



IRASCIBLE  
MUSIC



Lo'Jo (FR)

Album: Transe de Papier

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EPK: <https://www.irascible.ch/releases/lo-jo/transe-de-papier>

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Seventeen albums. Thirty-eight years of life. Those are quite some numbers. For any band. For Lo'Jo, doggedly marginal troubadours of the radiant word, the far-flung sound, they're a shy, courageous miracle. The mere fact that they've survived all the dirt roads down which they've travelled, that they haven't been downed by a stray bullet in the Caucasus, a sandstorm in the Sahara, an eruption on the Reunion Islands, is cause enough to celebrate. That they continue to deliver their exquisite song-poems of no fixed abode, their miniaturized paeans to the '*bazaar of knowledge, heterogenous boutique*' that is their world, our world, is a blessing we should include in those we count every day.

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"I feel I'm in the category of those that endure," says co-founder and chief songsmith Denis Péan. "Just like Mystic Revelation of Rastafari, Buena Vista Social Club, The Art Ensemble of Chicago, Moondog, Satie. I didn't die of an overdose at the age of 27, and that's enough for me."

Try and apply a *prêt-à-porter* musical category to Lo'Jo and you'll fail. Better to ditch the search for labels and accept Péan's own overview of their remarkable journey: "a collective improvisation over an entire life, performed with a mixture of naïve utopianism, of faith in creativity off the beaten track, of social and political conscience, of acute curiosity for the world."

Any regrets? More fame? Money? Hits? "Regrets can make a pretty little necklace; it's the beauty of things unconsumed, just skimmed over," says Péan. "I have absolutely no regrets not to have released a hit, just a frequent concern about the economic insecurity of the band. But quite apart from that, some of our songs have become very intimate hymns for a certain number of people."

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Place du Nord 7, 1005 Lausanne  
Geroldstrasse 33, 8005 Zürich  
[www.irascible.ch](http://www.irascible.ch)

Promotion:  
Gilles Kaeser  
[gilles@irascible.ch](mailto:gilles@irascible.ch)  
078 976 00 25



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It's true. Those people exist in large numbers in Lo'Jo's native France, especially in the Anjou region where all the band members were born, grew up and still live. They also exist in dedicated pockets all over Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand, Korea, Vietnam, Georgia, Mali, Algeria, the Sahara, Turkey, Egypt, the Indian Ocean, all the places where the Lo'Jo caravan has pulled into town to rest, eat, drink, listen, see, befriend and play, every journey yielding its precious cargo of sights, sounds and stories that provide the raw material for Lo'Jo's art.

In any case, Lo'Jo's latest album *Transe de Papier* offers no room for regret. Not an inch. Producer Justin Adams, whose association with Lo'Jo goes back to 1996's breakthrough album *Sin Acabar*, has concocted clarity and concision from the three nominally divergent constituents of Lo'Jo's music: delicate, virtuoso violin, piano and bassoon (courtesy of Péan and co-founder Richard Bourreau. Legacy of the time both of them spent studying French baroque and early modern music at the local conservatory); tides of kora, kamelen'ngoni, teherdent lute and other instruments from distant horizons (courtesy of Yamina Nid el Mourid and Bourreau. Legacy of Lo'Jo's many trips to West Africa and elsewhere); deep, raw, earthy grooves, (courtesy of bassist Alex Cochenec and guest drummers. Legacy of an enduring love of funk, dub, electro and other brands of rhythmic firewater). And topping it all, the luminous choral attack of the Nid el Mourid sisters, Nadia and Yamina, who sound like a female choir from the hills of Bulgaria, or the upper reaches of the Atlas mountains, where women with the courage of Cossacks belt their sadness and joy into the thin mountain air.

The band laid down some guiding principles before going into the studio: no guests (or few); no drummer (only percussion and loops); as much space as possible for the five members of the band to shine; bass (but no double-bass). Thankfully, the guests and drummer rules were only partially adhered to, since the roll-call is enticing: Robert Wyatt, Karl Hyde, the bassoonist Stéphane Coutable, two former Lo'Jo drummers (Franck Vaillant and Gabor Tury) and the late and sorely lamented Tony Allen, whose inimitable shuffle graces 'Jeudi d'Octobre' and 'Le Rue Passe'. "Tony seemed someone who was profoundly spiritual and centered," Péan says of the legendary drummer. "But he was also someone you could approach – very kind and very festive. He had one of the most impressive auras I've seen in my life."

Inviting Allen and Wyatt was, for Péan, "a way of combining history and respect for the elders." Wyatt's album *Rock Bottom* was one of the many portals that offered the young Denis Péan a mental exit route from the farm near Angers, in the west of France, where he spent his childhood. Along with punk, dub reggae, seeing Don Cherry play at the Théâtre d'Angers in 1978 (the dreadlocked Péan spoke to Cherry after the show - a pivotal moment) and the conservatory where he met Lo'Jo's violinist and co-founder Richard Bourreau. But equal to, if not greater than these musical baptisms, were the words Péan devoured, his 'trances of paper': poems by Apollinaire and Michaux, books by Baudelaire and Nietzsche, procured from La Tête en Bas, Angers' solitary radical book shop (it was later bombed by the far right).

'*Will tomorrow be virtuoso / Or rather a thorn in the palm? / Parabola of immensity,*' sing Nadia and Yamina on the title song of *Transe de Papier*. That parabola is poetry, the only thing "capable of sanctifying existence and all its mysteries," according to Péan, "the bridge between daily intimacy and cosmic intensity." Phrases of vivid

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beauty will jump out at those lucky enough to understand French as they listen to the album: *'History is a book made of porcelain'* ('Pas Pareil'); *'We greeted each other like the wind greets the water'* ('Black Bird'), *'I saw the dawn arise from the indecisive night / Adjusted the compass to the vagabond hour'* ('Un Jeudi d'Octobre). And in the song 'Minuscule', sung over a tender current of kamele n'goni and violin, there's a stanza that somehow sums up the soul of Lo'Jo. Robert Wyatt declaims it again (in French, a language he apparently loves) on the song 'Kiosco':

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