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## French guitar guru takes musical journey at Barking Legs

by **Casey Phillips**  
A&E Reporter

Some people like to treat music like a tacklebox, putting various artists in their designated trays for simplicity's sake. To Pierre Bensusan's eye, the art form is infinitely more nuanced than can be conveyed by a few genres, so he ignores them entirely.

The French-Algerian born guitarist's free-form approach draws on everything from Celtic music and jazz to New Age and classical. That alchemical blending has made him a frustrating target for those who take comfort in rigidly defined styles, but it's also a far more rewarding way to compose, he said.

"To me, there are no styles but just different angles, lightings and approaches to the language of music," Bensusan wrote in an emailed response while he toured overseas. "That has always been driving me as long as I can remember, and the more I go, the more this sentiment is reinforced."

Born in 1957 in French-Algeria and raised in Paris, Bensusan began studying music on piano at age 4.

When he was 11, his father gave him his first guitar, which he taught himself to play. Bensusan said he assumes his father wanted him to study swing and jazz music, but without the restrictions of formal training to rein him in, he explored his dual heritage in Western European and North African music instead.

In 1973, Bensusan stumbled upon DADGAD, an alternative guitar tuning that allowed for a droning effect he said resonated with him.

"Maybe due to my African roots, this was what triggered my drive," he said. "When I started to study DADGAD in a more academic way, I realized that anything could be played in that tuning — chords, scales, modes — with a very different color than standard tuning."

Bensusan's work has earned him numerous accolades. At age 18, his first album, "Prés de Paris," received the Gran Prix du Disque, a premiere award for French recording artists. In 2008, readers of Guitar World Magazine voted him Best World Music Guitar Player.

Thursday, Bensusan will take the stage at Barking Legs Theater to perform a two-hour set. He said he will draw primarily on his latest albums with the possibility of a revue of his earlier work in the form of an extended medley.

The show, he said, should serve as an exploration not just of his own music but of the entire art form and its many variations.

"I would like to take them to a journey, [to] lift them up, bring them a smile and have them wondering where they are," he said.

<http://current.timesfreepress.com/news/2012/may/11/french-guitar-guru-takes-musical-journey-barking-l/>