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**Naïssam Jalal and the quest to "play silence" in music**

   

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Naïssam Jalal's music knows no boundaries. ©Alexandre Lacombe

By: [Allison Hird](#)  20 min

**Franco-Syrian flute and ney player Naïssam Jalal is as eclectic as she is talented. Equally at ease flowing with Palestinian rapper Osloob as part of sextet Al Akhareen as surrounding her music with silence on her new album *Quest of the Invisible*. She talks to RFI about “spoken notes” and the challenges of getting musicians to “play” silence rather than just feel it.**

“I really wanted to try to compose a music project which is really about silence, trance, mysticism and spirituality in music,” says Jalal. *Quest of the Invisible* is the fruit of that quest, and sweet to the ear it is. “The whole album is a kind of very long silence. Even if you listen to the music you can hear the space around the music, the silence around the music, and that’s actually very hard to do.” She managed to get Leonardo Montana (piano), Claude Tchamitchian (double bass) and Hamid Drake (daf) on board. And while the trance bit wasn’t a big deal, “everybody does something about trance”, Drake was initially skeptical about the sound of silence. “It could be very frightening,” Jalal says, “people say ‘OK I’m a musician I’m supposed to feel the silence, not play silence’. So it was very hard. “Every time we play this music it’s a big issue, we really don’t know if we can do it.” And yet the audience, men and women, are often moved to tears.

### **Al Akhareen "the others"**

Jalal takes fewer risks playing alongside Osloob as part of Al Akhareen, but it’s still an original mix. She got to know the Palestinian rapper in Beirut in 2008 when she was studying classical Arabic music in Cairo. When he got refugee status in Paris in 2014 they decided to build a project as a duo, though on stage they’re a sextet with DJ, bass player, drummer and saxophonist.

Al Akhareen means “the others” in Arabic. “We were looking for a word for the band and we were like searching for what’s the common point we have together. Despite their roots in the Middle East, Jalal says they’re not exploring Arabic identity. “It’s about being the other in the society where we were born: him as a refugee in Lebanon and me as an immigrant in France.”

### **The flow of the flute**

Osloob takes care of the lyrics, telling stories based on his own experience but which are also the stories of others. For the melodies it’s often a collaborative process. But Jalal flows too. “I use my flute as a mouth, I’m talking with my flute so it’s spoken notes, not spoken words,” she says.

And while classical flute is a rare instrument in any rap formation, Jalal couldn’t care less about musical codes. “There is no frontier, no borders between rap and jazz and that’s what I really like when we play together. I can see young and very old people too. People are coming because they are open to different things, they don’t care about the borders. If you talk to them they feel it.” “When you try to be really sincere with what you are feeling, the message can be received,” she says. “I think people can feel it so deeply because I’m trying to get it from very deep in myself.”

