Global Sounds Abound in Manhattan for APAP/NYC Music Conference

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MANHATTAN — For those willing to dash from venue to venue this weekend, Manhattan’s stages will be bursting with exotic sounds as world artists try to catch the ear of music curators from across North America.

The APAP/NYC conference brings artists and presenters together, offering the public a sneak preview of who may be appearing at popular local music festivals such as River to River, Lincoln Center Out of Doors and Central Park Summerstage.

On Sunday, the sold-out globalFEST at Webster Hall will feature a dozen groups performing on three stages, capping off a weekend of traditional sounds and modern hybrids from globetrotting contemporary musicians.

Last year’s uprisings in the Middle East that toppled national governments damaged the support system for classical Arab music, but a revival is under way at places like Alwan for the Arts in the Financial District.

Friday, at the intimate Beaver Street loft space, Alwan presented Maqam Fest — named for the Maqam style, “a modal system common to the music of the Arab world, Greece and Central Asia,” explained musician Amir ElSaffer, an APAP presenter representing Alwan.

The six groups performing — Zikrayat, Maeandros, Gaida, Safaafir, Shusmo, and The Alwan Arab Music Ensemble — reflected on a different facet of Maqam that elaborated on their various traditions.

Highlights included Zikrayat’s dancers and players, whose repertoire recalls the golden age of Egyptian cinema. It also provided a rare opportunity to hear singer Ahmed Gamal, master of both western opera and Arabic classical music, outside of Cairo’s concert halls.

Acclaimed mezzo-soprano Malika Zarra, for whom APAP/NYC “is a platform and an opportunity to reconnect,” straddles multiple worlds with her Moroccan jazz.

Zarra’s and her quintet performed songs from their recent release "Berber Taxi" Friday at Zinc Bar in the Village, and will play again Saturday at a showcase with John Zorn’s a capella quarter Mycale at the Hilton Hotel in Midtown.

Unexpected juxtapositions of cultures — present since the first days of New York experimental music scene — have become the focus of several artists associated with Brooklyn’s Barbès and the Electric Cowbell label.
On Saturday, the cowbell tolls for Manhattan, as the group crosses the river to bring an eclectic lineup to Drom in the East Village.

Also in the East Village Saturday, Timbila will put an East Village twist on the Shona Mbira music of Zimbabwe, including the video premier of “Pocket the Cha Cha” at The Space (9 Bleecker St.). Leni Stern, a Moroccan tap dancer, and kora harp master Yacouba Sissoko are also expected to join.

Later in the evening, the soulful “Queen of Haitian Song,” Emiline Michel, will play a late set at Joe’s Pub. Expect to hear new music with plenty of flavor from from the island nation, where she is recording a new album.

Visit the APAP/NYC website for more.

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