

= Malouma =

Malouma Mint El Meidah (Arabic : ????????? ???? ????????? , also simply Maalouma or Malouma ; born October 1 , 1960) is a Mauritanian singer , songwriter and politician . Raised in the south @-@ west of the country by parents versed in traditional Mauritanian music , she first performed when she was twelve , soon featuring in solo concerts . Her first song " Habibi Habeytou " harshly criticized the way in which women were treated by their husbands . Though an immediate success , it caused an outcry from the traditional ruling classes . After being forced into marriage while still a teenager , Malouma had to give up singing until 1986 . She developed her own style combining traditional music with blues , jazz , and electro . Appearing on television with songs addressing highly controversial topics such as conjugal life , poverty and inequality , she was censored in Mauritania in the early 1990s but began to perform abroad by the end of the decade . After the ban was finally lifted , she relaunched her singing and recording career , gaining popularity , particularly among the younger generation . Her fourth album , Knou (2014) , includes lyrics expressing her views on human rights and women 's place in society .

Alongside her singing , Malouma has also fought to safeguard her country 's music , urging the government to create a music school , forming her own foundation in support of musical heritage , and in 2014 creating her own music festival . She has also been active in politics since the 1990s , when she began to campaign for more democracy . She was elected a senator in 2007 , the first politician in her caste , but was arrested the following year after a coup d'état . When elections were again held in 2009 , she became a senator for the opposition Ech @-@ Choura party where she was given special responsibilities for the environment . This led in 2011 to her appointment as the IUCN 's Goodwill Ambassador for Central and West Africa . In December 2014 , she announced she was moving from the opposition to join the ruling party , the Union for the Republic , where she felt she could be more effective in contributing to the country 's progress . Her work has been recognized by the French , who decorated her as a Knight of the Legion of Honor , and the Americans , whose ambassador to Mauritania named her a Mauritanian Woman of Courage .

= = Early life = =

Malouma Mint Mokhtar Ould Meidah was born in Mederdra in the Trarza Region of south @-@ western Mauritania , on October 1 , 1960 , the year the country gained independence from France . Born into a griot family , she grew up in the small desert village of Charatt , just south of Mederdra in West Africa . Her father , Mokhtar Ould Meidah , was a celebrated singer , tidinet player and poet while her grandfather , Mohamed Yahya Ould Boubane , is remembered as a talented writer and tidinet virtuoso . Her mother also came from a family of well @-@ known traditional singers . She taught her daughter to play the ardin , a ten @-@ stringed harp traditionally played by women , when she was six .

Malouma commenced her education at elementary school in 1965 in Mederdra . She qualified as an elementary school teacher in 1974 in Rosso . According to the traditions of her country , those of the Meidah family are required to carry on the art of their ancestors . As a result , she had to give up her aspirations to teach . Members of each caste are allowed only to marry other members of society within the same caste and the entire society is divided by castes politically , economically , and culturally . Movement outside of a particular caste is forbidden . She learned to play the traditional stringed instruments only women play , especially the ardin harp , and was taught traditional Mauritanian music by her father , who enjoyed an eclectic mix of music . As a result , she grew up listening to classical western works such as Beethoven , Chopin , Mozart , Vivaldi and Wagner , as well as the music of traditional Berber , Egyptian , Lebanese and Senegalese artists . She often accompanied her parents who sang traditional griots .

Malouma began singing as a child , first performed on the stage when she was twelve and began appearing in solo concerts with a traditional repertoire by age fifteen . In addition to her father 's guidance , she was inspired by other traditional artists including Oum Kalthoum , Abdel Halim Hafez , Fairouz , Dimi and Sabah . As she matured , she increasingly became interested in blues music ,

which appealed to her as it bore a resemblance to the traditional music she knew . Malouma wrote her first song , " Habibi Habeytou " (My beloved , I loved him) when she was sixteen . It was a song protesting the tradition of men turning their wives out of their homes to marry younger women . It brought her instant recognition , but created a backlash , causing physical attacks from the established Muslim community . Soon after she wrote it , her family moved to Nouakchott , the capital , to help her launch her music career , but in the strongly traditional society , Malouma was forced to marry , abandoning singing until the late 1980s . She was later accused by her father of ruining his reputation . In addition to the criticisms stemming from her songs , she had disgraced her family by divorcing twice : her first husband had been forced upon her , while the second came from a noble family , who would not allow her to sing . Yet after hearing one of her songs , her father commented : " You have created something new and I find it touching . Unfortunately , I will not live long enough to be able to protect you . "

= = Music career = =

= = = Background = = =

Malouma 's first major appearance was in 1986 , when she revealed her fusion style , combining traditional interpretations with more modern developments including blues , jazz , and electro . Her early songs " Habibi habeytou " , " Cyam ezzaman tijri " and " Awdhu billah " , which openly addressed love , conjugal life and the inequalities between men and women , contrasted strongly with what was considered acceptable in her home country . Nevertheless , they had strong popular appeal , especially for young women . Malouma carefully developed her approach , blending traditional themes with the rich repertoire and instrumentation of modern popular music . Typically , her compositions are based on the traditions of classical Arab poets , such as Al @-@ Mutanabbi and Antarah ibn Shaddad , whose verses cover political criticism , personal sacrifice and support for the weak and oppressed . She has also drawn on traditional Mauritanian themes , modernizing both the lyrics and musical presentation .

From the beginning , Malouma sang in a variety of languages , including traditional Arabic , Hassania (Mauritanian Arabic) , French and Wolof . By singing in various languages , she sought to air her message to a broader audience . It was not long before she appeared on television together with her sister , Emienh , and her brother , Arafat , an instrumentalist . Their style was controversial , especially after the release of her song " Habibi Habeytou " and a 1988 appearance at the Carthage Festival in Tunis , as she addressed social issues , such as poverty , inequality and disease which were not generally acceptable in Mauritania . Her participation in the Carthage event led to her subsequent appearance on Arab satellite channels , giving her greater exposure . Malouma became nationally known and was a sought after performer until a 1991 song about freedom of speech . After being censored for writing songs promoting women 's rights and challenging apartheid , she was banned from appearing on television and radio , holding concerts , and was even denied a permanent address . She did not perform anywhere for a lengthy period but in the late 1990s she began to sing in other African countries , in Europe , and in the United States . While she won audiences among the people , Malouma was persecuted by both the moral authorities and authoritarian governments , her music being completely banned until 2003 when a crowd of 10 @,@ 000 successfully called on President Ould Taya to cancel her censorship . Some restrictions still remained until the overthrow of the Ould Taya regime in 2005 .

The traditional griots are songs of praise , but Malouma used her voice to speak out against child marriages , racial and ethnic discrimination , slavery and other divisive issues facing a country at the crossroads of the Arab world and Africa . She also sang about illiteracy , HIV / AIDS awareness and in support of children 's vaccinations .

= = = Albums and bands = = =

Malouma 's first album , Desert of Eden was released by Shanachie Records in 1998 . When it was produced , she felt that the traditional elements were taken out during production , resulting in " bland electronic pop " , though it received good reviews from JazzTimes . In the early 2000s , she began working with a group called the Sahel Hawl Blues made up of ten young Mauritian musicians of different ethnic origins (Moor , Fula , Toucouleur , Sonike , Wolof and Haratin) , demonstrating her desire to overcome racial differences . In so doing , she was also able to extend music based on the traditional string instruments of the Moors to include the beat of the djembe , the darbouka , and the bendir frame drum . Led by Hadrady Ould Meidah , the group supported her desire to modernize traditional music , making it more accessible to the wider world . They toured with her in 2004 and 2005 and worked with her on her second album , Dunya (Life) , which sought to reclaim her musical heritage . Produced by Marabi Records in 2003 , the album contained twelve songs which blended harps , lutes and skin drums with electric guitar and bass , and traditional genres like serbat , which usually focuses on a single minor chord , with jazz .

Malouma 's album , Nour (Light) , was released in France on 8 March 2007 in celebration of International Women 's Day . Produced by Marabi / Harmonia Mundi , it featured a broad mix of music from lullabies to dance music . Malouma 's singing was supported by a group of fifteen studio musicians on a variety of electronic and traditional instruments . Reviews were mixed , but the CD ranked as number 14 on the World Music Charts Europe by September 2007 . After a hiatus from music to focus on politics , Malouma relaunched her musical career on October 5 , 2014 . Dressed in a blue toga , she presented her new album , Knou , at a special event , appearing on stage for the first time since her election seven years earlier . She chose to call it " Knou " , which is the name of a dance usually performed by women in western Mauritania . The album focused on traditional dancing melodies , but bridged generations by adding modern twists . Weaving jazz , rock and reggae rhythms , into the traditional songs , it was well received .

= = = Music festivals = = =

Music festival appearances have been a large part of Malouma 's career . The first time she participated in an international festival was in Carthage , Tunisia in 1988 ; her performance proved to be highly successful . Malouma returned to the stage in August 2003 , appearing at the Festival des Musiques Métisses in Angoulême , France , combining traditional Moorish music with a more modern approach in numbers from her album Dunya . She was not only selected as " artiste de l 'année " (artist of the year) but was nicknamed " Diva des Sables " (Diva of the Sands) . Her success continued in October of the same year at the World Music Expo in Seville , Spain , where she was selected by the jury as a featured performer . One of the highlights of Angoulême 's Festival des Musiques Métisses was her nostalgic rendering of " Mreïmida " . The song proved equally popular in Mauritania at the 2004 Nouakchott Festival of Nomadic Music . She was finally permitted to take part after her ban had been lifted . She appeared there with another female Mauritanian star , Dimi Mint Abba , and was accompanied by the French pianist Jean @-@ Philippe Rykiel on a synthesizer .

Malouma toured in the United States in 2005 with appearances in Ann Arbor , Michigan , Chicago , Illinois , Boston and Cambridge , Massachusetts , Lafayette , Louisiana (for the Festival International de Louisiane) , before finishing in New York City . Two years later , Malouma participated in the 32nd Paléo Festival in Nyon , Switzerland , which focused on musicians from North Africa . She also appeared in the 2010 edition of the Fårde International Folk Music Festival , held in Fårde , Norway under the theme of " freedom and oppression " . At the 2012 Festival International des Arts de l ? Ahaggar in Abalessa , Algeria , she was chosen as one of the three artists to perform in the grand finale , receiving acclaim for the balance of instrumentals and vocals , the composition , and her two back @-@ up vocalists . Her 2013 performance at the World of Music , Arts and Dance Festival (WOMAD) , held in Wiltshire , England included a " Taste The World " event where performers not only sang , but prepared a dish from their country . Malouma 's lamb @-@ filled pancakes were a highlight of the festival presenting an up @-@ front and personal encounter with the musician for the audience . Her second stage appearance at the event also

brought praise for her rock @-@ star performance embracing modern music . In 2014 , Malouma participated in the Meeting of the Arts of the Arab World , a festival in Montpellier , France , as well as at the Parisian Festival Rhizomes .

= = Politics = =

Malouma , officially Malouma Meidah , first became politically active as a member of the opposition party in 1992 , speaking out against dictatorships and in favor of democratization . In 2007 , in what was widely considered the first freely held and fair election in the country , she was elected to the Senate of Mauritania , as one of the six women senators in a legislature of 56 members . She was the first person from the musician iggawen caste to serve in politics . Shortly after she was elected , a coup d'état took place in Mauritania in 2008 and deposed the first democratically @-@ elected head of state , Sidi Mohamed Ould Cheikh Abdallahi . Because she had written songs criticizing the coup , Malouma was arrested and over a thousand cassettes and CDs of her recordings were seized . After the coup , the leader , Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz , allowed elections to proceed with only minor delays . He was elected president in July 2009 and the Senate elections in which one @-@ third of the members faced re @-@ election also were held . The parliamentary opposition group , called " Ech @-@ Choura " , of which Malouma was a member and served as the First Secretary , constituted 12 members of the 56 @-@ member Senate after the 2009 election . She also served on the Parliamentary Group for the Environment and as 2nd Secretary of the Committee on Foreign Affairs , Defence and Armed Forces .

Malouma announced in April 2014 that she no longer felt she could keep up her political fight for democracy , although she would continue to support cultural and environmental causes . Even so , her Knou lyrics included allusions to her favorite political causes : equality and rights for all , women 's place in society , and education for the young , all under threat , as well as environmental protection . Referring to her political role as a senator for the opposition party Assembly of Democratic Forces , in August 2014 she commented : " I use my presence and speaking time in the chamber to extend the effect of my texts and my songs . Whenever I run into ministers or important personalities , I tell them what the people expect of them . " She has also continued to speak out about issues such as Palestine and the Iraqi War in her songs . At a press conference on December 16 , 2014 , Malouma announced she was leaving the opposition and joining the ruling party , the Union for the Republic , on the grounds that she could participate more effectively in building Mauritania by standing behind the policies of the current leader Aziz .

= = Environment and culture = =

In addition to her work in her music career and political activism , Malouma is involved in both environmental protection and cultural preservation projects .

= = = Environmental activism = = =

Malouma Mediah was involved in a project in 2009 , to relocate 9 @,@ 000 slum @-@ dwelling families from the outskirts of the city into inner city neighborhoods . She insisted that for health reasons , improvements would first have to be made to the infrastructure . In August 2011 , the International Union for Conservation of Nature appointed Malouma as Goodwill Ambassador for Central and West Africa . The position required her to raise awareness of environmental problems with a view to introducing sustainable solutions . On her appointment she commented : " I am delighted at the confidence that IUCN just placed in me . I am deeply honored . I will do my best to fulfill this great responsibility . " In September 2012 , she performed in a concert given during the 2012 IUCN World Conservation Congress held on Jeju Island , South Korea .

= = = Cultural preservation = = =

As a result of the Mauritanian caste system , the development of traditional music in Mauritania has been supported by just a few families , threatened by a closed culture in which there are limited opportunities for support . As families have no means of preserving their music , or recording it , their creations are often forgotten owing to the absence of family members interested in ensuring their survival . The situation has been compounded by rules forbidding their support from outside the family environment . Concerned that the musical traditions of the country were vanishing , in 2006 , Malouma urged the government to create a school to preserve the country 's music heritage , even introducing a measure to Parliament . In 2011 , she created the Malouma Foundation in support of the preservation of the national musical heritage . The foundation aims to protect and preserve the Arab , African , and Berber roots of music in Mauritania and , to that end , is collecting and storing music from throughout the country to both preserve it and make it available for other uses , including education . Long concerned that the Moorish music traditions of her country were being replaced by the Malian and Moroccan music preferred by younger people , in 2014 , she created a Mauritanian Music Festival .

When she produced *Nour* in 2007 , Malouma collaborated with the painter , Sidi Yahia , hoping to create visual images to illustrate the songs in the album . Eleven paintings resulted from the joint venture and Malouma and Yahia presented cultural discussions about their works titled " *Regarder la musique , écouter la peinture ?* " (Watch the music , listen to the painting ?) In 2013 a month @-@ long exhibit was presented to showcase the paintings and the music which inspired them at a gallery in Nouakchott . In 2015 , after receiving a grant from the Arab Culture Fund , Malouma convinced musicians to collaborate with artists when recording their music . The project aimed at collecting music from six artists and producing an album of their works . Malouma has continued to press for the establishment of a music school , though it would require overcoming taboos on family restrictions in regard to musical legacy .

= = Awards and recognition = =

Malouma was selected in 2003 by the jury as one of the World Music Expo (WOMEX) showcase artists and two years later she was selected by BBC musicologist Charlie Gillett , for his 2005 selected compilation *Favorite Sounds of the World* CD . That same year , N 'Diaye Cheikh , a Mauritanian filmmaker , produced a documentary about her , entitled *Malouma , diva des sables* (Malouma , Diva of the Sands) with Mosaic Films , which won Best Documentary at the Festival international du film de quartier (FIFQ ; Dakar , Senegal) and a 2007 Prize of Distinction from Festival International de Programmes Audiovisuels (FIPA) , held in Biarritz , France . She was a runner @-@ up for the Middle East and North Africa in the 2008 BBC Radio 3 Awards for World Music . The griot @-@ artist community of Mauritania has also acclaimed her by calling her the " first true composer in Mauritania " .

Malouma was decorated in 2013 as a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor by the French ambassador , Hervé Besancenot , acting on behalf of President Nicholas Sarkozy of France . On January 20 , 2015 , Malouma , Mauritania 's " singer of the people and Senator " , was honored by the American ambassador , Larry André , at a lunch attended by notable leaders , especially women , from the country 's civil society . Presenting Malouma with the Mauritanian Woman of Courage award , the ambassador noted her " exceptional courage and leadership in advocating human rights , women , gender equality and harmony amongst the cultural traditions of Mauritania " .

= = Selected works = =

1998 , *Desert of Eden* (album) , a mix of West @-@ African and Arabic @-@ Berber sounds , released in the West

2003 , *Dunya* (Life) , 12 @-@ track album , recorded on the Marabi label in Nouakchott ; a mix of blues , rock , and traditional melodies from southern Mauritanian and Indo @-@ Pakistani , all sung in Hassaniya Arabic

2007 , *Nour* (Light) , 12 @-@ track album , recorded on the Marabi label during her stay in

Angloulême in 2003 with the support of festival organizer Christian Mousset ; a collection of dance beats featuring electric guitars but without the traditional instruments of the Moors

2008 , Malouma received accolades for her blues song " Yarab " on the album Desert Blues 3 ? Entre Dunes Et Savanes released by Network Medien

2009 , Malouma was a featured composer and vocalist on two songs , " Missy Nouakchott " and " Sable Émouvant " on the 2009 Ping Kong album by DuOud

2014 , Knou (album) , a collection of ethno @-@ pop tunes woven through with traditional tidinit lute and ardin harp instruments