



From history of violence arises music preaching peace

Lamine Fellah brings his band Sarazino to Stern Grove festival in S.F. on June 20.

By Roman Gokhman
Oakland Tribune

06/18/2010 - As a son of a diplomat in Algeria, Lamine Fellah grew up around politics, asking questions about why people fight and why different countries can't get along.

And then, civil war broke out in his country and his father was assassinated by extremists. That's when he said he understood the value of freedom and tolerance.

"I think tolerance is one of the most important values for me after what happened," said Fellah, whose hybrid reggae/hip hop band Sarazino performs the first day of the Stern Grove Festival on June 20.

"When I see what's going around in the world, it always reminds me of that terrible day that he died. I always keep this in mind, even when I write music."

Fellah was born to a family of nomads. They moved from Algeria to Spain and Switzerland, and the African countries of Burundi and Burkina Faso, where his father was assigned.

He was exposed to a variety of West African music styles, as well as Middle Eastern, French and Flamenco.

He bought a drum set and began to write his own songs.

After finishing schooling in Algeria, he moved to Canada in 1988, where he got degrees in political science and economics from the University of Montreal.



I always considered music something I had in me but I didn't need it to succeed," he said. "Politics really interested me — to understand the relations between countries, between peoples and between cultures."

While in Montreal he was exposed the city's active nightclub music scene, and he began to branch out. He formed the first incarnation of Sarazino in that city.

Tragedy struck his family in 1993. A year earlier, Algeria erupted in a bloody civil war. The Islamic Salvation Front had won the first round of the country's first-ever multiparty election, and the government responded by canceling the second round and outlawing political parties based on religion.

For the next decade, Islamic militants fought the government, often with the country's people stuck in the middle of the battle. More than 100,000 died.

"There were a lot of Islamic fundamentalist terrorists fighting against a government that wasn't always very clean," Fellah said. "In my family we have a very tolerant way."

So when his father was assassinated by Islamic extremists, it came as a shock to his family. Fellah and his family were forced into exile from their homeland.

"It made me understand the value of liberty, of freedom," he said.

Three years later, Fellah found a home in Quito, Ecuador. He started a music production business and released a second album under the Sarazino moniker.

"In Burkina Faso the radio was only playing African music, so I grew up with that style," he said. "When I went to Canada, I learned how to produce all my ideas. But I needed to live the South American experience to make my music more mature."

Take the experience of a man who grew up with a politician's family and cycle it through the various places where he has lived and the end result is Fellah's third album, 2009's "Ya Foy!" — a blend of upbeat reggae, funk, African, Latin, French, and Arabic tunes that celebrates people's differences and similarities.

The album's name means "no problem" in the Dioula language of West Africa. On it, Fellah sings in Spanish, French, English and several African languages. The songs deal with the issues most important to him — tolerance, conscience and freedom.

"It comes from all the studies I did in politics about the difficulties of South America, of Africa, and also to understand our similarities and differences."

PREVIEW

WHO: Angélique Kidjo and Sarazino at Stern Grove

WHEN: 2 p.m. Sunday

WHERE: Stern Grove, 19th Avenue and Sloat Boulevard

ADMISSION: Free; 415-252-6252, www.sterngrove.org

http://www.insidebayarea.com/music/ci_15328820

