

TINARIWEN

FEB 20 ROYCE HALL

PLUS SPECIAL GUESTS

Tinariwen is leading a revolution in world music. *Telegraph UK's* review of the group's latest release *Imidiwan: Companions* (2009) dubs the music from these soul rebels from the Saharan desert "utterly unselfconscious, mining its own earthy terrain apparently indifferent to the fact that the rest of the world is even listening." Be part of the listening world at the group's UCLA Live appearance.



SAHARAN SOUND, GLOBAL UNDERSTANDING

by Steve Hochman

The 1994 edition of the *Rough Guide to World Music* contained just one passing mention of the Tuareg, the nomadic people of the Sahara desert in Mali and Niger. The book's 2006 edition, though, devoted an entire section to the endangered culture's music. What happened in the meantime to cause this leap of interest?

In a word: Tinariwen.

With its percolating electric guitar rhythms and its messages born of the struggles of the nomadic Tuareg people, Tinariwen has become the cause celebre of global fans and stars alike and the name-brand avatar of an emerging African consciousness, advocated by tastemakers such as David Byrne and Robert Plant and sought out for collaborations by Santana, the Rolling Stones, Herbie Hancock and many others. Tinariwen concerts are exhilaratingly seductive celebrations that have become legend on stages all over the world, and the group's February 20 date at UCLA Live's Royce Hall is certain to add to its legacy of transformative experiences. At home, its sponsorship of and participation in various festivals has made the Sahara a must-visit destination for music adventurers from all over the world.

And its fourth and latest album *Imidiwan: Companions*, recorded in organic sessions in an encampment beneath a Saharan night sky, was recently given England's prestigious *Uncut Magazine* Music Award, beating out esteemed runners-up as Bob Dylan, Wilco, Kings of Leon and Grizzly Bear.

So how is it that this ragtag band, formed three decades ago among the sometimes-violent fights for Tuareg autonomy, ascended to these heights of late? Simple, says founder and guitarist Ibrahim Ag Alhabib, credited as the first to bring electric instruments into the Tuareg sounds: "The main essence is that our music moves the population. It touches them."

Indeed it does, and on several levels.

"If we're talking about what's the most amazing, creative, forward-looking political record we're discussing, then this album is very, very special," remarked noted broadcaster Bob Harris, one of the blue-ribbon judges for the *Uncut* honors. "There's so much to discover, to know about this record, but you find yourself asking, 'How much do I want to know, or how much do I just want to be entranced by it?'"

As its music has become integrated into the western world over the past decade, Tinariwen has benefited from—and in turn helped stimulate—awareness of a number of issues that impact both its home and the world at large.

"The interest in the desert and the climate changes has brought our people in the spotlight too, Alhabib says. "To reach a deeper understanding and find freedom and solutions, we need this attention. It's a global project to save our planet and population."

The biggest impact, though, has been in the Sahara.

"It has created hope among us and more important, acceptance for our younger generation," he says of the group's global recognition. "Likewise, we have tried to set general desert living in focus to create a deeper global understanding. It's a method to protect our people and their fragile lifestyle. We organize several festivals during the year and use the financial and PR profits on our people, environment, education systems, reorganization and so on."

Tinariwen has also been inspiring a new generation by creating the group Tamakrist with younger members to represent "a modern version of Tinariwen music and ideology," Alhabib explains. Tinariwen itself has scaled back a bit in size, a leaner lineup than had toured in the past with a more "rock band" formation. But it's never lost sight of its roots or mission.

Photo: Eric Mullet