Tinariwen - Elwan (2017)

1 Tiwàyyen 2 Sastanàqqàm 3 Nizzagh Ijbal 4 Hayati 5 Ittus 6 Ténéré Tàqqàl 7 Imidiwàn N-àkall-In 8 Talyat 9 Assàwt 10 Arhegh Ad Annàgh 11 Nànnuflày Bass, Electric Guitar – Eyadou Ag Leche Electric Guitar – Iyad Moussa Ben Abderahmane Lead Guitar, Lead Vocals – Ibrahim Ag Alhabib You-you – Mina Wallet Oumar Lead Guitar, Lead Vocals – Abdallah Ag Alhousseyni Lead Guitar, Lead Vocals – Alhassane Ag Touhami Backing Vocals – Abdelkader Ourzig, Abdoul Wahab Cheich, Haibdallah Akhamouk (Imarhan), Hicham Bouhasse, M'bark Bellal, Melghaynine Sifori (The Kids From M'Hamid), Said Laghferi, Tahar Khaldi Backing Vocals, Handclaps – Abdallah Ag Alhousseyni, Alhassane Ag Touhami, Eyadou Ag Leche Cigarbox Guitar – Alain Johannes Djembe, Calabash, Backing Vocals, Handclaps – Said Ag Ayad Electric Guitar – Kurt Vile, Matt Sweeney Guitar, Backing Vocals, Handclaps – Elaga Ag Hamid Tambours, Percussion – The Gangas De Tagounite Vocals – Mark Lanegan

Decades of cultural displacement, political unrest, and even a kidnapping have somehow failed to dim the spirit of Tinariwen, the long-tenured Saharan desert blues outfit from Northern Mali. Over 30 years into their career and with six albums to their credit, the Tuareg band has maintained a global presence and garnered widespread critical acclaim for its distinctive sound fusing West African assouf traditions with a potent multi-guitar attack. For their seventh album, Elwan, Tinariwen reunited with producer Patrick Votan, who also helmed 2014's dramatic Emmaar. Just prior to Emmaar, the band was exiled from Mali, fleeing from the militant Islamist regime Ansar Dine, who denounced popular music as "Satan's music." With their homeland still in conflict, this album marks the second time the embattled musicians were unable to record on native soil. Captured in France, Morocco, and California, Elwan is a work of subtle power, relying less on the atmospheric grace of its predecessors and focusing on the distilled, fine-tuned engine of Tinariwen's percussive core. Overall, the album's production is more immediate and, with its tasteful contingent of rock-oriented guests like Kurt Vile, Mark Lanegan, Alain Johannes, and Matt Sweeney, the arrangements still remain spare and effective. On the slowly unfurling "Ténéré Tàqqàl," gently snaking riffs belie the tension of the lyrics, which make reference to uprisings, both human and animal. On "Imidiwàn N-Àkall-In," a track full of quietly roiling tension, bandleader Ibrahim Ag Alhabib sings "My own people have abandoned their

ancestral ways, all that's left is a groaning land full of old people and children." While there is certainly bitterness throughout Elwan's 13 tracks, there is hope, love, and motivation, too. On the dreamy "Nànnuflày," a spray of smoothly interlocking guitar riffs build as Alhabib and the group deliver a call-and-response to which guest vocalist Lanegan replies "No sleepwalking, don't keep me apart, I'm through sleepwalking, God be in my heart." Exiles, explorers, and seekers of inner truth, Tinariwen once again deliver a vital and engaging album. ---Timothy Monger, AllMusic Review

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