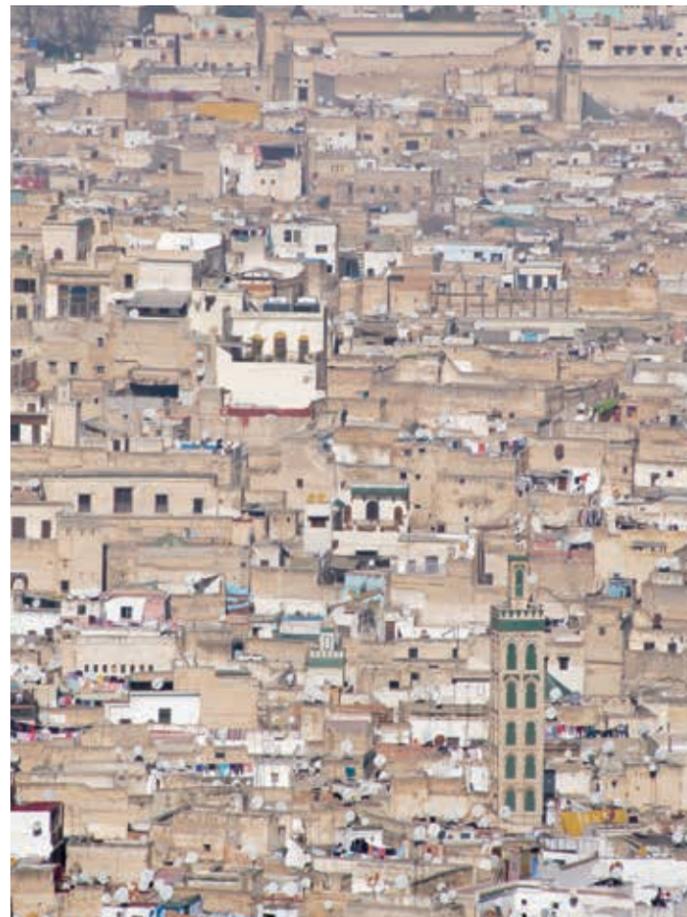
MARRAKECH

Villa des Orangers

A 20th-century riad was revamped and restored to create this 27-room lodging within the medina, the perfect mix of luxury hotel and intimate retreat. The main courtyard is dotted with orange trees, and a heated swimming pool makes for an essential end-of-day refresh. It’s just a five-minute walk to the Djemaa el Fna square. Both breakfast and lunch are included. villadesorangers.com



FRANCESCO LASTRUCCI



Moroccan rhythms: Scan the QR code at left on the Spotify app for our curated playlist for this story.

Looking around, he says: “There are beautiful examples of the diaspora coming back home—finding their space, their community, and their role.”

What happens next? Not even a clairvoyant like Khadija could know that. I ask Frank Rynne, who manages the Master Musicians of Joujouka, about the future of the band. Would their children take over? Frank is optimistic—although he acknowledges the issue has been exacerbated by the arrival of cell phone service in their remote village. “The kids in Joujouka love the music, but they’re drawn to the bright lights, big city. You’ve got kids from Joujouka throwing gang signs on Facebook.”

The cultural tectonic plates are shifting in thrilling ways. Still, the single best show I see all week is at Café Clock in Marrakech, where four women perform traditional music at deafening volume while young people dance like nobody is watching. Except someone is watching. Because they’re all filming themselves with their iPhones.

Before I leave town, I take a day trip to Essaouira—a port city on the Atlantic Ocean where Jimi Hendrix, Cat Stevens, and Frank Zappa all famously traveled for inspiration. Essaouira is a three-hour drive from Marrakech, and it’s home to a four-day Gnawa festival held every summer. My driver plays traditional folkloric music the entire way, telling me the metal of the castanets is meant to recall the sounds of the chains the slaves wore. Months later, I will struggle to get the *clang-clang-clang* out of my head.

The seaside city emerges from the mist like a dream. Or like an oil painting of 18th-century fortifications protecting a sacred port. According to legend, Hendrix wrote “Castles Made of Sand” about Essaouira. It’s a good story. But the song was actually released two years *before* Hendrix’s first known visit. Still, I could see why the story lingers. The joint is that beautiful. Essaouira is like Marrakech’s polar opposite, or a palate cleanser anyway: a beach town where children kick around a sand-covered soccer ball while their parents take in the sun. The place is still inspiring global artists. HBO’s *Game of Thrones* came here to film a season-three scene featuring the Mother of Dragons, Daenerys Targaryen.

In the old medina, tight rows of vendors sell meat and spices

Mythic Morocco (clockwise from top left): The Atlas Mountains extend for more than 1,200 miles and form the geologic backbone of Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia; a visitor braves midday heat to stroll Marrakech’s casbah (old citadel quarter); Fès’s medina brims with life; the minaret of Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca is the world’s tallest at 689 feet.



and carpets. Photos of Hendrix still hang in shop windows. I head to Taros Café, a rooftop escape with glimmering ocean views. I’d heard that musicians sometimes perform out on the deck, although apparently that’s only at night. It is lunchtime, and I am starving. So I sit anyway and stare out at the azure ocean, ordering a baked white fish and a glass of cheap white wine. I hear music from the town square below, where tourists clap for local musicians, throwing coins into guitar cases.

I find myself thinking about a conversation I’d had with a DJ who lives in Casablanca called Kali G, who often samples Moroccan folkloric music—Berber voices, Gnawa instruments like the flute that announces the start of Ramadan—into his dance tracks. I’d asked him about Sufi trance and about healing. How does it work? And could I take it home with me? He smiled, then said, “First you have to get rid of your material possessions. Then ego. Only when you say goodbye to fear do you open the door to something beautiful.” He was right.

Sitting here on the rooftop, I am listening to a different type of music: the sound of the *alizé*, Essaouira’s famous coastal winds. Taros, the name of the restaurant, is actually the Berber word for “coastal wind.” The waves lap up on the shore below, rushing in, rushing out. There’s no need to rush at all.

MICKEY RAPKIN (@mickeyrapkin) is a writer in Los Angeles and author of the book *Pitch Perfect*. His first children’s book, *It’s Not a Bed, It’s a Time Machine*, was published this year.

CARLEY RUDD (MOUNTAINS, CITYSCAPE, MINARET), KRISTA ROSSOW (WALKER); NG MAPS AND CRAIG MOLYNEUX, CARTDECO; PARK DATA FROM THE WORLD DATABASE ON PROTECTED AREAS (WDPA), MAP DATA © OPENSTREETMAP CONTRIBUTORS, AVAILABLE UNDER OPEN DATABASE LICENSE; OPENSTREETMAP/COPYRIGHT

*What does silence sound like?
We go in search of nature's
hush on a Southern
California road trip*

By **George W. Stone**
Photographs by **Jennifer Emerling**



CALIFORNIA

A QUEST FOR QUIET



K I K I , D O Y O U L O V E M E ?

*Are you riding?
Say you'll never ever
leave from beside me...*

I'm sitting at an amoeba-shaped resort pool in Palm Springs, and a DJ is blasting Drake to a puddle of swimmers doing more soaking than splashing. I measure 84 decibels—the volume of a very loud and extremely close Vitamix blending a batch of piña colodas. My thoughts are screaming for attention they will not get because I'm buffeted by beats, deafened by the din, drowning in a sea of sound in this hip-hop hot tub. I'm longing for an island of silence. I know I'm not alone.

Sound—waves of vibrating airborne molecules that smash into one another before crashing into our eardrums—has always been a part of our world. But environmental noise is the haze of our days, a human-made fog that pollutes the space around us. Conversations carry on at 60 decibels (dB), vacuum cleaners whir at 70, alarm clocks wail at 80, stadiums can rock as loud as 130.

This is not to suggest that our planet is silent: The calls of some species of cicada can surpass 110 dB. Thunder claps at 120. The loudest clicks from sperm whales have been measured at 230—louder than a rocket launch but emanating underwater. Earth itself has a sound, an incessant hum caused by pounding ocean waves, measured at a frequency 10,000 times lower than what humans can hear.

Sometimes I worry that I've forgotten how to listen—how to separate layers of sound and explore the audible dimensions around me. How much of my life am I missing when I'm not listening?

So I set out on a 500-mile sound quest that took me from the drumbeat of civilization to nearly noiseless realms. I did not turn on the radio, though occasionally I sang a song that came to mind. I barely spoke; instead I tried to hear whatever came my way. As a traveler, I know that there is beauty in stillness and harmony in silence. My path started with a plane (120 dB) smacking down on a runway in Southern California. Which is where my journey begins...

Palm Springs pops with bubblegum pink and other sunny colors at places such as (clockwise from top) the mid-century modern "lion house" and the deck at the Saguaro Hotel. When not working at Saguaro, Jorge Castellon is a dancer with a serious fan collection. Opening pages: Tiki enthusiasts gather annually at Caliente Tropics Resort.



SERGEY LOBODENKO/GETTY IMAGES (ALL ILLUSTRATIONS)

ELVIS HONEYMOON HIDEAWAY, PALM SPRINGS, 42 DECIBELS

Suspicious minds are wondering what I'm up to, holding a microphone to the house where Elvis and his bride, Priscilla, retreated following their 1967 nuptials. A self-guided drive to celebrity homes has led me to the King's banana-colored, boomerang-hooded manor, currently on the market for \$3.2 million. Fans can book a guided tour to check out the futuristic contours of this four-bedroom "house of tomorrow," situated at the base of the San Jacinto Mountains. I've come for a little less conversation. I'm here on a mission to listen.

I've assembled a tool kit for measurements that includes a decibel meter, a digital recorder, an ambient temperature gauge, and a heart rate monitor. At 11:45 a.m. it's 84°F. Birds trill as a springtime breeze washes over branches. Beyond a sense of calm, there's not much to detect.

Palm Springs is a playground of shape and color, a mid-century marvel of manicured lawns, modernist homes (glass, stone, terrazzo, and Formica), and poolside saturnalia set within an arid ecosystem that can seem like the surface of Mars. The combination of desert minimalism and architectural

Nature sets the soundtrack along the Andreas Canyon Trail in Indian Canyons, Palm Springs. Birds chirp, water trickles, and wind rustles palm fronds in this quiet oasis.

So I head 20 minutes south to Indian Canyons, the ancestral home of the Agua Caliente Band of Cahuilla Indians. I park and hike into Palm Canyon, a shaded oasis with a creek that weaves around boulders and rushes over stones. Kneeling beside the water, I measure 65 dB (a working air conditioner). The sun is bright, and the air is dry, despite the 86°F heat. As I step away from the creek, I hear my footsteps on gravel and the occasional flitting of a grasshopper. Painted lady caterpillars cross my path as I disappear into a soundscape that feels like velvet.

VARNER HARBOR, SALTON SEA, 58 DECIBELS

"A date palm must have its feet in the water and its head in the

*Earth itself has a sound, an incessant hum caused by
pounding ocean waves, measured at a frequency
10,000 times lower than what humans can hear.*

daring ushered in an era of swizzle sticks and domestic idealism.

With design in mind, I putter around town, ogling the estates of stars from another era: Marilyn Monroe, Liberace, Frank Sinatra. In terms of architectural impact, few properties come close to the Kaufmann Desert House, designed by Richard Neutra in 1946 for the Pittsburgh retail magnate who had previously tapped Frank Lloyd Wright to build Fallingwater in Pennsylvania. I wind up at the former estate of singer and talk show host Dinah Shore. At 12:26 p.m. and 88°F, it is only slightly louder than Elvis's house—47 dB, about as loud as a babbling brook. A crow caws and flies buzz as gardeners tend to the grass, perhaps in anticipation of the return of current owner Leonardo DiCaprio.

In recent years the city has attracted a cool crowd, drawn to the Coachella Valley for lost weekends at formerly faded motels that have been reinvented to Rat Pack splendor: the Ace, the Saguaro, the Parker (opened as California's first Holiday Inn in 1959, later owned by Gene Autry and Merv Griffin, now a Jonathan Adler-designed emblem of modernism's resilience). The valley is quiet, but the city is getting louder.

fires of heaven," states an Arabic proverb quoted by E. Floyd Shields, founder of Shields Date Garden, in his 1952 manifesto *The Romance and Sex Life of the Date*. Date shakes are to this stretch of desert what egg creams are to Brooklyn or key lime pie is to the Florida Keys—indulgent necessities open to infinite interpretation. Only a coldhearted road tripper heading southeast toward Indio on I-10 would pass Shields's roadside curiosity without tasting the granddaddy of all date shakes. The site is significant in California agricultural history and a relic from an era when roadside attractions were famous for being famous and worthy of seeing just to say you saw them.

In the garden's café, blenders whirl quietly behind a screen (no more than 55 dB) as they whip up vanilla ice cream and crystallized dried date flakes into a concoction that is way too sweet but superdelicious. I sip my shake as I step into a wood-paneled movie theater that has been screening, for decades running, the founder's "treatise on date culture."

I need the sugar for the 45-minute drive past Coachella, Thermal, Mecca, Mortmar, and finally to California's largest





“We’re doing the desert—for real,” says Phoenix Demille (top), with her dog, Mazie, outside the Giant Rock Meeting Room, a café in Yucca Valley. Arid attractions near the Salton Sea include folk art masterwork Salvation Mountain and the café at Shields Date Garden, home to a creamy date shake.

lake, the Salton Sea, a saline lake in the Sonoran Desert that formed in 1905 when the Colorado River breached its silt-clogged levees and, over nearly two years, flooded a basin along the San Andreas Fault. It wasn’t the first time the valley had been flooded—it had done so in preceding centuries—but this time part of the lake was transformed into a tourist attraction.

“Out of disaster come desert beaches with their excellent bathing, boating and motorboat racing,” wrote Shields, around the time that waterside resorts began to bubble up. But the 1950s recreational dream was illusory; by the 1970s, rising water levels, increasing salinity (the lake has no drainage outlet), and agricultural runoff began to spell doom for the holiday destination. Although this body of water remains a stop on the Pacific flyway for migratory birds, it’s now most often described in apocalyptic terms—as a dying ecosystem that coughs up algal blooms, dead fish, and rank odors.

There are two songs of the Salton Sea: The first is a 58-decibel natural rhythm of birds tweeting, water gently lapping, wind racing over the glassy surface. The second song, increasing in volume, is a lament of environmental degradation, a requiem for

instruments—43,000-year-old flutes made from bird bone and mammoth ivory, found in a cave in southern Germany—suggest that music played a part in early *Homo sapiens* society.

The communal benefits of music have been valued for centuries, from Egyptian incantations to Greek flutes and lyres to Chinese bells and wind chimes, Indigenous Australian didgeridoos, African drums, and Native American rattles.

In recent years, sound baths have made waves in meditation and therapeutic circles as antidotes to stress, depression,

*This is the sound of intention:
of people making an effort to connect with each other
and listen to the world. It’s music to my ears.*



a smothered shoreline. While some conservationists are motivated by the first song to restore this ecosystem, most visitors, myself included, are carried away by the mournful melody.

THE INTEGRATRON, LANDERS, 39 DECIBELS

On the road north to my next stop I pass under colossal wind turbines that slice the sky like vorpal swords and see power cables stretched across the horizon like the strings of an immense violin. I’m recalling “Jabberwocky,” Lewis Carroll’s nonsense poem, which relies on invented words that sound exactly like what they mean, even though they are meaningless. *’Twas brillig, and the slithy toves / Did gyre and gimble in the wabe ...*

It’s fun to remember things you think you’ve forgotten, and a road trip is perfect for this. I’m heading from the Sonoran toward the Mojave Desert, pondering dreamscapes of monsters like the Jubjub bird and the frumious Bandersnatch—fantastical creatures that will live forever in my memory because their author put their sonorous names to verse and rhyme.

Sound is food for the ears and nourishment for the soul. While voice is our first instrument, the world’s earliest musical

anomie, and more. Under the guidance of an instructor and to the frequencies of quartz crystal singing bowls keyed harmonically to the body, sound bathers enter a meditative state of deep relaxation and resonant awareness. I have benefited from such auditory immersion, and I believe in its healing power.

After an hour of driving, I reach my destination: the Integratron, a squat white dome dating from the mid-1950s, protected behind fencing and offering a ritualized sound-bath experience. The place looks like a UFO, which is not surprising considering its creator, George Van Tassel, claimed that it was based on “the design of Moses’ Tabernacle, the writings of Nikola Tesla and telepathic directions from extraterrestrials.”

The wooden structure, listed on the National Register of Historic Places by the National Park Service, sits at an energy vortex—an intersection of geomagnetic forces—and “was designed to be an electrostatic generator for the purpose of rejuvenation and time travel.” Unfortunately, when I arrive, the Integratron is closed, and so my space-time journeys will have to wait. If only I could go back in time to plan better... Still, I feel a surge of joy as I wander around the “energy machine” and

Founded in 1957,
the Integratron
offers sound baths:
meditative acoustic
immersions said to
have healing and
therapeutic benefits.





through the scraggly desert vegetation punctuated with spiky leaves of grass, meditating on this remarkable effort to channel planetary power into waves of peace and spiritual healing. This is the sound of intention: of people making an effort to connect with each other and listen to the world. It's music to my ears.

KELSO DUNES, MOJAVE NATIONAL PRESERVE, 54 DECIBELS

But I still haven't found what I'm looking for: the sound of the planet speaking to me. For this I head toward the largest field of aeolian sand deposits in the Mojave Desert. My route from Landers to Kelso Dunes takes me past Joshua Tree National Park, home of the spiky-topped yucca palms that inspired the title of U2's 1987 landmark album about America. The park is popular (some say too popular) and seductive; it's difficult to drive past its gates without stopping. Since my goal is to listen to the sounds of nature, not the clicking of cameras, I press on and careen into the desert.

If you're even mildly concerned about chupacabras, the goat blood-sucking creatures from folklore's dark recesses, this is not the drive for you. Crows dive-bomb my car as I cruise across a scorched valley framed by ominous rock mountains and lined with salt flats. It feels like a road to perdition, the kind of drive an outlaw makes. At Amboy I turn right on Route 66, the National Trails Highway, and watch as the longest, loneliest train in my life, a silver stream drawn by three engines, crosses my path. Then I pass Roy's Motel and Café, an artifact of atomic age Googie architecture but now a snapshot stop in a ghost town.

Hours pass, my brain's jukebox is totally played out, and I'm enjoying the silence. At last I turn down a potholed road and stop near the base of a sand colossus that looms like a sleeping camel. I learned about Kelso Dune Field by reading *The Sound Book*, a tour of the world's sonic wonders by Trevor Cox, a professor of acoustic engineering (and author of "Soundscapes" on page 46 in this issue). There are only about 30 aeolian dunes in the world—mountains that "boom" when sheets of consistently sized grains of sand cascade down a steep surface and rub against stationary sand below. I experienced my first singing dune by sliding down a slip face on Namibia's Skeleton Coast. As the sand grains danced on air pockets, they vibrated all around me, generating the reverberant buzz of a bee swarm.

A sand avalanche starts the singing at Kelso Dunes, the largest field of aeolian sand deposits in the Mojave Desert. If conditions are right, visitors can hear the dunes burp and boom.



Breaking waves serenade a couple at sunset on the three-mile-long coast of Crystal Cove State Park, in Orange County.

I grab my recording equipment and dash to the dunes, which turns out to be a deceptively long distance (the field covers 45 square miles, though I am in a small portion of that space). The flat path lined with desert grass and wildflowers eventually gives way to a mottled beach, then hilly humps, and finally a 650-foot mountain of shifting sand that is soft, deep, and difficult to climb. The sand is starting to speak to me; its first message is: “Why did you leave your water bottle in the car?”

Cox describes this sound of striding across an aeolian dune as a tuba being played badly: *burp, burp, burp*. But as I reach the ridge, I hear little more than my own panting. I roll around the dune, scooting down the leeward side, racing up to a new ridge, feeling the wind-sculpted ripples of sand under my bare feet, and yet I do not hear an oscillating hum or the drone of an airplane propeller. I certainly do not detect “the sounds of all kinds of musical instruments, and also of drums and the clash of arms,” as Marco Polo wrote about the Gobi desert’s booming sands.

Many factors determine whether a dune will sing: the degree of incline, shape of sand, humidity, wind direction. I had hoped for a symphony, and all I got was silence. Disappointed, I busy myself by taking dubious measurements: 54 dB (the hum of a refrigerator) at 78°F with a wind speed of five miles an hour. Perhaps the fact that I really don’t know what I’m doing is why I can’t hear the dunes? Just as I’m ganging up on myself, I feel

a breeze whoosh across the sand and I imagine tiny grains of silica dancing. Something starts to resonate. I inhale deeply and feel calm, quieted, happy to be in the middle of nowhere, alone and untethered yet connected to the universe. The sun starts to set, and shadows stretch over the landscape so that the larger dunes appear to smother the smaller dunes until nothing is left but silhouettes. What I find I could never have looked for.

SOUND LAB, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, IRVINE, 20 DECIBELS

My search for silence has led me deeper into a world of sound, but I can’t shake my need for noiselessness. I’ve read about efforts to uncover the quietest places on Earth, including acoustic ecologist Gordon Hempton’s One Square Inch project, which identified a spot in the Hoh Rainforest, in Washington State’s Olympic Peninsula, as the most noise pollution-free point in the contiguous United States. I have been to this forest; it was hushed and enveloping (though I kept expecting Ewoks to come crashing through the moss-covered trees).



California dreamin’: Scan the QR code at left on the Spotify app for our curated playlist for this story.

I wanted more or less, so I set my GPS for the University of California, Irvine, where there is a room so silent—an anechoic chamber lined with sound-absorbing insulation to smother acoustic waves—it can reportedly drive a person crazy. At the Department of Cognitive Sciences’ Conscious Systems Lab, I meet a pair of Ph.D.’s, Kourosh Saberi and Haleh Farahbod, who study how perceptual systems such as hearing, speech, and language emerge from brain function. Crucial to my curiosity, they have an anechoic chamber located in their basement.

Entering the chamber is like stepping into a secret. The world’s hum is absorbed by dense foam walls, but anxiety seems amplified in this dark, echo-free box. The room is designed for serious research into brain mapping, hearing aid technology, and the development of auditory navigational systems for blind people. My own interests are embarrassingly pedestrian: I just want to experience silence. And so we close the door, stand perfectly still, hold our breath, and stare at each other for one minute.

My heartbeat sounds like a bass note in a Temptations song. I measure something shy of 20 dB. Louder than the -9.4 dB documented in the world’s quietest chamber but low enough to reduce us to laughter when someone’s stomach gurgles. Anywhere there’s a human, there will be a human sound. I decide to embrace this reality—and all the noises that come with life.

CRYSTAL COVE STATE PARK, ORANGE COUNTY, 70 DECIBELS

My journey began in the desert and ends at the sea, to the music of waves crashing on barnacle-covered boulders, children outrunning the tide, seagulls calling, and my bare feet slapping the sand. It turns out that experiencing soundlessness in the anechoic chamber feels like an acoustic burial or a funeral in outer space, so I decide to drive a few miles along the Pacific Coast Highway to Newport Beach to return to life and explore the aural curiosities of this marine conservation area.

Sound is transcendent, and solitude does not require silence. In fact, it’s the integration of sound into our lives that brings volumes of meaning. Henry David Thoreau called sound “a vibration of the universal lyre.” On the beach I find my own spirit vibrating at a higher frequency. Birdsong, wind, waves, conversation, music, airplanes. Every element is an instrument.

I thought my sonic quest was about silence, but it’s not. It’s about remembering how to hear harmonious notes in the world. Even an echo is a new sound on the road to bliss.

GEORGE W. STONE (@georgewstone) is editor in chief of *Traveler*. California-based photographer Jennifer Emerling (@jemerling) has an eye for electric color and a heart for the open road.



Travel Wise: California Sounds

A SOUND CONNECTION

Nat Geo and the Decibel
The decibel, a unit of measurement used to compare sound intensity on a logarithmic scale, is named for Alexander Graham Bell, one of the founders of the National Geographic Society. A difference of one decibel (one-tenth of a “bel”) can be detected by some listeners. Zero dB is the hearing threshold; a whisper measures roughly 30 dB.

SIGHTS AND BITES

Nature’s Health Food
This vegetarian/vegan café in Palm Springs is perfect for healthy restorative flavors and a delicious, almost-guilt-free date shake. natureshealthfoodcafe.com

The Integratron

Unlock your chakras and lift your spirits in a 60-minute sonic healing session at this historic acoustic chamber in Landers. Check the site for schedules and to reserve a space. integratron.com

Modernism Week

This annual celebration of mid-century architecture and

culture is a bold and beautiful time to see Palm Springs (February 13-23, 2020). Book ahead. modernismweek.com

Palm Springs Art Museum

Discover the creative origins of Coachella Valley’s artful turns and the marvels of modernist design at the three locations of this community institution. psmuseum.org

WHERE TO STAY

Crystal Cove State Park

A conservancy supports the historical and natural assets of the protected parkland and manages 24 cottages that were part of a beach colony in the 1920s. The Moro campground, on the bluff overlooking the ocean, offers sites with spectacular views. crystalcovestatepark.org, crystalcove.org

The Ranch at Laguna Beach

Nestled amid coastal canyons, this National Geographic Unique Lodge pays homage to its history as a 19th-century homestead. Guests can swim, kayak, and paddleboard along Laguna’s seven miles of sand. natgeolodges.com/explore

NG MAPS AND CRAIG MOLYNEUX; CARTDECOR; MAP DATA: © OPENSTREETMAP CONTRIBUTORS, AVAILABLE UNDER OPEN DATABASE LICENSE; OPENSTREETMAP.ORG/COPYRIGHT