

A D O N I S

Meet Adonis, the indie-rock boy band from Beirut. With lyrics that tackle socio-political struggles faced by Lebanese youth and a sound that merges pop-rock and electronic music with Arabic rhythms and sounds, Adonis forms an integral part of the burgeoning alternative Lebanese music scene. Having performed in many different countries in the region and collaborated with Lebanese insta-star Dana Hourani, the band is anticipating the release of its fourth album. We had coffee with guitarist Joey Abu Jawdeh and lead singer Anthony Khoury to hear their story.

Interview/Cynthia Jreige
Photography/Yasmina Hilal
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So tell us, how was Adonis conceived?

Joey (J): It all started seven years ago. Anthony and I met at architecture school in Beirut. We were both into classical Arabic music, and eventually became friends and started writing music together. As more members joined the band, we recorded and released a few demos online, which picked up quickly, and led to us playing our first gig in Hamra.

It was in the winter of 2012, the venue was packed, and the reception was amazing. Although the band remains a side hobby for us, we somehow ended up releasing three studio albums, and are currently working on the fourth.

Have you stayed local or has Adonis gone regional, or international?

J: definitely regional. We perform frequently in Cairo, Dubai, Amman, etc. We're trying to push it to Europe and the US next year, mostly in cities that have a large Arabic-speaking population.

Who is your target audience, who would you say listens to your music the most?

J: We have a very eclectic audience. We notice this both in our gigs and online. We've even met a few none Arabic-speaking fans who have memorized our songs word by word, which is really touching.

How would you say the scene in Lebanon has evolved since you guys started, and how would you place yourselves within this scene?

J: Independent musicians in Lebanon write and perform mainly in English. The reason is that, like us, these musicians grew up listening to British, American, or French bands and artists, and were artistically formed through them.

But the indie scene has evolved a lot in the past few years; artists are taking more risks, trying new things. It's true that the audience for indie music in Lebanon is limited to a few thousand people, who dwell mainly in Beirut and its surroundings; but our market is consistently growing. When it comes to Adonis, on a musical level, our aim was and will be to challenge the status-quo, and create independent music in the Lebanese dialect, that resonates directly with today's Lebanese and Arab youth.

How would you say your style has evolved since you first started, has it significantly shifted?

J: As an artist, you are constantly influenced by your surroundings. So many factors feed into your music, the socio-political context you're in, your ideas, principles, feelings; and all of these forces are fluid, constantly changing, so it's only natural for your music to take on new forms as well.

Seven years ago, we were very different to who we are today. We didn't write or play our instruments the same way we do now, even the way we perform live has drastically changed. Our music is very context-specific, and things always sound the way they do for a reason.

I personally got to know you through your collaboration with Dana Hourani, do you guys plan on doing more collabs?

J: It was a great experience. Besides being one of the sweetest girls we've met, Dana has an amazing voice and is an exceptional visual artist. We were lucky to have worked with her, and would definitely love to do more collaborations of the sort in the future.

Who would be your dream collaborator?

J: Some dream collaborations will probably remain in the "dream" section, such as with idols like Radiohead. On a local level, I'd say Ziad Rahbani, who is a tremendous inspiration for all of us.

Who has influenced your sound?

J: Wow, that question about influences... You know, influences change so much, there are so many that come and go. The things that move you and motivate you are very volatile as well. I am often influenced by the sound of the drums in a track. Beats inspire me and give me endless ideas of how I want our music to sound like.

Rather than a select body of artists and works who have a direct impact on us, I would say that our influences are a sum of little bits here and there, of small moments in a song, or a live performance, or a musician's life story. And the role of personal experience shouldn't be underestimated as well; in an artist's work, this will always remain the most powerful influence.

Considering the scene is still quite small here in Lebanon, do the bands within it support each other or is there rivalry?

J: I don't believe in the notion of competition in music, and there is definitely no reason for rivalry between musicians. Music is not like a traditional business where a client has to choose between your product and someone else's; especially nowadays, with the technology of streaming, which has made music boundlessly and equally accessible for everyone. Contrary to popular belief, we find that, in Lebanon and in the region, there is a lot of complicity and respect between independent musicians and bands.







When is your album coming out?

Anthony: We haven't set a specific date yet, but I'd say around mid next year.

Can you give us some hints, a teaser of what to expect?

J: I would say we are sticking to the general themes we usually tackle in our music, but with a new approach to songwriting and production, spearheaded by the album's producers, Sleiman Damein and Tarek Majdalani. Shayef, the track we've released a month ago, is a good reference for the sound we're aiming for: a cinematic mood, a lot of work on the drums, and a very large and layered sound.

What message would you like to spread through your music?

J: I think the most important thing in life is to question things. We try to make music that is different, that will hopefully motivate people to question existing structures, specifically in the Arab world. It won't do anyone any favours to not question things.

For me, the primary goal of our music is to convince people that it is possible to have alternatives to everything you see and do. Our music is just our own way to ask questions.

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