

## **Zahidatou Adham**

**Ethnic group:** Tuareg (Willimiden)

**Language (dialect):** Tamasheq (Tiwillimat)

**Country:** Niger

**Recording date:** December 18, 2017

**Recording location:** Agadez, Niger

**Total Recording time:** 31:42

**Technician:** Brian Nowak

### **Group Members:**

Zahidatou Adham -- anzas

Ahagog Chaibata -- vocals

### **Track names -- duration**

1) Song medley - 24:08

2) Zahidatou interview 1 - 3:21

3) Zahidatou interview 2 - 14:13

### **Group Introduction:**

Zahidatou Adham remains alone among anzas players of the Willimiden Tuareg in Niger, although the tradition still exists among the Willimiden across the Mali border to the West. Without any successors, she reminds society of the past almost as a vestige, as if everyone has simply given up on the fiddle and all that it provides. Growing up in the Northern Sahel and Sahara area of the Tahoua Region, a nomadic upbringing includes displacing the family camp and resettling the leather, goat-skin tent so that the camels and goats have enough to eat. The environment and spirits within the landscape motivated Zahidatou to master the anzas and create songs that resound with a noble solitude, a combination of human resilience and vulnerability with the tone of the landscape itself.

Anzas players are women from the noble segments of a hierarchical society and styles differs locally but also among the larger confederates within Tuareg society. For example, among the Kel Ewey from the Air Mountains, the anzas is an austere event where the music accompanies a man reciting poetry. In the Air Mountains, not only does the anzas and poetry carry a dignified, even otherworldly feel to it, but onlookers as well must sit absolutely still out of respect and to fully concentrate and reflect on the art of words. Among the Willimiden, the anzas bow animates with a certain bounce that renders it almost

danceable, and points to the motivational and confident energy the instrument is thought to be capable of producing.

As Zahidatou explains, the importance of the anzas during climactic moments in the lives of individuals and society as a whole underscores the power Willimiden Tuareg attribute to this instrument. During raids or battle the anzas was played behind the warriors as encouragement and a reminder that they could only go forward, as no warrior could return to a community after having returned mid-charge past the anzas player that resonated the force of society during battle. In a similarly important and powerful role, the anzas also healed problems related to the spirit or involved with natural energies and imbalance, and exorcism. The mystical qualities from the sound of the instrument, particularly in the hands of a devoted musician, can be applied to a variety of settings, some disappearing and others changing. Although without society's encouragement, the Willimiden anzas is not going to be around for much longer in Niger.

### **Recording Context:**

The opportunity to see Zahidatou singing is rare as she is a true rural woman, far from the festival scene, in its basic and fairly unorganized form in Niger. However, the mayor from her commune offered transport for her to come to the Sultan's enthronement festivities and the December 18<sup>th</sup> celebration in Agadez. Part of the informality present at these events also allows for last minute changes and so she was able to play on stage in the stadium as part of the showcase of musicians despite not being invited.

Following the performance, after everyone had long cleared out of the stadium, I found Zahidatou sitting on the new astro-turf. The recording took place at the home of the family she was staying with on the day of the December 18<sup>th</sup> national holiday in Niger during an intense dust storm that made the festivities less than desirable to attend. Zahidatou was not parading or attending and so we sheltered inside, away from the horizontal blowing sand and orange fog-like hue. Confined in a small room, others came in and although not at all atmospheric in terms of the landscape that inspired the mystical one-string's sound, the sound filled the room and the pride and acknowledgement of the importance of this close-up recording was clearly felt.

Respect for elders and reserve are important features of Tuareg behavior and the uplifting spirit of the anzas encourages the two men to jokingly push Zahidatou while playing. Some of the fun-natured playing is comical, the equivalent of hitting an old woman, while some has social relationships underlying. For example the noble and smith

would have a push and pull relationship as patron and client. In this way, the performance allows for long-term social relations and a general good time to fill the performance space. Zahidatou brightens up and even lovingly lunges back at one point to pay back. A short interview allowed the personality and stories of the anzad to come alive through the view of the last player in the region.