

TINARIWEN

EMMAAR

THE DESERT IS A PLACE OF HARDSHIP AND SUBTLE BEAUTY, A STARK WORLD THAT REVEALS ITS SECRETS SLOWLY AND CAREFULLY. LIFE IN THE DESERT IS RESILIENT AND STRONG, AND THE PEOPLE ARE GENTLE GIANTS AMONG THE SAND, STORMS, AND SUN. FOR SAHARAN BLUES BAND TINARIWEN, THE DESERT IS THEIR HOME, AND THEIR HYPNOTIC AND ELECTRIFYING GUITAR ROCK REFLECTS COMPLEX REALITIES OF THEIR HOMEBASE IN NORTH WEST AFRICA.

THEY ARE TUAREG, DESCENDED FROM NOMADIC PEOPLE WHO HAVE WANDERED THE DUNES FOR MILLENNIA, BUT THE MUSIC OF TINARIWEN TRAVELS TOO, REVERBERATING FAR FROM DUSTY PLAINS OF MALI. THEIR 2011 ALBUM TASSILI, RECORDED IN THE ALGERIAN DESERT — IN A TENT AND UNDER THE STARS WITH A ESTEEMED CADRE OF MUSICIANS INCLUDING NELS CLINE AND TV ON THE RADIO'S TUNDE ADEBIMPE AND KYP MALONE — WON A GRAMMY AWARD FOR BEST WORLD MUSIC. NOW THEIR NEW RECORD EMMAAR RETURNS TO THEIR ROOTS, DELIVERING STRIPPED-DOWN DIRGES, EFFERVESCENT ANTHEMS, AND ABOVE ALL, A RETURN TO SIMPLICITY AND HONESTY.

DUE TO POLITICAL INSTABILITY IN THEIR COUNTRY, THE BAND RECORDED AWAY FROM THEIR HOMELAND FOR THE FIRST TIME, SETTING UP SHOP IN ANOTHER DESERT: JOSHUA TREE, CALIFORNIA. "THIS IS THE FIRST TIME WE ARE RECORDING OUT OF AFRICA IT HAS TO BE IN A DESERT," SAYS BASSIST EYADOU AG LECHE. "WE WOULD LIKE TO LIVE IN PEACE IN THE NORTH OF MALI, BUT THIS IS VERY DIFFICULT, THERE IS NO ADMINISTRATION, NO BANKS, NO FOOD, NO GAS. JOSHUA TREE IS IN THE HIGH DESERT OF CALIFORNIA, WE LOVE ALL THE DESERT, THESE ARE PLACES WHERE WE FEEL GOOD TO LIVE AND TO CREATE."

RECORDED OVER THREE WEEKS IN STUDIO BUILT IN A HOUSE IN THE REGION KNOWN FOR SPACED-OUT ROCK 'N' ROLL AND PSYCHEDELIC COWBOY FOLK, EMMAAR SHOWCASES AN ORGANIC FEEL FROM THE ROLLING HAND DRUMS AND MEANDERING GUITARS OF ALBUM OPENER "TOUMAST TINCHA" CHANTS TO THE GALLOPING BEATS OF THE FORWARD-MARCHING "CHAGHAYBOU." "WE WERE NOT IN A PROPER STUDIO OR OUTSIDE IN THE DESERT LIKE TASSILI," AG LECHE SAYS, "WE BUILT A STUDIO IN A BIG HOUSE IN JOSHUA TREE. EVERYBODY IN THE SAME ROOM, WITH NO SEPARATION. WE WANTED SOMETHING WHICH SOUNDED NATURAL AND LIVE."

ALONG WITH THE ORIGINAL MEMBERS WHO FOUNDED THE GROUP IN THE 1980S (VOCALISTS AND GUITARISTS IBRAHIM AG ALHABIB, ABDALLAH AG ALHOUSSEYNI, AND ALHASSANE AG TOUHAMI) AND THE YOUNGER GENERATION WHO GREW UP LISTENING TO THE BAND AND JOINED IN THE 1990S (MULTI-INSTRUMENTALIST EYADOU AG LECHE, GUITARIST ELAGA AG HAMID, AND PERCUSSIONIST SAID AG AYAD), A GROUP OF AMERICAN MUSICIANS APPEAR ON THE ALBUM. ACCOMPANIED BY RED HOT CHILI PEPPERS GUITARIST JOSH KLINGHOFFER, MATT SWEENEY FROM CHAVEZ, NASHVILLE FIDDLER FATS KAPLIN, AND POET SAUL WILLIAMS, EMMAAR IS A RICHLY LAYERED LISTEN SOLIDIFIED BY ATMOSPHERIC TEXTURES AND GRITTY GUITAR-WORK.

RECORDING AWAY FROM MALI CREATED A NUANCED SOUND THAT AG LECHE SAYS COULD HAVE BEEN INSPIRED BY THE NEW LANDSCAPE AND AMERICAN EXPERIENCES. "WE THINK THAT THE AIR IS DIFFERENT, THE MOODS ARE DIFFERENT, RECORDING IN AMERICA AND DOING A SMALL TOUR IN CALIFORNIA, ARIZONA, NEW MEXICO AND TEXAS, BROUGHT US IN A SPECIAL MOOD, THE LANDSCAPE, THE BIG SPACE, THE SOUTH. WE WATCHED WESTERN MOVIES, DURING THE RECORDING AND ATE BURRITOS, AND THE ENGINEER WHO WORKED WITH US IS FROM NASHVILLE, SO I SUPPOSED IT CHANGE THE WAY OUR MUSIC IS CAPTURED."

BUT WHILE THE LOCATION WAS NEW, THEIR MUSIC STILL FOCUSED ON LIFE IN THE SAHARA. "THE NEW SONGS OF THIS ALBUM TALK ABOUT WHAT WE FEEL TODAY," AG LECHE SAYS, "THE TUAREG ISSUES, THE NEED OF BEING RECOGNIZED BY THE ADMINISTRATION OF OUR COUNTRY. BUT ALSO SOME POETIC WAYS OF DESCRIBING OUR FEELINGS. THE TAMASHEQ LANGUAGE IS USING A LOT OF METAPHORS, AND IT COMES FROM THE OLD TRADITIONAL TUAREG POETRY THAT TELLS ABOUT THE TUAREG TRIBES, THEIR ADVENTURES IN THE DESERT, THE WARS, BUT ALSO THE BEAUTY OF THE DESERT, THE SKY, THE LANDS, AND THE ASSOUF, OUR BLUES, AND NOSTALGIA OF AN OLD TIME."

IF TINARIWEN PAYS HOMAGE TO OLD TIMES, IT'S BECAUSE THEIR PRESENT IS IN FLUX. TURMOIL HAS EMBROILED THEIR REGION ONCE AGAIN, AS GOVERNMENTS AND POWERS RISE AND FALL, ALMOST WITH THE REGULARITY OF THE SEASONS. "IT IS GOING TO BE A VERY LONG WAY TO PEACE IN THE NORTH," SAYS AG LECHE. "IT'S BEEN UP AND DOWN. THE ISLAMIST ARE ALL AROUND IN THE NORTH BUT ALSO SOME THIEVES AND BAD PEOPLE TAKING ADVANTAGE OF THIS CHAOS TO FRIGHTEN OUR PEOPLE."

MALI, IT SEEMS, IS THE FORGOTTEN, OR IGNORED, BROTHER OF THE ARAB SPRING, BUT ON EMMAAR, TINARIWEN TELLS ABOUT THE TRIALS OF THEIR PEOPLE AND TELLS THE WORLD OF THE PLIGHT OF THEIR FAMILIES. "THE IDEALS OF THE PEOPLE HAVE BEEN SOLD CHEAP, MY FRIENDS / A PEACE IMPOSED BY FORCE IS BOUND TO FAIL / AND GIVES WAY TO HATRED," AG LECHE SINGS ON "TOUMAST TINCHA."

THOUGH THE BAND'S SUCCESS HAS BROUGHT THEM AROUND THE WORLD, THEY RARELY CAN GO HOME, FACING THREATS OF INCARCERATION AND DEATH BY THUGS IN POWER. BUT LIKE CREATURES OF THE DESERT, THEY ADAPT AND CARRY ON, AFTER ALL, TINARIWEN IS A BAND BORN INTO CHAOS.

"OUR PEOPLE ARE USED TO MOVING ALL THE TIME," AG LECHE SAYS, "SINCE THE LATE 60'S WE HAVE ALWAYS BEEN MOVED BETWEEN MALI, ALGERIA, LIBYA, CHAD, MAURITANIA, NIGER. NOWADAY A LOT OF OUR FAMILIES MOVED TO THE ALGERIAN BORDER OR CLOSE TO NIGER BECAUSE OF THE SITUATION WITH THE MALIAN ADMINISTRATION. WE ARE REFUGEES IN A LOT OF COUNTRIES IN AFRICA."

TINARIWEN'S OWN STORY BURGEONS WITH MYTH AND MYTHOS IN THEIR HOME COUNTRY AND BEYOND. THEIR TALE IS THE STUFF OF LEGENDS. FOUNDING MEMBER IBRAHIM AG ALHABIB, GREW UP IN DESOLATION IN MALI, WHERE HE WITNESSED HIS OWN FATHER'S DEATH AT THE AGE OF FOUR. LATER, AFTER SEEING A WESTERN FILM, HE BUILT HIS FIRST GUITAR FROM A BICYCLE WIRE, A STICK AND A TIN CAN. THE BAND WAS FOUNDED IN THE 1980'S IN TUAREG CAMPS IN LIBYA, WHERE THE NOMADIC PEOPLES HAD RELOCATED TO FIND WORK AND A NEW LIFE AWAY FROM THEIR HOMETOWN OF THE SAHARA. DISILLUSIONED BY THE PROMISES OF QUADDAFI AT THE TIME, THE TUAREG BECAME RESTLESS AGAIN AND LONGED FOR HOME. BUT THE INTERACTION WITH CITY LIFE YIELDED UNEXPECTED CONSEQUENCES, THEY BECAME EXPOSED TO WESTERN MUSIC — MOST NOTABLY THE GUITAR-DRIVEN ANTHEMS OF JIMI HENDRIX AND THE AMERICAN BLUES — WHICH THEY MIXED WITH THEIR OWN SOULFUL DIRGES WHICH THEY'D PERFORM IN THE CAMPS BY THE FIRE WITH BATTERY-OPERATED AMPS. WHEN REVOLUTION BROKE OUT BACK IN MALI, THEY LEFT LIBYA BEHIND, HUNG UP THEIR GUITARS AND PICKED UP GUNS TO FIGHT FOR THE TUAREG INDEPENDENCE. WHEN THE DISCORD DIED DOWN, THE BAND RETURNED TO MUSIC, DELIVERING SONGS IMBUED WITH ACHING BEAUTY AND LONESOME POETRY. THEIR MUSIC WAS BOOTLEGGED AND TRADED AROUND THE REGION, EARNING THEM A DEVOUT FOLLOWING. THEN IN THE LATE 1990S, THEY WERE DISCOVERED BY WESTERN MUSICIANS AND FOR THE FIRST TIME, THEIR SONGS LEFT THE SAHARA AND WERE INTRODUCED TO THE WORLD. FOR THE NEXT TEN YEARS, THE NOMADS NOW TRAVELED THE WORLD, PERFORMING AT NEARLY EVERY NOTABLE FESTIVAL AND VENUE AROUND THE GLOBE, PROVIDING THE WORLD WITH A TASTE OF THE ACHING BEAUTY AND LONESOME PLEASURES OF SAHARAN ASSOUF.