

Kel Assouf - Black Tenere (2019)

Written by bluesever

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1 *Fransa* 4:41 2 *Tenere* 4:02 3 *Alyochan* 3:55 4 *Tamatant* 5:28 5 *America* 3:55 6 *Amghar* 4:08 7 *Ariyal* 7:22 8 *Taddout* 5:17 9 *Ubary* 3:11 Arranger, Producer – Sofyann Ben Youssef Drums – Olivier Penu Keyboards – Sofyann Ben Youssef Vocals, Electric Guitar – Aboubacar Harouna

Kel Assouf are a rocking inter-global trio, whose roots fuse from West African Sahara to European Belgium and beyond. They sit comfortably in the Tuareg musical character, moulded by trailblazers Tinariwen, but with this new release, they burst through and breakdown musical barriers, roaring rock'n'roll, as well as spiritually meditative mellow tracks.

Produced by their very own keyboardist Sofyann Ben Youssef, this is the third album from the trio, released on Glitterbeat Records, a label well established and renowned for bringing global music to larger audiences, winning the WOMEX award for best label every year since 2014.

The opening track 'Fransa' starts by setting the Tuareg tone with gritty driving guitar, clap percussions and a cyclical bass line that introduces the funky elements of the album.

The second track 'Tenere' then really exemplifies their influences from Europe, as well as Africa, with breaks of rocking drums and muted guitar rhythm in alt-rock fashion, and keys that resemble the sounds of bagpipes that are highlighted in a drop that leads into an all-out crescendo.

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In contrast, the next track 'Aloychan' starts atmospheric, with sounds that resonate with imagery of the Sahara, then the rumbling of drums and guitar seem as if to appear from over a dune. I like the simplicity of the vocals and drums together, then with key synths and guitar working in unison on the repeated riffs in psychedelic tonalities. I also enjoy the build-up in this song.

The fourth track 'Tamatant' I found to be immediately spiritual and meditative, with the soft twang of the electric guitar, lack of any percussive instruments and a drone-esque backdrop.

After a little research, the lyrics too are precious in this album, with a clear message of tragedy and defiance describing the strife of the Tuaregs – or Kel Tamasheq, their preferred name in post-colonial West and North Africa.

The whole album from beginning to end offers a variety of treats in terms of styles and vibes, representing the multiculturalism of the Tuareg diaspora, with an even up-and-down between roaring rock'n'roll tracks to fiercely funky and consciously calm sounds. ---Sophie Darling, rhythmpassport.com

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