

## Abdel Hadi Halo & the El Gusto Orchestra of Algiers

Connected to “El Gusto,” a documentary film by Safinez Bousbia to be released later this year, this piece of audio vérité documents the reconvening of an old Algerian band that included both Jewish and Muslim musicians. And there’s your movie, of course, but the album stands on its own merits. The music is chaabi, a long-lost alloy of North African, Andalusian and Middle Eastern sources; its high period was in the bars of Algiers after World War II. The orchestra has banjos, lutes, mandolins and violins, playing unison lines; it’s led by a pianist, and it moves along on a bed of percussion, thundering and then turning romantic and vulnerable. This recording, recently released by the British label Honest Jon’s, represents an incomplete version of the band that will be seen in the movie. (It has none of the older Jewish musicians, who relocated to France in 1962, when Algeria became a Muslim-ruled state. In 2006, when this recording was made, they were still afraid to return to Algiers. The orchestra later staged a full reunion, its first gig in more than 45 years, in September in Marseilles, France.) It’s a bewitching record anyway, with gorgeous natural-room sound and powerful, guttural singing.

By [BEN RATLIFF](#)

*Published: April 13, 2008*

