Daily Life

TINARIWEN RELEASES NEW ALBUM 'HOGGAR'

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Any rock fan may have heard the argument that rock music is a dead genre, its dying breaths of creativity spent decades ago. Although rock music may no longer populate the Western Top 40 lists, the genre is alive and burgeoning with innovation. You just need to know where to look for it.

Tinariwen, arguably the most influential Saharan rock band in history, has recently released a new album titled "Hoggar" on the punk label Wedge Records.

Tinariwen was founded in the 1970s by Ibrahim Ag Alhabib, a runaway son of a Tuareg rebel fighter. His earliest memory was watching his father's execution at the age of four. Having taught himself to play on a guitar he'd crafted out of an oil can and bike parts, Alhabib pioneered a blend of American blues, traditional music forms like Takamba and Tendé, and Arabic pop that characterizes modern-day Tuareg rock.

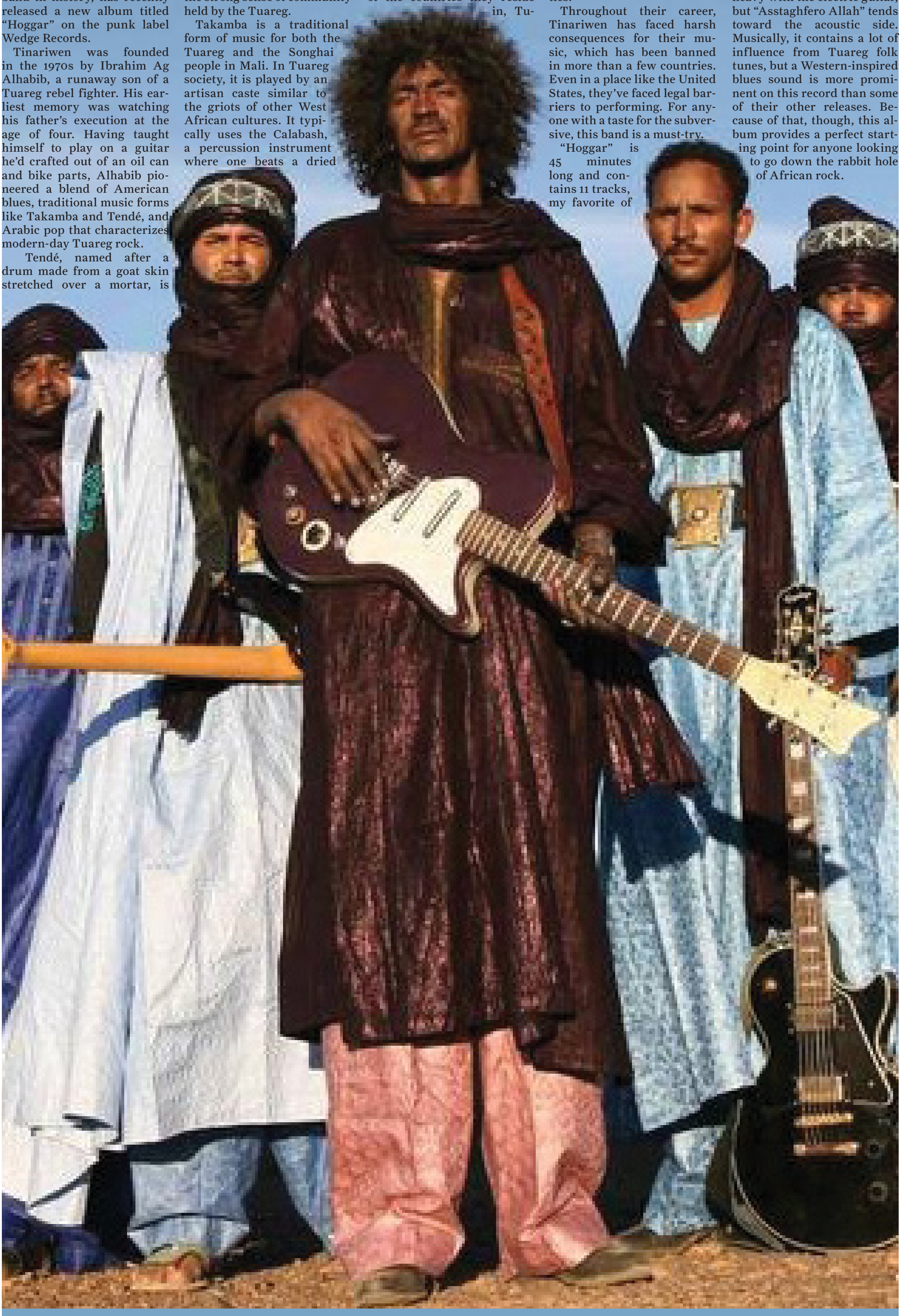
Tendé, named after a drum made from a goat skin stretched over a mortar, is the core expression of Tuareg community life and the backbone of all Tuareg music. Although it is traditionally performed only by women, Tendé performances are community-wide gatherings where the singing of the women is accompanied by the dancing of the men. Tendé songs themselves are almost exclusively call and response, expressing the strong sense of community held by the Tuareg.

Takamba is a traditional form of music for both the Tuareg and the Songhai people in Mali. In Tuareg society, it is played by an artisan caste similar to the griots of other West African cultures. It typically uses the Calabash, a percussion instrument where one beats a dried gourd half-submerged in a tub of water. Both styles are the basis of modern-day Tuareg rock and central to the music of Tinariwen.

The Tuareg, a nomadic ethnic group indigenous to the Sahara, have faced incredible struggle as their homeland was divided by European Colonial powers. Subject to separation and discrimination in many of the countries they reside in, Tuareg teenagers turned to rock music as an outlet. Today, this struggle continues as more and more Tuareg land is rendered uninhabitable by war and desertification. This specific genre of rock — dubbed "Tishoumaren" after the French word for "unemployed," because of Tuareg job discrimination — is bluesy, hypnotic and drips with politics.

Throughout their career, Tinariwen has faced harsh consequences for their music, which has been banned in more than a few countries. Even in a place like the United States, they've faced legal barriers to performing. For anyone with a taste for the subversive, this band is a must-try.

"Hoggar" is 45 minutes long and contains 11 tracks, my favorite of which being "Erghad Awefo" and "N'ak Tenere Lyat." Most of the songs are sung in Tamasheq and Arabic, but the second track on the album, "Imidiwan Takyadam," features José González and contains some Spanish lyrics. The music is defined by its hypnotic guitar, pulsing drums, and male and female vocals. Most of the songs are heavy with the electric guitar, but "Asstaghfero Allah" tends toward the acoustic side. Musically, it contains a lot of influence from Tuareg folk tunes, but a Western-inspired blues sound is more prominent on this record than some of their other releases. Because of that, though, this album provides a perfect starting point for anyone looking to go down the rabbit hole of African rock.



The group members of Tinariwen pose while shooting a music video for their song "Tenere Taqqim Tossam" in 2011. The band has just released their 10th studio album "Hoggar" on March 13, 2026.

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