

Niger, Musiques des Tuaregs, Vols 1&2 (Azawagh and In Gall) Recorded by Francois Borel 1971_97 Disques VDE-Gallo, <http://www.vdegallo.ch>, CD-1105 and CD 1106

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This excellent pair of CDs is largely compiled from recordings made by Francois Borel between 1971 and the late 1990s. Each takes a specific regional community as its focus and provides a comprehensive cross-section of its musical culture, representing, we assume, an indigenous typology. The illustrated notes (in French as well as English) that accompany the discs provide brief but adequate explanations of the social contexts in which the recordings were made. Biographical details of some individual musicians are also included, which not only informs a listener's understanding of their role in society but can also illustrate their performative intentions. We are told, for example, that the song "Amellokoy" (vol. 2, track 6) is performed by a man in his sixties who "has lost some of his vocal capabilities" but has "retained the distinctive traits of the Air style", which are subsequently described. For listeners unfamiliar with Tuareg musics these notes are invaluable, as they draw attention to aspects of the recordings that would otherwise be missed. Being personally more familiar with northern Berber musics, I could certainly identify strong "family resemblances" with the rhythmic and melodic structures found here, particularly in the use of the *anzad* (one-string bowed lute), though associations might just as easily be made with genres found in Mali or even Mauritania. As traditionally transhumant societies, whose neighbours refer to them as *Tegareygaret* ("in between" people), Tuareg groups have clearly played a significant role in the transmission of musical styles across the Sahel, through trade, migration or seasonal interaction with settled communities.

Perhaps a little surprisingly, these various groups seem to have maintained a rigid hierarchical social system, until more recently coming under increasing pressure to become sedentary. The social apex consists of a warrior class that in the past has specialized in raiding trans-Saharan trade routes and settlements. Below these are artisans, ritual specialists, herdsmen and vassals, the descendants of slaves captured during these acts of warfare. Most speak Tamachek, a Berber language that distinguishes Tuaregs from their neighbours, though vassal tribes may use forms of Arabic. Such distinctions are reflected in the musical cultures of these groups, and these CDs do a good job of illustrating and explaining these differences. Shepherds provide flute music played on recycled copper piping, certain dances are mostly associated with “smiths and servants” (though we hear that young “nobles” sneak out at night to join in), and specialist bards (*ammessewey*) recount tales of past valour in song. However, the biggest socio-musical distinction illustrated in these CDs is between male and female repertoires. Men from warrior classes, it appears, do not play instruments, but in *Arzawagh* (Vol. 1) they sing *Asak* poetry to the accompaniment of the *anzad* fiddle, which is played exclusively by noble women, many of them clearly virtuosos. The style of singing in *In Gall* is quite different, reflecting closer associations with the Tuareg communities of *Ai'r*, yet this gendered principle remains the same. Vol. 2 includes the *dhikr* chanting of the *Qadiri* Sufi brotherhood, another aspect of local musical practices, which is also exclusive of women.

The instruments which most distinguish Tuareg groups from their neighbours, the *anzad* and the *tendey* drum, are largely the province of women, and they are used not only to accompany men's song and solo performance but also in various curative rites. The *tendey*, typically associated with lower-status women, is effectively a small bowl covered with hide, usually played along with the *assakhalaboo* water drum, another bowl played up-turned in a bucket of

water. It is no doubt significant that these most iconic instruments, including the anžad, are put together temporarily from household objects, as befitting a thoroughly nomadic lifestyle. Over the period in which these recordings were made these communities have adapted to considerable social changes, and the In Gall tribes appear to have become effectively sedentarized during this time. Recently guitars have been introduced, as exemplified in Vol. 1, as other instruments from adjacent Hausa communities have become incorporated into local tradition. So the significance of these more traditional musics has also presumably changed, as the Tuareg strive to maintain social hierarchies and intertribal alliances as matters of identity preservation rather than everyday practice. These collections encompass the musics made during a period of transition and as such may be considered somewhat historical, as surely not all of these traditions will survive this fundamental change of lifestyle in the same form, or with the same significance.

Both these CDs contain a wide range of material, and, though clearly drawing upon broad common traditions, each is quite distinct and designed to be typical of a particular area. As what are effectively archive field recordings they are comprehensive and scholarly, but not likely to have a wide non-specialist appeal. However, as an introduction to a complex and fascinating musical world they serve their purpose extremely well.