

# *Musical Ancestries: Algeria Script*

NARR: Kyle was so excited he could hardly wait to get home. He'd just gotten a text from Mustafa, his friend from North Africa.

KYLE: MOM! DAD! Where ARE you?

MOM: Right here, Kyle – what's up?

KYLE: Mustafa just texted me. He wants me to go visit Algeria! Can I? ***Please?***

MOM: (amused) You know your Dad has a say in this too... right? Oh, hi, hon.

KYLE: Hey, Dad. Mustafa wants me to go with him to Algeria. Can I? Please?

MOM: Well, Kyle, we have a big surprise for you. We spoke with Mustafa a few months ago. Your father and I even got a Visa for you from the Algerian Consulate. It'll be a great experience and you'll be in such good hands. So, yes...you're going.

KYLE: ***AWESOME!!*** Thank you!

NARR: Mustafa, 24, was practically a member of the family. He'd been living with them while he worked on his master's degree in teaching. He was almost done and planned to return to Algiers. Kyle would go with him and stay for several days.

Over the past year, Mustafa had become a close friend and mentor to 13-year-old Kyle. On long walks, they talked about growing up... sports...books they'd read. They visited the Science Museum, Magic House, Art Museum, and the Zoo. They went to concerts together and loved baseball games! Kyle felt like Mustafa was an older brother...he could tell him anything. Mustafa was a fine role model who made people feel better just by being around.

As they boarded the plane headed for Algeria, Kyle felt very grown-up. On the way, they talked a lot.

MUSTAFA: Kyle, let's talk about Algeria's history. It's an ancient country. Its history goes back to antiquity. Throughout the centuries the Romans, the Vandals and then the Byzantines controlled the region. In 1516, Algeria was beginning to come into her own when the Spaniards attacked. The pirate, *Khair ad Din Barbarossa*, and his brother, *Aruj*, were called to the city of Algiers to help fight them off. Remember Redbeard the Pirate?

KYLE: Yeah, I DO! He was fierce! I read that "Barba-rossa" literally means "Beard-red"!

MUST: It does! And that's him! After his brother was killed in 1518, Barbarossa made a deal with the Ottoman Turks. **IF** he could conquer the Spanish, their lands would all become part of the Ottoman Empire. Well, he DID Conquer them, and in 1525, he became an Ottoman Turkish admiral and established the **Regency of Algiers**.

KYLE: How did the Regency make its money?

MUST: Good question. They taxed ships...European, American and especially the rich ships of the Catholic Church. They also sold grain to France, but when the French stopped paying, Algerians stopped all further sales.

KYLE: I'll bet that made 'em mad.

MUST: It didn't go over well, *at all*. Eventually, this dispute led the French to invade Algeria, and that ended Ottoman rule. The French ruled for the next 132 years. Algeria gained its independence on July 5<sup>th</sup>, 1962...not all that long ago.

Like many nations, Kyle, history shapes a nation's culture, but especially in Algeria. It touches everything – literature, music, arts, crafts, and religion.

NARR: Algeria's languages also reflect its history. The two main languages are **Arabic** and the Berber language, **Tamazight**. Many people also speak French. Though only a few speak English, there is a growing interest in that language.

Islam is the official religion, and most Algerians are Muslims. A small percentage are Christian and Jewish.

It was evening when they arrived in **Algiers**, the **capitol city of Algeria**. Kyle was fascinated by the sights, sounds and activity. He wanted to see more, but they were both tired from the long trip. They awoke before sunrise to the sound of morning prayers coming from a nearby **minaret**. Kyle began to get a sense of what an

KYLE: Mustafa, what are they singing?

MUST: That's the morning call to prayer, "**adhan**". It starts with praise and is recited five times each day. It is a call to worship for all Muslims.

Today, we're going to explore some of the city and learn about its culture and music. We're going to *the Casbah* – the citadel (or fortress) of Algiers. Very historic.

But first, something to eat! Hungry?

KYLE: Starving!

NARR: They walked to a nearby café for breakfast and Kyle sampled some coffee...strong and black. (A huge cultural tradition in Algeria.)

MUST: Too strong? A little different from the coffee back home, yes?

KYLE: Sure is! I like it, but... I think I'd like some water too, please.

NARR: Kyle made a mental note that *next* time he'd try the sweetened mint tea or maybe the fruit juice.

As they made their way to *the Casbah*, Mustafa told Kyle about the music of North Africa, and specifically the country of Algeria.

MUST: The oldest style of music in Algeria is **Andalus**. It's named for Andalusia, the area of southern Spain where it came from. It came to North Africa, or the Maghreb, when the Sephardic Jews and Muslims were driven out of Spain.

Sometimes called **Maghrebian** classical music, each region has its own style. The basic **form** is called **Nuubaat**. Each individual **nubah** is like a suite of pieces and is based on one scale or mode. Traditionally, each **nubah** was an hour long.

KYLE: That's a long piece of music!

MUST: Yes, but it's beautiful and interesting. When you listen, you hear a hint of Spanish **Flamenco**.

NARR: Traditional instruments include the **rabab** (a bowed instrument like a violin), **tambur**, and **darbuka** (a goblet drum).

MUST: In the twentieth century, musicians added western orchestral instruments...and, like classical music in Europe, Andalusian music is highly respected in Algeria.

KYLE: Is Algeria the only North African country that has Andalusian music?

MUST: Mostly, but also in neighboring countries –Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, and Libya. The pure traditional styles are still here, but not known as well outside North Africa. It's our more recent styles that are popular around the world.

NARR: Internationally, the best-known style of Algerian music is **Rai**. It could be called a pop interpretation of traditional music.

Rai comes from western Algeria. Some people think it started with **Bedouin** shepherds visiting the city; others think it began with street performers' music. It may have been a combination of both. As it grew, other non-Algerian styles mixed with it – like jazz and music heard in recordings and on the radio. Even before the style was known as Rai, many of its earliest performers were women. The most famous of these was **Chikha Remitti**, known as the *Grandmother of Rai*.

In the early 1960s, after Algeria became independent, Younger musicians added western electronic instruments, and blended Rai with other cultural styles...like **Reggae**. This was known as **pop-Rai** – wildly popular both in Algeria and around the world. Many artists introduced Algerian music to brand-new audiences on their worldwide tours. **Cheb Khaled**, known as *The King of Rai*, had global success with his breakout single, "**Didi**". He still performs with other international artists.

**MUST:** Because of Algeria's cultural roots, Raï has many musical influences. **Flamenco, Cha-cha** and **cabaret** melodies have mingled with **Bedouin** rhythms, and modern western instruments have mixed with traditional ones. As recording technology grew and international recording sales expanded, Raï hit a peak in the 1980s, and it's still popular today.

**NARR:** The traditional instruments in Raï music are the Berber **gasba flutes** (made from wood), **ghaita mizmars** (Middle Eastern double-reed instruments) and **guellal drums** (long, cylindrical drums of wood or clay, with goat-skin heads).

There's also the **bendir** (a frame drum played with the fingers, often with a snare that buzzes). The western **violin** is played on the knee in the Middle Eastern style, and the **darbouka** (or **doumbek**) (a single-head drum) is held under the arm or sideways on the lap.

**MUST:** The decade of the 1990s was very dark for Algeria and North Africa, Kyle. There was terrorism, extremism and much death. The arts and culture were smothered, especially Raï music, because of its rebellious nature. Thankfully, those days are over, and Raï is once again appreciated for its unique musical expression.

**KYLE:** Do you think we might be able to see a Raï group perform?

**MUST:** Yes. Absolutely! You will hear a lot of fusion performed along with Raï...and you will *love* experiencing it in person!

Speaking of experiencing, look where we are, Kyle – at the **Casbah!** It's an ancient citadel (like a castle) where people lived within the walls...a protected city. This was where ALL the cultures met and mingled.

KYLE: Wow – I know of the Casbah! It’s just like going back in time.

MUST: Exactly. History is important, especially here in Algiers. It unifies us, but it also helps us understand the richness of our Algerian heritage. Awe-inspiring, isn’t it?

KYLE: Yeah – it really is. Mustafa, what do you call that man’s clothing?

MUST: Good question. That is the traditional garb.

NARR: The white woolen cloak, the **gandoura**, is worn over a long cotton shirt. Sometimes a cape called a **burnous** is draped over the shoulders. It is made of linen for the summer and wool for winter. It can be plain or adorned with fancy stitching – a sign of that person’s wealth. The traditional head covering is a small hat called the **chechia**.

MUST: Today, though, almost everyone wears European-style clothing.

KYLE: It looks really comfortable.

MUST: It is. Practical, too. Remember, the Sahara Desert is directly south of us, and our climate can be very harsh with sandstorms and such. You like it, don’t you?

KYLE: I do.

MUST: Then we will simply have to outfit you like a traditional Algerian before you go home. How **else** would people know you’ve been here?

KYLE: (laughing) Yeah. Right!

NARR: Their next days were spent in easy friendship – exploring and talking about Algerian culture and music. One distinctive traditional form is **Chaabi**, which means ‘folk’ or ‘popular’ – the music of the people. During the 1800s, Chaabi evolved in the Casbah district of Algiers from Andalus classical music.

**Chaabi** is very popular among Algerians, and often performed at weddings and other gatherings. Vocalists sing about love, loss and betrayal... similar to Spanish Flamenco. Small ensembles accompanying them can include stringed instruments like the **mandol** (ancestor of the mandolin), the **tambour** and percussion, plus other instruments, even piano and violin. The more traditional-style pieces were about 40 minutes long, but since the 1950’s they’re much shorter. There is also a **Chaabi Dance**.

MUST: Kyle, there is also a different type of music, not rooted in Andalusian music...it is **Berber**, also known as **Amazigh**. The two main groups of Berbers are the **Kabyles** and the **Chaouias**.

NARR: Ancient **Amazigh** music is diverse, with singing and instruments like **oboes** and **bagpipes**. **Pentatonic** scales and **colorful rhythms** are often used. Small bands of musicians keep the ancient traditions alive by travelling from village to village to entertain at weddings and other social events. Known for storytelling, folk song, poetry and dance, traditional **Kabyle** music features vocalists accompanied by a **rhythm** section, usually a **t’bel** (large side drum) and **bendir** (frame drum), plus a **melody** section, consisting of a **ghaita** (oboe) and an **ajouag** (flute).

MUST: You should also know, Kyle, there are several types of traditional dances here in Algeria. The **Kabyle** dance is performed by women, and also by men. It expresses their joy at weddings and festivals. There’s another, the **Dance Alaoui**, that is danced by **men**



**only**, in the west of Algeria. It shows the people's pride in their land and their endurance.

KYLE:           What's your favorite, Mustafa?

MUST:           The one I really like is **Dance Chaoui**, which is 200 years old and from north-eastern Algeria. It represents the hospitality and kindness of the people.

These are all traditional forms of Berber music, but in the 1950s to the 70s, the music became more modern when western instruments were added.

NARR:           Kyle and Mustafa's days together flew by. To celebrate Kyle's last night in Algiers, they went out to dinner and enjoyed a beautifully prepared supper of **couscous** (steamed wheat) with lamb, cooked vegetables and gravy. (The secret is in the flavorings and spices which can include onions, turnips, raisins, chickpeas, and red peppers, as well as salt, pepper, cumin, and coriander. Delicious!)

As they finished, enjoying the relaxed pace of dinner and their easy friendship, Mustafa handed Kyle a package wrapped in cloth.

MUST:           Kyle, my young friend, this clothing is for you. It is your own **gandoura**, a cotton shirt and a **burnous**, along with a **chechia**. You've learned so much these last few days, and absorbed so much of our Algerian culture, you're like my brother. You should have this traditional clothing. Also, I want you to accept an Algerian name to go with this... *Rachid*. It means "perceptive," which you *really* are. I know we'll be lifelong friends.

KYLE:           Rachid – I like it. I don't know how to thank you for all of this, Mustafa. This has been the most incredible experience of my life...

MUST: (smiling) ...so far...

KYLE: (smiling) Yeah... so far! You have taught me more than I *ever* thought I could know. I'm honored to be your lifelong friend.  
Thank you, Mustafa.