

# Bombino brings his fresh take on music to Chicago

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Bombino's "desert blues" guitar style also incorporates sounds familiar to fans of rock 'n' roll.

The Tuareg people of Mali and Niger's Sahara region have long been known for the gifted guitarists who have forged their own type of protest against repressive governments.

In rebellions over the decades, they have put down their guns and picked up guitars, thus confirming the power of music. Many died for their efforts.

In recent years, highly respected groups such as Tinariwen and Etran Finatawa have taken this infectious desert blues to a global audience. Now, a new generation of Tuareg artists are stepping up, led by 30-year-old Bombino, who is gaining wide acclaim for his debut disc, "Agadez."

Bombino — the stage name of singer-guitarist Omara Moctar — makes his Chicago debut this weekend with three local performances, including the Dave Matthews Band Caravan, the Chicago Folk & Roots Festival and a free concert in Millennium Park.

Filmmaker Ron Wyman first encountered Bombino's music in 2007 while he was working on a documentary about the Tuareg in northern Niger. The only music available during weeks in the bush was a homemade tape of Bombino's music supplied by Wyman's Tuareg driver.

"It became the soundtrack for this magnificent region at the edge of the desert," Wyman recalled. "I knew I had to track Bombino down."

A year later, Wyman found Bombino in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, where he was living in exile after running into trouble with the Niger government. He quickly realized Bombino would fit right into his film, "Agadez: The Music and the Rebellion" (available at [zerogravityfilms.com/store](http://zerogravityfilms.com/store)).

## Bombino

□ 1:30 p.m. July 9

□ Dave Matthews Band Caravan, 8555 S. Green Bay

□ Tickets, \$85

□ (800) 594-8499; [dmbcaravan.com](http://dmbcaravan.com)

□ 3:05 p.m. July 10

□ Chicago Folk and Roots Festival, Welles Park, 4400 N. Lincoln

□ Admission, \$10

□ (773) 728-6000; [chicagofolkandroots.org](http://chicagofolkandroots.org)

□ 6:30 p.m. July 11

□ Pritzker Pavilion, Millennium Park, Randolph and Michigan

□ Free

□ (312) 742-1168; [millenniumpark.org](http://millenniumpark.org)



"His songs represent the future of the Tuareg, which is a culture of people living in a very traditional manner, a nomadic lifestyle facing the modern world," said Wyman, who also produced Bombino's album.

Bombino's music is the bridge between the two worlds.

"I want to address topics that directly affect the Tuareg," Bombino said through a translator. "It is an opportunity to discover the power of music in a new way."

The Tuareg are a pastoral, nomadic people who are masters of long-distance camel caravans over the Sahara Desert. They have long spurned outside influences and have fought to remain independent from those who tried to control them. Tuareg rebellions against the government have occurred three times in the last two decades.

The Tuareg also are independent when it comes to their moderate take on the Muslim religion and the rights of women. In the Tuareg culture, it is not the women who cover their faces but the men.

Bombino's songs call attention to the fact that today the world around the Tuaregs is complex and evolving. He believes that if the Tuareg don't evolve with it, they will be left behind.

"Bombino pushes ideas such as the importance of education and taking part in government," Wyman said. "Rebellion for him is more of a cultural concept now. The goal is to move into the modern world without losing what being Tuareg is all about."

A marvelous guitarist, Bombino's style exists somewhere between Ali Farka Toure and Jimi Hendrix. He was given a guitar in the early '90s by his uncle Rissa Ixa, a famous Tuareg painter. He was proficient enough at 14 to join guitarist Haja Bebe's band where, as the youngest member, he was tagged Bombino.

Today the 31-year-old performer's rock 'n' roll guitar work has been called "the new sound of Niger." It reverberates with the traditional Tuareg desert blues sound but adds in aggressive guitar riffs and beautiful melodies. He named the new album after his hometown, Agadez, a historic town on the trans-Saharan trade route.

Currently, after free democratic elections in Niger, the Tuaregs see change in the government. The country's new president, Mahamadou Issoufou, has appointed a Tuareg, Brigi Rafini, prime minister.

"We hope this will be a time of peace and development," Bombino said.

As Bombino looks to the future, he has not abandoned the desert. The nomadic life of a Tuareg still pulses in his veins. The desert is the only place where he says he can "breathe peacefully as a Tuareg."

"I am inspired by the desert, particularly at night, as the sun sets," Bombino says in Wyman's film, "to play the guitar, to be writing and creating new songs and getting together to play with my friends."

<http://www.suntimes.com/entertainment/6375296-421/bombino-brings-his-fresh-take-on-music-to-chicago.html>

