TINARIWEN

Thom Yorke (Radiohead):
"The Clock was totally taken from this weird 'Arabian festival in the desert' that Robert Plant did. There are a couple of tracks where these guitar players from Mali play these amazing riffs. So I copied their style and improvised for 10 minutes and then just randomly recorded bits until I captured something of what they were doing." (Mojo Magazine, UK).

Kyp Malone & Tunde Adebimpe (TV ON THE RADIO):
"We were simultaneously stunned that we'd never heard of them before and amazed at how bad they made everyone else look!" (BBC)

Damon Albarn:
"They were proper rebels, and what a wonderful way to advertise a problem to the world: through music. You don't have to understand the words to hear something deeper in it. It's the mood that says it all." (Q Magazine, UK).

Carlos Santana:
"To share this stage with Tinariwen is a real joy because when I hear them I hear the beginning of the music of the Mississippi and of Muddy Waters, Jeff Beck, BB King, Little Walter, Otis Rush, Buddy Guy…this is where it all comes from, they are the originators."
(On stage at the Montreux Jazz Festival 2006).

Robert Plant:
"Listening to Tinariwen is like dropping a bucket into a deep well."

Bono (U2):
"I really appreciated them. They come from a hard place. It's very different when people are singing for their life, rather than just to eat. It's really The Edge who introduced me to this music. It's true that this kind of music is like a breath, that I can feel. It's the discovery of new sounds, new harmonies. We're trying to get inspired, but just a little bit. We don't want to end up being tourists."

Chris Martin (Coldplay):
"…so much amazing music inspired us on this record. We listened to Rammstein and Tinariwen, one after the other, and the middle part of '42' came naturally from that. There were no limits."
(Talking about the album'Viva la Vida' to Rock'n' Folk France)

TINARIWEN BIOGRAPHY

How do you compress a thirty-year epic into a few pages? Tinariwen, whose back-story has variously been described as "the most compelling of any band" (Songlines), "the most rock'n'roll of them all" (The Irish Times), "hard-bitten" (Slate.com) and "dramatic" (The Independent), are both a dream and a nightmare for any aspiring music writer: a dream because the most superficial 'headlines' of their tale – rebellion, guns and guitars, desert nomads, Ghadaffi, the real Saharan blues – are like easy nuggets of gold to thrill-seeking journalists and literary prospectors. And a nightmare, because none of these clichés really do the band justice or even begin to

describe who they are, what they feel or the music they play. The following comprises only the chapter headings, the main way markers of the long road the group have travelled from the wild empty places of the southern Sahara desert to the concert stages of the world.

In the early 1960s, Mali threw off the yoke of French colonial rule and became an independent country, ruled by a new African elite from the capital Bamako. A thousand miles away in the northern desert regions, the nomadic Touareg or Kel Tamashek ('The Tamashek speaking people') had trouble recognising the legitimacy of their new rulers or accepting their socialist laws and taxes, their alien ways and demands. In 1963 there was a Touareg uprising in a large remote part of the desert called The Adrar des Iforas, around the small outpost of Kidal with its old French Foreign Legion fort. It was brutally suppressed by the Malian army. The period still haunts the local population like a nightmare. Of the many stories of suffering and incidents of callousness that survive in the collective memory, there is one that is crucial to our story. It concerns a mason and trader by the name of Alhabib Ag Sidi who was arrested in front of his family in the village of Tessalit, taken to the barracks in Kidal and executed for aiding the rebels. The army then went and destroyed Alhabib's herd of camels, cattle and goats. His young four-year old son Ibrahim witnessed this wanton act of destruction before travelling north into exile in Algeria with his family and their one remaining cow. By 1964 the uprising had been crushed, and the Adrar des Iforas was turned into a no-go zone, ruled by the Army.

Ibrahim Ag Alhabib grew up in refugee camps near Bordj Moktar or in the deserts around the southern Algerian city of Tamanrasset. He hated school and preferred running wild in the bush. One day he saw a film at a makeshift desert village cinema. It was a western and it featured a cowboy playing a guitar. The instrument made Ibrahim dream. He built his own guitar out of a tin can, a stick and bicycle brake wire. He started to play old Touareg melodies on it, and modern Arabic pop tunes. After a while, he became pretty good. He was a solitary kid anyway, who kept himself to himself and was known as 'Abaraybone' or 'raggamuffin child' by the other kids and adults.

At the age of 9 Ibrahim ran away from home in a cement truck, to earn some money and see the world. He grew up wandering around Algeria and Libya doing odd jobs – carpenter, builder, tailor, gardener. It was a precarious existence; made bearable by the companionship of many other young Touareg men who were living the same marginal life in exile. The northern desert regions of Mali had been struck by a catastrophic drought in 1973-4, which had almost wiped out the animal herds and the traditional nomadic way of life with it. Algeria and Libya were awash with errant exiled Touareg youth; jobless, paperless, surviving by any means necessary. They would gather together in groups and sleep rough on the outskirts of villages and towns, sharing food, cigarettes, songs and stories. The police would harass them mercilessly, shouting "Hey you! Les chomeurs! ('unemployed' in French)." In the age-old tradition of the underclass, this insult was turned into a badge of honour, and these young men became known as the 'ishumar' generation.

Towards the end of the 1970s, Ibrahim began to meet other Touareg of his age who shared his passion for music of all kinds, from traditional Touareg poetry and song to the radical *chaabi* protest music of Moroccan groups like Nass El Ghiwane and Jil Jilala, from Algerian pop *rai* to western rock and pop artists like Elvis Presley, Led Zeppelin, Carlos Santana, Dire Straits, Jimmy Hendrix, Boney M and Bob Marley. His most important early musical partners were Inteyeden Ag Ablil, his brother Liya, aka 'Diarra', Ag Ablil, and Hassan Ag Touhami aka 'The Lion of the Desert'. This group of friends got together in Tamanrasset, and began to play at parties and weddings. They acquired their first real acoustic guitar in 1979, and their reputation grew. They were new and radical inasmuch as they wrote their own poems and songs – not the old Touareg verse of heroic deeds and fair maidens – but new lyrics about homesickness, longing, exile and political awakening. In order to keep out of trouble with the law, Ibrahim, Inteyeden

and their friends would often just disappear off into the desert for a night or two, to drink tea, make music and sleep under the stars. People began to call them 'Kel Tinariwen', which translates literally as 'The People of the Deserts' or roughly and more accurately as 'The Desert Boys'.

In 1980, Colonel Ghadaffi put out a decree inviting all young Touareg men, who were living illegally in Libya, to come and receive a full military training at a designated camp in the southern desert. It was an opportunistic move. The Touareg had long held a reputation as brilliant bushmen and desert fighters. Ghadaffi dreamed of forming a Saharan regiment, made up of the best young Touareg fighters, to further his territorial ambitions in Chad, Niger and elsewhere.

Seeing it as a heaven-sent chance to learn how to be soldiers and take back their homeland by force, Ibrahim and most of his friends answered the call immediately. Their training was very tough, and lasted only nine months. Four years later, in 1985, they were invited back into a new camp near Tripoli. This time it was run by the leaders of the Touareg rebel movement, the MPA (Mouvement Populaire de l'Azawad). Ibrahim, Inteyeden, Diarra and Hassan were joined by a whole new group of aspiring musicians, including Keddou Ag Ossade aka 'Hiwaj', Mohammed Ag Itlale aka 'Japonais', Sweiloum, Abouhadid and the young Abdallah Ag Alhousseyni. They formed a collective and built their own make-shift rehearsal studio, equipping it with basic gear bought with the money from a communal chest into which all recruits paid contributions. Their mission was to write songs about the rebellion, about the aspirations of the Touareg for political freedom, for education and development, and then to record these songs without payment for whoever turned up at their door with an empty cassette. It was a propaganda machine for a people without any other forms of media whatsoever. The cassettes were taken back to camps and villages throughout the Sahara, copied, and then copied again and again and again. It was a cassette-to-cassette grapevine and the sound quality was as atrocious as the message was powerful.

Ibrahim, Inteyeden, Japonais, Diarra, Hassan and their friends never saw themselves as one-dimensional propagandists however. They were musicians and poets. Their songs spoke of deep personal struggles and of their love of their desert home, as much as they raised the flag for the rebel movement. In 1989, frustrated by the lack of progress and by broken promises, the members of Tinariwen escaped from the Libyan camp and headed south into Mali. Ibrahim found himself back in Tessalit, the village of his birth, for the first time in 26 years. And then, in June 1990, the rebellion began.

It lasted about six months. The Malian government offered peace terms to the MPA in January 1991 and the Tamanrasset Accords were signed. The rebel movement split into different factions comprising those who were pro or contra the Accords. It was a confusing, desperate and often dispiriting time. Most of Tinariwen decided to leave the military life behind and go back to being musicians.

And that was it...six months of open combat in a story lasting three decades or more. No wonder the group are frustrated and bored by journalists who remain obsessed with the romantic myth of guns and guitars, of rebellion and war. In 1991, Ibrahim and his friends had no doubt that they were musicians first and foremost. They had become soldiers only out of necessity, for a brief and painful period. It was all over in a flicker.

The group headed home to Tessalit and Kidal, or went to seek work in Gao, Mopti and Bamako. Some, like Keddou, accepted posts in the army, the customs service or in education under a UN sponsored programme aimed at reintegrating rebels into civil society. In groups of two, three, four or more, they also began to play gigs openly. Touareg from all over the Sahara were delighted finally to encounter the group who had invented the modern Touareg guitar style, who

had been the pied pipers of the rebellion and whose songs defined the story of a whole generation. Their secret was unveiled.

But it was a discreet success. In 1992 some of the members of Tinariwen went to Abidjan in Ivory Coast to record a cassette at the legendary JBZ studios. They played gigs for Touareg communities throughout north and West Africa, but not that often. They were nomads at heart, and the collective was often spread out over thousands of miles. But that was the group's strength. Just two members could get together in a village with a guitar or two, a djembe or water can for percussion, and sing the songs of Tinariwen. It's often said that every Touareg from Tamanrasset to Niamey and from Timbuktu to Ghat is a member of Tinariwen, so widely are their songs known and treasured. They are more of a social movement than a desert rock'n'roll band.

Then news came that a French group called Lo'Jo wanted to invite Tinariwen to Europe. This adventurous bunch of musical troubadours lived in Angers, in the Loire valley. Angers was twinned with Bamako. In 1998 Lo'Jo travelled to the Malian capital for a festival of street theatre and music, and there they met Issa Dicko and Foy Foy, two members of the Tinariwen collective, who told them all about the sufferings of the Touareg, the droughts, the rebellion, the exile. Together they came up with the idea of creating a festival based on the traditional annual gatherings of Touareg in each part of the desert, which would hopefully open up the desert regions to cultural exchange, tourism and investment. It was a crazy improbable scheme. In 1999 some of the members of Tinariwen came and did a few gigs in France under the name of AZAWAD. And then in January 2001, the first Festival in the Desert took place in Tin Essako, 60 km east of Kidal. About 1000 locals, and 80 Europeans gathered in that remote beautiful spot. Tinariwen were the stars of the show. A new international phase of their long hard journey was about to begin.

Success came swiftly. By the end of 2001, Tinariwen had performed at WOMAD, Roskilde and the South Bank in London. Their debut CD, 'The Radio Tisdas Sessions', recorded by Justin Adams and Jean-Paul Romann in the studios of Kidal's only Tamashek-speaking radio station, Radio Tisdas, was released on IRL / Wayward in October. Initially lauded by the world music scene and by African music aficionados, Tinariwen's magic quickly began to work on those with little previous interest in those areas. The guitar licks, the grungy grimy desert sound, the arcane yet effortless rhythms, the striking turbans and robes, the wild rebel iconography, the scintillating exoticism of Kalashnikovs and Stratocasters, the glimpsed power of their poetry, so strange and yet somehow so thrillingly familiar…it all synched in with a general fatigue amongst adventurous pop and rock fans, exasperated with endless young drum-bass-and-two-guitars, indi-rock bands.

Over the past seven years, the group have played over 700 concerts in Europe, North America, Japan and Australia. Their name has graced the bills of most of the world's premier rock and world music festivals including Glastonbury, Coachella, Roskilde, Paleo, Les Vieilles Charrues, WOMAD and Printemps de Bourges. Their 2004 CD 'Amassakoul' ("The Traveller') and its follow-up in 2007 'Aman Iman' ("Water Is Life"), have established them as one of the most popular and best selling African groups on the planet. Their ever expanding fan base includes a host of stars and legends: Carlos Santana, Robert Plant, Bono and the Edge, Thom Yorke, Chris Martin, Henry Rollins, Brian Eno, TV on the Radio. In 2005 they were awarded a BBC Award for World Music, and in 2008 they received Germany's prestigious Praetorius Music Prize.

Those are the outward stats of success. Deep inside, Ibrahim, Hassan, Japonais and Abdallah gently rejoice in their improbable victory against all the odds. When they were just youths sharing a cigarette under the shade of an acacia tree somewhere in the southern Sahara, they always dreamed of travelling and seeing the world. Now they've done it. But their biggest

source of pride has been in representing their music and their culture to the world and spreading the message that despite all the twisted words and propaganda to the contrary, the desert really is one of the most beautiful, most peaceful and most inspirational places on earth. Ibrahim's only real regret is that his friend Inteyeden hasn't been at his side during these payback years. The charismatic co-inventor of modern Touareg guitar rock died in 1994 from a mysterious illness.

Since 2001, the founders and elders of Tinariwen have been supported and energised by a new younger generation including bassist Eyadou Ag Leche, percussionist Said Ag Ayad, rhythm guitarist Elaga Ag Hamid, guitarist Abdallah Ag Lamida aka 'Intidao', vocalists Wonou Walet Sidati and the Walet Oumar sisters. They were just children when the rebellion ravaged the north of Mali and Niger. They grew up on Tinariwen's songs. Their presence in the group brings Tinariwen in line with so many long-lasting music and theatre groups in Africa and elsewhere, who, by integrating successive generations of artists into their ranks, become self-perpetuating.

In December of 2008 the old and the young gathered in the sleepy desert village of Tessalit to record Tinariwen's fourth album. It seemed like the ideal place; quiet, off the beaten track, home to Hassan and Ibrahim, blessed with a plentiful water supply and a friendly familiar populace. The group had expressed a strong desire to return to their roots and recapture the raw desert sound of their early recordings. Lo'Jo's French sound engineer, Jean-Paul Romann, who had worked with Justin Adams on 'The Radio Tisdas Sessions' eight years previously, was recruited to produce the album. He arrived with a studio in a suitcase, which was set up in a rented adobe house in the middle of the village, and powered by a chugging generator. The sessions proceeding slowly, surely, in pace with the rhythm of life in that remote corner of Africa. There were free concerts for the local populace in the village square, and recording sessions far out in the bush. There were solitary nights around the fire, under the stars, and parties here and there in the village. It was all very strange, very familiar, just like Tinariwen themselves.

'Imidiwan' is one of those big Tamashek words, to which no single English word can ever do justice. Just like 'Assouf', the name which the Touareg themselves often give Tinariwen's guitar style. 'Assouf' means the blues, loneliness, heartache, longing, homesickness and the darkness beyond the campfire. 'Imidiwan' means friends, companions, soul-brothers, fellow travellers. The juxtaposition of these two words is particularly striking. Maybe Tinariwen are coming in from the cold and recognising all those soul-friends, both living and departed, who have made their incredible journey bearable, whilst warming their hands over the camp fire and looking up at the night sky thick with stars.

Andy Morgan, May 2009.

TINARIWEN – What's the word?.....

"Tinariwen have been acclaimed as possessors of the original DNA of rock 'n' roll...subtly shifting layers of guitar and clapping create a rhythmic base that sounds as though it emanates from the rock and sand of the Sahara itself**" Mark Hudson / Daily Telegraph (UK) – POP CD OF THE WEEK, 4/5 Stars.**

"Tinariwen have created one of the most distinctive, extraordinary and irresistible sounds in modern music, and they're sensibly not veering away from it." **The Sunday Times (UK) – CD OF THE WEEK, 4 Stars.**

“If the amazing story of Tinariwen has engaged a worldwide audience, so has their music**.” Paul Elliot / Q Magazine, 4/5 Stars**

“This is cosmopolitan music plugged into the global mainline, nothing to alarm those daunted by the unknown. Yet it’s also strange, dusty, wild and wonderful!” **Danny Ecclestone / Mojo, 4/5 Stars**

“…their most consistent set yet, a trance-inducing meander through the Sahara, with stinging guitars, earth-moving bass and wildly unpolished harmonies**.” David Hutcheon / The Times. 4/5 Stars.**

“These songs are uplifting, moving, entrancing and, above all, life-affirming – like beacons of hope for the vivid African continent they come from**.” The Sun (UK). 4.5/5 Stars.**

“A cat’s cradle of wiry funk guitar riffs played over ragged, galloping hand drums, topped by growling, ululating vocals, it seems to reunite pre-war Delta Blues with its distant African cousins**.” John Lewis / Uncut, 4/5 Stars.**

“It doesn’t really matter whether you understand what Tinariwen’s lyrics mean; this sort of music is occasionally powerful enough to burrow inside you, find your inner tempo and cause you to move without even realising it. Best of all, there’s no pretension or stigma involved in its enjoyment.” **Lauren Murphy / entertainment.ie 3/5 Stars.**

“Imidiwan, then, builds even on the successful Aman Iman album, Tinariwen’s sound forging its own distinctive path with real emotion and a sense of togetherness. Taken on its own mertis, this is life-enriching sutff**.” Ben Hogwood / musicOMH.com 5/5 Stars.**

"There's vitality and colour aplenty in the magnificent invocation of a desert deer, Tenhert ('The Doe'), and in the swirling delirium of Kel Tamashek ('The Tamashek People'**)." BBC Music**.

“The standard bearers of “desert blues” don’t falter on this fourth album, which takes a step back from the sonic clarity of ‘Aman Iman: Water Is Life’, in favour of a rootsier sound**.” Neil Spencer, The Observer Review**

“The shock of the old may have subsided; their newfound popularity deserves to go on**.” Steve Yates / Word Magazine.**