

BIOGRAPHY



HENRI AGNEL

**[Performance of music from the Middle Ages
to the Baroque period]**

Composer – Classical and flamenco guitarist – Mandolinist – Lutenist (Oud) and percussionist (Zarb and Moroccan percussion) – Specialist in the cittern family (Cittern, Corsican Cétéra, Orpharion, Pandore)

Artistic director of the JADE Association / Compagnie Henri

Artistic director of the ensemble “Les Ménéstriers”

I. TRAINING / EDUCATION

Henri Agnel was born in Rabat, Morocco in 1952, into a family of musicians. He began studying music at the age of five: mandolin with his father, Jean Agnel, music theory with his uncle, Aimé Agnel, and choral singing with Madame Sauvage and Monsieur Perrodin in Rabat.

After this initial family-based education, he went on to meet his main mentors:

- Classical and flamenco guitar: José María Rodríguez and especially Jacques Florencie Wilmann, who also became his teacher in composition, classical and contemporary music, and orchestral conducting.
- Arab lute (Oud) and Moroccan percussion: Various musicians encountered during festivities, weddings, and moussems (pilgrimages). His encounter with the master Mounir Bachir, and the support he received from him in his research, was particularly influential.
- Iranian zarb: In addition to being his teacher, Djamchid Chemirani became a close friend, and the two have performed together in concert since 1980.
- Afghan robab: Studied with Amir (in Pakistan)
- Indian vocal and rhythmic techniques: Studied with Zahid Farani (in Pakistan)
- Gnawa music: Studied with the mâalem Si Mohamed Chaouqi (in Rabat, Morocco)

II. CAREER

Arriving in France in 1964 at the age of 12, Henri Agnel began his career as a concert performer alongside his musical studies. Initially, he played in a trio with his father Jean on mandolin, his brother Jean Etienne, and himself on guitar. As pop music gained popularity, he founded several pop bands, and in 1969 he created TIJDIT in Algeria, a group blending pop, rock, and Gnawa rhythms. He lived for a year in Mostaganem and studied at the Conservatory of Oran.

His career as a classical and contemporary concert performer on guitar and mandolin took off upon his return from Algeria in 1970. His teacher Jacques Florencie Wilmann, impressed by his talent, introduced him to the public through classical repertoire concerts. Wilmann also introduced him to contemporary composers and musicians gathered around Diego Masson at the time in the ensemble *Musique vivante*, including Jean-Pierre Drouet, Gaston and Brigitte Sylvestre, Michel Portal, Carlos Roquet Alcina, Renaud François, Jean-François Jenny-Clarke, Georges Aperghis, and Jacques Florencie Wilmann himself. Through this network, Henri participated in numerous contemporary premieres, with several works composed for and by him.

In 1973, an unexpected encounter reignited his interest in Eastern music: *Les Ménestriers*, the legendary early music ensemble of the 1970s, invited him to join them to perform Medieval and Renaissance repertoires, which lasted for the last eight years of the group's activity.

It was within the Medieval repertoire that Henri Agnel deeply felt the connection to the Arab-Andalusian and Arabic musical traditions of his childhood. This realization prompted him to return to the study of Arabic, Persian, and Indian music to understand the commonalities and differences between these musical and poetic traditions. He learned instrumental techniques, improvisation, and ornamentation methods that helped him revive Medieval music.

Since then, he has toured internationally promoting repertoires such as those of troubadours, trouvères, *Cantigas de Santa Maria*, *Minnesänger*, and French and Italian estampies of the 14th century. This broad expertise—spanning classical, contemporary, medieval, Renaissance, Oriental, and Gnawa music—attracted the attention of the French Ministry of Culture, which funded a study cycle for him in Pakistan and commissioned a composition in 1984: an opera titled *MIO-CID*, based on the epic poem of *Cid Campeador*.

The *Maison de la Radio* commissioned numerous musical scores for radio dramas from him. The Paris Opera Festival commissioned him, via choreographer Alain Marty, to compose a ballet based on a text by Marguerite Yourcenar titled *Wang Fô*, performed by dancers Mickael Denard, Larry Leong, Amy Swanson, and actor Didier Sandre.

Since 1969, Henri Agnel has performed concerts in classical, contemporary, early, and traditional music repertoires. He has conducted and accompanied artists such as Angélique Ionatos, Misa, Amina Alaoui, Houria Aïchi, and Ute Lemper. He was the Oud soloist for Mozart

l'Égyptien. His tours have taken him throughout Europe, the United States and Canada, New Zealand, Japan, China, Pakistan, and countries across North Africa and the Arab world.

Since 1999, he has performed with his son Idriss AGNEL as the Duo AGNEL, titled "From Florence to Kabul."

From 2015 to 2017, he accompanied Ute Lemper in her creation "The 9 Secrets" (text by Paulo Coelho, music by Ute Lemper, directed by Volker Schlöndorff). In August 2015, he toured Algeria accompanying Houria Aïchi.

His new CD was released with Ensemble Henri Agnel: "Los Kaminos – Sephardic Songs from Andalusia to the Balkans", featuring Milena Jeliaskova, Milena Roudeva, and Idriss Agnel (Accords Croisés).

He is a composer for instruments, operas, ballets, theater, and films; he has also composed numerous works for France Culture and arranged music for Angélique Ionatos, Ludovikos, Troy, and others.

He is a classical guitar teacher and founder and instructor of the professional group of musicians and dancers specializing in French Renaissance music, "La compagnie Maître Guillaume." He teaches early music and its connections to the Oriental world, as well as courses focused on the Corsican Cétéra, through workshops and masterclasses.

Since 1992, he has also organized masterclasses bringing together musicians from diverse backgrounds: himself for early and Oriental music, Djamchid Chemirani for Iranian zarb classes, Pedro Soler for flamenco guitar, among others.

Many musicians and ensembles come to study with him. Finally, he teaches "Modes, Rhythms, and Improvisation" at the IIMM (International Institute of World Music, Aubagne).

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