

Prodigious Tuareg guitarist and songwriter Mdou Moctar boldly reforges contemporary Saharan music and “rock music“ by melding Eddie Van Halen pyrotechnics, full-blast noise and guitar shredding, field recordings, drums rhythms, poetic meditations on love, religion, women’s rights, inequality and Western Africa’s exploitation at the hands of colonial powers to rip a new hole in the sky with the *Afrique Victime* album.

Mdou Moctar’s home is Agadez, a desert village in rural Niger. Inspired by YouTube videos of Eddie Van Halen’s six string techniques and traditional Tuareg melodies, he mastered the guitar which he himself built and created his own burning style. A born charismatic, Mdou went on to tell his story as an aspiring artist by writing, producing & starring in the first Tuareg language film: a remake of *Purple Rain* called *Akounak Tedalat Taha Tazoughai* – which translates to “Rain The Color Of Blue With A Little Red In It”, winning the approval of his family and his community. The word and the sound travelled across West Africa via mobile phone data cards, a popular form of local music distribution. Gruelling DIY world tours and albums on the independent US label *Sahel Sounds* followed, including 2019’s landmark *Ilana: The Creator* album that earned Mdou Moctar an ecstatic international audience.

*Afrique Victime* is result of the combined efforts of Mdou and the members of the band that shares his name. Mdou’s crucial collaborator is Ahmoudou Madassane, who’s been his rhythm guitarist since 2008– their two guitars are an alchemical combination. As a songwriter, producer and recording artist Ahmoudou is the premier musical ambassador to Tuaregs in Niger, empowering young musicians with instruments, recording opportunities, and visas. Madassane helped form the revolutionary first woman-fronted Tuareg guitar band *Les Filles De Illighadad*, whose debut album and tours caused an international sensation in 2019.

The band’s youngest member is prodigal drummer Souleymane Ibrahim, also a member of both the well-known Niger band *Sultanat Star De L’air* and the longest running wedding band in Agadez, *Etran De L’air*. Souleymane’s playing on this album ferociously sets a new standard for the “rock” drumset.

Producer & bassist Mikey Coltun flies 20 hours from Brooklyn, NYC, then takes a 28 hour bus ride to reach Agadez so the band can practice and record. With no support from a major label or a manager, they made this journey out of Niger every time they toured. In the past three years, Mikey’s played over 500 shows on three continents as Mdou Moctar’s bassist, road manager, producer/recording engineer, and friend. Coltun recorded and produced *Afrique Victime* around the band’s travels in 2019– in studios, apartments, hotel rooms, venue backstages, and in field recordings in Niger.

Recording and honing songs as a touring outfit forged a livewire new sound, and *Ilana* was a late ’60s early ’70s ZZ Top and Black Sabbath record – *Afrique Victime* is mid ’70s to early ’80s Van Halen meets Black Flag meets Black Uhuru. The ferocity of Moctar’s electric guitar and the band’s hypnotic rhythm section are an awe-inspiring display on songs like “Chismiten” and the mournful yet incandescent title track. Elsewhere, Moctar finds inspiration in highlighting lesser known facets of the group: “While people have gotten to know Mdou Moctar as a rock band, there is a whole different set of music with this band done on acoustic guitars which we wanted to incorporate into this album in order to go through a sonic journey,” he says. Mdou pays homage to one of his heroes Abdallah Ag Oumbadagou, the legendary Niger musician and political revolutionary, on songs “Habibti” and “Layla”. “Abdallah was a contemporary of Tinariwen and helped to pioneer the sound of Tuareg guitar music blended with drum machines and electronic sounds”.

“From prison to Nobel prize. They ceded to Mandela / Africa is a victim of so many crimes / If we stay silent it will be the end of us / Why is this happening?” Moctar asks on the heartfelt and rallying title track. “I want the world to know that we are making music to promote world peace and be with everyone on the same level, fighting against racism”, he says. “All colors and genders are equal. Women, Men and children all suffer in the desert due to the colonization by France and therefore there is a lack of the basics – hospitals, drinking water, schools.”

The needs of Agadez are a major part of what drives Moctar as an artist, and promoting the region’s youth through music is an especially personal cause. “I know what it’s like to have been in that position,” he says, “to not have the support of your family, or the money for guitars or strings, it’s really hard. I have a lot of support from the younger generation, because I help them out a lot. When I get back from tour, I give them gear that I bought while I was away so they can go out and form their own bands.”

Says Coltun: “In Agadez the music and feeling at Tuareg weddings is exactly like the best of Western DIY/Punk shows. It’s loud, energetic and powerful. There is a sense of everyone helping out. Tuaregs are a tight community. If you’re Tuareg you’re considered family.”

The music listeners are the beneficiaries of the staggeringly powerful do-it-yourself musical ethic of Mdou Moctar– the man and the band– who’ve worked so hard to bring the spirits of families and communities in Niger to the West. Afrique Victime sounds and feels like a Tuareg hand reaching down from the sky, and we are very lucky for this chance to get lifted.