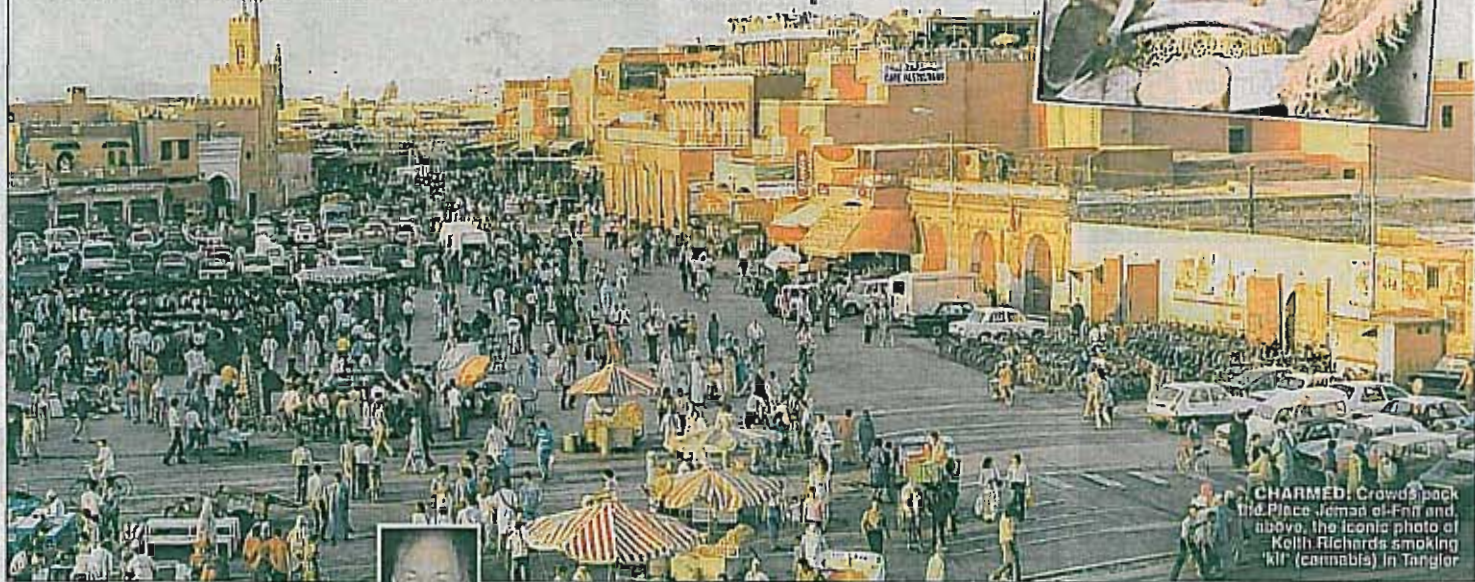


Travel

When Keef met Mr Kif

...in Morocco's land of forbidden pleasures



CHARMED: Crowds pack the Place Jemaa el-Fna and, above, the iconic photo of Keith Richards smoking 'Kif' (cannabis) in Tangier



By Steve Turner

IN THE Sixties, Morocco was to the Rolling Stones what India was to The Beatles. Whereas the Fab Four were inspired by the possibility of reaching a state of bliss, Mick Jagger, Brian Jones, Keith Richards and their entourage were enticed by the prospect of danger, magic and the primeval. It's easy to see what attracted them. Walking through the souks of Marrakech is like entering a phantasmagoria. The narrow streets are

organised craft by craft. A wall of brightly coloured slippers slides into an avenue of glinting brass that then turns into a corridor of mirrors or a cavern of freshly beaten metal reeking of oil. Parts of the medina are positively medieval. Workers sit in small, dimly lit rooms weaving

carpets, chickens are sold alive with their legs trussed together, beggars with hollowed-out eyes have their heads encased in cowls. It feels like being 'dragged' backwards through time. 'We enjoyed being transported,' was how Keith Richards explained his early experiences of Morocco. 'You could be Sinbad the Sailor, One Thousand and One Nights. We loved it.' The Stones also loved the Place Jemaa el-Fna where snake charmers, tooth pullers, fortune

tellers, card players, dancers, acrobats and child boxers still perform to mesmerised crowds. It was here that Brian Jones first heard the fusion of Berber, African and Arabic music. American novelist Jay McInerney once said of Paul Bowles, acclaimed author of *The Sheltering Sky*, that he 'associated Morocco with the anarchic forces of the unconscious'. The same

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HASH AND CARRY: Members of the Stones with Achmed in his antiques shop. Right: The souks of Marrakech



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could be said of the Rolling Stones. The American designer Bill Willis, a Moroccan resident since 1965, witnessed the Stones fall in love with the country and was with them when they checked into the Es Saadi Hotel in 1967 where Cecil Beaton photographed them.

"Morocco really felt like a foreign country back then," said Willis. "There were no supermarkets, no mass tourism. The women wore veils. We loved the open courtyards and palm trees. I don't think it could ever be that exciting again. Morocco is now imitating too many Western ideas."

Swinging London regularly came to Marrakech when England turned cold. Willis found and decorated a palace for Paul Getty and his wife Thelma which became the scene of celebrated parties involving members of the Stones and The Beatles among others. It was sold in 1971 when Thelma died of a heroin overdose. Patrick Lichfield's portrait of the Gettys on their roof terrace, swathed in Moroccan chic, the Atlas Mountains in the distance, became one of the most iconic photographs of the Sixties.

Yet despite the allure of Marrakech, the Stones currently the subject of Martin Scorsese's film *Shine A Light* were drawn more often to the seedier attractions of Tangier, home at the time to spies, smugglers, decadent expatriate aristocrats and writers-in-exile.

The band would stay at El Minzah, still the city's most exclusive hotel, and make contact with Paul Bowles and Brion Gysin, writers with tenuous affiliations to the Beat Generation and the avant garde. (Jack Kerouac had visited Tangier just prior to the publication of *On The Road* and William Burroughs wrote *The Naked Lunch* in a seedy hotel close to the port.)

ON RUE de Commerce, a short walk from El Minzah, the Stones discovered the Bazaar Petit Port Said owned by the colourful Achmed. Besides selling carpets and antique jewellery, Achmed could supply kif (locally grown cannabis), often artfully concealed in the heels of shoes. He smoked his own stash in a gold pipe and owned both a Mercedes and a red Cadillac.

He would fill you full of hash and then sell you things at exorbitant prices while this little old transistor would be blaring out Radio Cairo," said Richards.

It was here that the members of the band bought the clothes and trinkets that turned them: from modish hipsters into proto-hippies with billowing shirts, bracelets and necklaces.

Achmed is now dead and the Bazaar Petit Port Said is the site of an internet cafe called Teleboutique. The last time the Stones were in Tangier they shopped at Boutique Majid, an upmarket antique store with a dazzling range of jewellery, embroidery, carpets, chests, doors and pottery, much of it dating from the 19th Century.

One of the most evocative of photographer Michael Cooper's images of the Stones in Morocco shows Keith sitting on the terrace of a cafe, a cigarette in his left

It's a weird sound, like a 4,000-year-old rock band



For further information on El Minzah in Tangier visit www.elminzah.com or call 00 212 39 93 68 65. For further information on Hotel Es Saadi in Marrakech visit www.esaadi.com or call 00 212 24 44 88 11. EasyJet offers return fares from Gatwick to Marrakech from £88.98. Visit www.easyjet.com.

hand, a sebsi full of smouldering kif in the other. A sheepskin coat is draped over his shoulders, a chain of Moroccan coins hangs from his neck, there are silver bracelets around his wrist and he has a gold belt around his waist.

Books identify this 1966 picture as having been taken at Cafe Kid - but there is no such place. I showed it to Rachid, my trusty guide, and he immediately identified it as Cafe Baba, near the kasbah that overlooks Sidi Hosni, the scene of Barbara Hutton's lavish and decadent parties in the Forties and Fifties.

Established in 1943, Cafe Baba feels as though it hasn't been decorated - or cleaned - since. The floor tiles are chipped, the marble-topped tables have been carved into and all the decorative plants are dying, if not dead. Both times I visited there was only one utter cus-

tomer - an old man in a woollen hat who was propped on a couch watching an Arabic music programme on a black and white television.

My most fruitful contact in Tangier was Cherie Nutting, an American photographer who took over Paul Bowles's apartment when he died in 1959. She had arrived on his doorstep in 1986 as a fan and ended up becoming one of his closest confidantes, photographing him extensively and eventually publishing an affectionate memoir called *Yesterday's Perfume*.

Cherie was a connection not only with Tangier's illustrious literary past but with the Master Musicians of Jajouka, the group that Brian Jones brought to the wider world's attention when he recorded them in their village in July 1968. (Brian Jones Presents The Pipes Of Pan At

Jajouka was released on Rolling Stones Records in 1971.) Cherie fell in love and married Bachir Attar, the group's leader, and became their de facto manager. The Stones later invited the group to play on their album *Steel Wheels*.

In June 1989, Mick Jagger, Keith Richards and Ronnie Wood flew to Tangier and the backing track for *Continental Drift*, one of the songs on *Steel Wheels*, was recorded in the courtyard of the 16th Century villa Palais Ben Abou. The next day, Jagger made a fleeting pilgrimage to Jajouka.

"Almost 20 years after Mick Jagger, and 40 years after Brian Jones, I made the same trip with Cherie as my guide. She and Bashir divorced 12 years ago but remain friends. We were driven three hours south-west of Tangier where the Rif Mountains begin to bulge out of the fertile landscape.

Jajouka isn't marked on maps and there are no signposts. Until recently there was no passable road up the mountainside - visitors had to park their cars and make the final climb by mule. There's a track of sorts now but it's strewn with rocks.

Jajouka is a scattering of white-walled houses with corrugated-tin roofs. The streets are no more than wide stretches of rocky ground that all converge on what amounts to the village green where there is a large well. There is no drainage or running water but electricity has arrived and, with it, the modernising influence of TV.

Bashir's home, the HQ of the Master Musicians, is where Mick Jagger came to visit. In the middle distance is the dark entrance to the cave where local myth has it that the gift of music was handed to Bashir's ancestors by a half-man, half-goat known as Bou Jeloud.

Bachir's bedroom is a testament to the Rolling Stones' effect on the musicians of this remote community. CDs and DVDs are piled on a shelf, backstage

passes from American venues hang on the wall alongside framed photos of Bachir with Peter Gabriel, Aerosmith's Steven Tyler, LSD advocate Timothy Leary, and Jagger. Ironically a photo of Brian Jones, updated in red ink with the inscription DIED JUNE 1969, is covered in cobwebs.

Bachir was a five-year-old shepherd boy when Jones arrived in his village with Brion Gysin, who had discovered the Master Musicians in 1951. No one in Jajouka had seen a man with long blond hair. Jones was like an apparition to them. "He was wearing headphones and moving his head like this," says Bachir, bobbing up and down. "We didn't know who he was. Brion Gysin said Brian had told him, 'I've now found the music that I want.'"

During the evening of my visit, musicians gathered at Bachir's house, their instruments carried in brightly patterned bags. They smoked their kif and talked. Most of them looked over 50 and several had played on the Jones session.

BEFORE the music began we ate a stew of freshly slaughtered goat with chicken, potatoes, gherkins, cauliflower and rich gravy. There was no alcohol, as they follow strict Muslim codes, but there was plenty of hot, sweet mint tea. Then there was a moment of prayer.

The performance featured seven chaïta players (the chaïta is a double reed instrument like an oboe) and four drummers playing what William Burroughs once described as 'the primordial sounds of a 4,000-year-old rock 'n' roll band'.

It's a strange, haunting music that sounds like the band of the Royal Scots Dragoon Guards on speed, or as one

critic once said, 'the world's greatest horn section jamming with an ambulance'. It's powerful, repetitive and very loud. What attracted men such as Bowles, Burroughs and Gysin to the Master Musicians of Jajouka was the belief that this music had its origins in paganism. Bou Jeloud, in their view, was Pan and the annual ritual in which a dancer dresses in goat skin was a survival of the rites of Pan.

In the past, villagers regarded as demented would be chained up and forced to listen to music until their madness left them. Bachir still believes the music can heal. "It is music for the whole world," he told me. "It's a gift to the Attar family from God. It can change people from the bad way to the good way."

I signed the visitors' book bought after the musically curious began wending their way to Jajouka in the early Seventies. Donovan paid a poignant visit in 1993 with his wife Linda and Julian, the son Linda bore Brian Jones in 1964. Julian sketched a man on a motorcycle and signed it "Keep on trucking". Donovan had written a poem.

Mick Jagger visited on June 18, 1989, staying for two hours with Bachir, the only villager who speaks English. "Such a great pleasure finally to come to your village," Jagger wrote in the visitors' book. "Thanks for all your wonderful music and hospitality. I'm glad we finally got to play together."

Local legend has it that if the Master Musicians ever stop playing, the Earth will stop turning. That's bad news because the kids in Jajouka today prefer the new to the old - none of them wants to follow in their father's footsteps.

"We are the last generation," said Bachir, looking wistfully up to the stars. "You can't learn this music. You have to inherit it."

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