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TINARIWEN

Imidiwan: Companions

World Village 468096

2009 saw Tinariwen continue their conquering ways. They had opening slots for the Rolling Stones, and their profile grew and grew. This new album is the culmination of all that, a disc that builds very interestingly on the Desert Blues sound that's become their trademark, and their fame. Although that spare, airy blues sound can be an end in itself – and it's very much in evidence here – there are signs that the band has been influenced by their exposure to rock. That was first apparent on their second album, but here the attitude is more rock 'n' roll, and, on cuts like "Tenhert (The Doe)," the sound is overt. When they do step up a couple of gears from the languid desert gait, it's thrilling, and shows that they're really one of the best rock bands around, tight (as they should be after a few years of heavy touring), slick, but with a sense of the exotic and spontaneous. Lyrically they remain serious, with songs about the nature of revolution ("Imidiwan Afrik Temdam"), regret ("Tamodjerazt Assis"), and the Tamashek people ("Kel Tamashek") – all inspirational stuff. The layered guitars can still seduce, and the magic that first brought them to the fore is still very much present. Tinariwen continues to grow and develop, both musically and in stature. — CN