

barbican



Mariza © Carlos Ramos

Songlines Music Awards 2016 Winners's Concert Mon 3 Oct, 7.30pm

Presented by Simon Broughton

7.30pm **Sam Lee & Friends**
Sam Lee vocals, shruti box
Josh Green percussion, vocals
Jon Whitten piano, dulcimer
Flora Curzon violin, vocals

8.05pm **Songhoy Blues**
Aliou Touré vocals, guitar
Oumar Touré vocals, bass guitar
Garba Touré vocals, guitar
Nathanael Dembélé drums

8.45pm interval

9.05pm **Debashish Bhattacharya**
Debashish Bhattacharya Hindustani slide guitar
Subhasis Bhattacharjee tabla

9.40pm **Mariza**
Mariza vocals
José Manuel Neto Portuguese guitar
Pedro Jória classical guitar
Fernando Araújo (Yami) acoustic bass
Hugo Marques (Vicky) drums, percussion

You're here, so it's safe to say you know *Songlines*, the glossy magazine that covers the world's most exciting music, from traditional, contemporary and fusion to, well, whatever helps you look at the world through sound. Through *Songlines* you'll have made new discoveries, read up on your musical heroes, come to appreciate the sheer wealth of talent that exists across the globe. Some of you might even have cast your vote in the eighth annual *Songlines Music Awards*, four winners of which will grace the Barbican stage tonight.

Mariza. Debashish Bhattacharya. Songhoy Blues. Sam Lee & Friends. Artists who on the face of it couldn't be more different, but who share the sort of drive, passion and questing spirit - along with respect for the past and hope for the future - that marks out great achievers.

Mariza, then. Fado's foremost global ambassador. Winner of the Best Artist award for *Mundo* (Allophone), her first recording of entirely new material in five years, and an album that continues her penchant for contemporising Portugal's Fado

Blues by adding catchy Pop ballads, washes of electronics and songs sung in Spanish as well as Portuguese.

'Fado is there in my soul, even when I'm not conforming to its traditional image,' says the peroxidized icon, whose Portuguese father and Mozambiquan mother ran a taverna in Lisbon; as a child she'd sit at the top of the stairs listening to the fadistas singing the old tunes.

It's little wonder, really, why Mariza went on to become a sensation, what with her show-stopping voice, easy stage patter and spectacular gowns designed by couturier friends - along with a backing group of crack musicians playing everything from Peruvian cajon box to the heart-shaped Portuguese guitar. Not since the stormy, black-clad Amália Rodrigues (1920 - 1999) has there been a diva who so captures the essence of Fado, a music first sung by sailors in Lisbon's ports in the early 1800s. Mariza is the new Fado queen; long may she reign.

Winner of the Asia and South Pacific category for his album *Slide Guitar Ragas From Dusk Till Dawn* (Riverboat), Debashish Bhattacharya was similarly influenced young. Aged three, he was given a Hawaiian slide guitar; as a teenager he fashioned his own Hindustani version, the *chaturangui*, and has created what he calls 'The Trinity of Guitars' by adding the 14-string *gandharvi* and a four-string lap steel ukulele, the *anand*. In the process Debashish has created both a new instrumental language for Indian ragas and some of the most glorious, emotionally compelling, technically impressive music around.

'The music I play is universal, rooted deep in thousands of years of tradition with the essence of peace and bliss,' he says. 'But it's essentially modern, engulfing Reggae, Hip-Hop, Rock, Jazz and Blues.'

It's a remit that might be loosely applied to Songhoy Blues, that all-stops guitar band from Mali, West Africa. Drawn together under the shadow of war - and the decree banning music - by three exiles from Timbuktu and a Bamako-based drummer, the quartet hitched a career-boosting ride on Damon Albarn's Africa Express. Their astounding debut *Music in Exile* (Transgressive), which has won them the Songlines's Newcomer award, was produced by American guitarist Nick Zinner of the Yeah Yeah Yeahs; they've been wowing critics, selling out venues and commanding foot-stomping encores ever since.

'We grew up listening to old music by the Beatles, Jimi Hendrix and John Lee Hooker,' says Aliou Touré, a mesmerising frontman given to moments of splay-footed Rock posing and bursts of fluid, ghostly dancing inspired by the Sahel's signature *takamba* dance, which he grew up performing. 'But our main diet was Hip-Hop and R&B. We can't stay too long in their traditional aesthetic of our grandparents; we love electric guitars too much.'

And finally, fabulously, Sam Lee & Friends, winners of the Europe category for their album *The Fade In Time* (Nest Collective). A work that, like its Mercury-nominated predecessor, *Ground Of Its Own*, shines a spotlight on the rich heritage of the UK and Ireland's Gypsy culture, which the London-based Lee has been immersed in for several years, knocking on doors in Aberdeen, visiting camps in Oxfordshire, offering reassurances that his intentions were genuine, seeking permission to sing songs passed down over hundreds of years.

'These songs come from a time when we were as in tune with the land as any owl, fox or badger,' says Lee, a Chelsea art college graduate, nature lover and former burlesque dancer. Lifted by a band on violin, cello, piano, percussion and Japanese koto (zither) *The Fade in Time* gives the stories and melodies a bold modern platform, even adding Bollywood beats and Polynesian flavours to the living traditions of our fair isle, highlighting the truth and honesty inherent in the songs, and in Lee's lilting, resonant voice.

'I hear a truth and honesty in these old songs that are as beautiful as birdsong,' says Lee. Who, with the Nest Collective, his award-winning Folk club, ascribes to the quote attributed to composer Gustav Mahler: 'Tradition is tending the flame. It is not worshipping the ashes.'

Programme notes © Jane Cornwell

Produced by the Barbican in association with Songlines

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