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MUSIC REVIEW | YANNICK NOAH

Commanding the Stage at Another French Open

By JON PARELES
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Yannick Noah, a French tennis champion in the 1980s and '90s, is now well into a second career as a singer. On Sunday afternoon he headlined a Central Park SummerStage concert supported by the French Embassy to coincide with the Fête de la Musique, a nationwide day of free concerts in France. Among the athletic elite with pop ambitions, Mr. Noah, 49, is more convincing than, say, [Shaquille O'Neal](#) as a rapper.



Robert Stolarik for The New York Times
Yannick Noah at Central Park SummerStage on Sunday.

Mr. Noah doesn't write his own songs, but he chooses benign ones like "Donne-Moi une Vie," from his most recent album, the 2006 "Charango" (St. George/Sony BMG France), which insists that from Calcutta to Haiti to the Gaza Strip children deserve a life with hope, and "Yé Mama Yé," offering gratitude to his grandmother. His slim but agreeable voice is polished in the studio, and onstage he wisely relied on his band's grooves: reggae, funk, rock, hints of Andean music as well as upbeat bikutsi and makossa from Cameroon, where his father was born.

He swiveled his hips to the African rhythms, shook his dreadlocks, made his way through the audience and borrowed liberally from a surefire source: [Bob Marley](#), whose "Woy-yo-yo" singalongs punctuated more than one song and who wrote one of the encores, "Redemption Song." Taking on that mantle would be presumptuous. What Mr. Noah is after, instead, is a good time with a clear conscience.

The triple bill also included the United States debut of Coralie Clément, an updated French pop chanteuse. She has a small, breathy voice and songs that touch on chanson, cabaret, bossa nova and flamenco; backing her

were a guitarist and a keyboardist who played the theremin and carried her rhythm section on a laptop. It wasn't her day.

Between rain and technical problems her music longed for someplace more intimate and indoors, where she could whisper.

The concert's most gifted musician was the opener: Mayra Andrade, a singer who identifies herself as Cape Verdean. She was born in Cuba to parents from Cape Verde,

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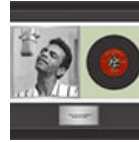
and has lived in Cape Verde, Senegal, Angola, Germany and now France. With a limber, inviting voice, Ms. Andrade fuses Cape Verdean styles — the gentle morna and the peppier coladeira and funana — with Brazilian music, jazz and hints of African styles.

Although she did have a song in French, the lyrics were mostly in Cape Verdean Creole, which is based on Portuguese. Ms. Andrade sang about love and about music as a cultural showcase and refuge, while the arrangements revealed how savvy and flexible her Cape Verdean culture could be.

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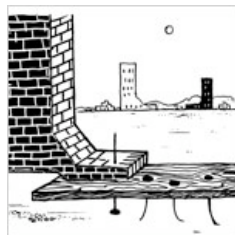


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