

How to navigate the Lebanese underground

Beirut has one of the most dynamic music scenes in the region, but few bands get the recognition they deserve outside beyond the borders of the country. Here's your unofficial guide to the tangled web of sound (well, at least the parts we like)

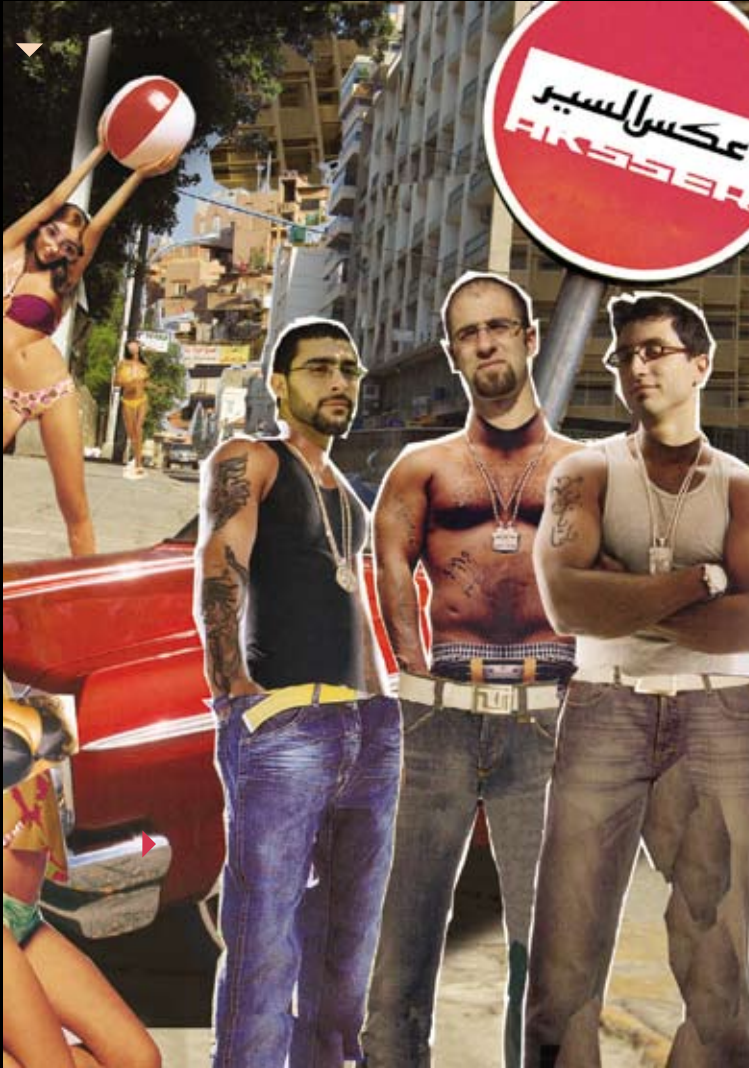
The New Government

Their eponymous single took a decidedly political stance with lyrics like "I killed the prime minister/I killed a famous journalist... we're the new government". Sugary vocals combine with lava-lamp worthy psychedelic guitar riffs. This five-man band has a bouncy punk-pop-rock vibe, a mix of sing-able lyrics and suburban headbanging choruses, making it one of the most addictive bands on Lebanon's underground scene.

Along with gigs in Europe, the band – Zeid Hamdan (vocals, guitars), Jérémie Regnier (vocals, synth, piano), Timothée Regnier (guitars, backing vocals), Cherif Saad (bass), and Nabil Saliba (drums) – released their first full length album last year. *We want another one. Now.*

Aksser (Aks El Sayr)

Aksser, a trio of early-20 something guys, has a sense of humour and a feel for the linguistic gymnastics that Arabic rap requires. Their tracks are the ones you listen to before hitting up the clubs, or on your way for a drunken shawerma snack afterwards. The group cites Eminem as one of its influences, and there are definite melodic references to the Detroit rapper's style on a few songs, detracting a bit from Aksser's own talent for laying down funky, hoppin tracks with an Arabic twist. The guys are young, but their sound is fresh – not immature. A lot of potential for becoming huge in the region and gaining a following abroad. Aksser is made up of Waël Kodeih, Houssam Fathallah and Tarek Yamani.



Hausman Tree

The Regnier brothers from The New Government bring together a 70s folk sound with traces of The Kinks and late-60s The Who in their collaboration as Hausman Tree. The French siblings began the alliance in 2003. In early 2007, Jeremie and Timothée recorded three EPs based on a collection of poetry entitled "The wit and wisdom of Arty Stotle". The duo is the most down-tempo on the underground scene, and if you dig The New Government's retro feel but crave a more chill sound, check out Hausman Tree.



Shift Z

Electro alter ego of Zeid Hamdan. With his trademark oversized glasses and Miami Vice handlebar moustache, Shift Z is the man behind underground cult faves like the monotonous "Lebanese people" and the surprisingly catchy "Hizyawizz".



Scrambled Eggs

A bruising collision of crackling drums, spiralling guitars and unhinged, swooping vocals, the band catapulted alternative rock to the forefront of Lebanese music. With influences ranging from Public Image Limited and Sonic Youth to Bloc Party and Arctic Monkeys, the friends have three full-length

albums under their belt, developing their sound from industrial landscapes to what they now call "ambient punk". They recently spent time in New York, recording and mixing album number four. Tony Elieh on bass, Malek Rizkallah on drums, Marc Codsí on guitars, and Charbel Haber on guitars and vocals.



Mick Strip aka Slutterhouse

Mick Strip is a Lebanese PhD candidate who lives in Paris. Slutterhouse is Mick Strip produced by The Suicides. Comic Strip is the Parisian rock band Mick Strip plays with.

Yeah, it's confusing but worth paying attention to. This 23-year-old Lebanese musician has been living in Paris for the past five years, and is currently writing his PhD thesis in Philosophy. He met Frankie and Cherry Suicide, aka The Suicides, during the summer of 2006 and they produced his electronic/rock/dance music project called Slutterhouse – which, with adrenaline-pumping tracks like "Inside the Station", could easily provide the soundtrack to the next Run Lola Run-esque film. He gets back to Beirut about twice a year and collaborates with Frankie and Cherry Suicide. In addition to the Slutterhouse collaboration with them, he also plays with the Parisian rock band Comic Strip.

The Suicides

Once upon a time there was a girl named Cherry and a boy named Frankie. They met in 2006, when Frankie was known for his solo project "Trash Inc," with tracks like "Roadkill Blues", and Cherry was preparing her first and last art show. The sparks between them flew when Frankie watched Cherry perform an improvised poem. Last summer's war brought them together, they started meddling with his unfinished tracks, and they've been living happily ever since as The Suicides. Their first song "Slow (I just wanted you to know)" was released, and its sound is pure Beirut party scene. Expect "Slow" to creep out of Lebanon and into DJ sets in Jordan and the UAE by this summer, it's that good. An EP will be released sometime this year. Separately, Cherry is collaborating with electronica act MUNMA, while Frankie continues as the drummer of The New Government.



IndyCult

A website and a love for all things underground music-oriented in Lebanon, Indycult features fairly regular interviews with the new and somewhat more established members of the scene. They also have a Wikipedia-style guide to Lebanese artists, musicians, and films.