

RAMY ESSAM

MUSIC IS THE WEAPON

In 2011 Ramy Essam exploded into international fame as the real voice of the Egyptian revolution. His songs spread like wildfire among the demonstrators, and during the height of the uprising Ramy performed in front of millions of people in the Tahrir Square. The songs became the soundtrack of a whole generation of young Egyptians' struggle for a better future. His song "Irhal", in which he's demanding the resignation of Mubarak, is referred to as the real anthem of the revolution. Time Out Magazine later selected Irhal as the third most worldchanging song of all time (with John Lennon's "Imagine" #5 on the list).

But fame came at a heavy price with brutal torture and arrests to silence Ramy. Still, he came out even stronger and more determined to speak out against the oppression. "In the revolution I was born again. The struggle became the purpose of my life."

After being censored and more or less silenced by the Egyptian regime, he was in 2014 offered a safe haven residence in Malmö, Sweden. Once again having the chance to create and perform freely, he became determined to use the opportunity to spread his message around the world.

In 2016 Ramy returned to the international scene big time, with a string of singles releases that gained a lot of new audiences and attention. He toured extensively throughout the year in Sweden and internationally. He also performed in the experimental theatre show "Smash up - A rock documentary" in Malmö and Stockholm and toured throughout Finland with the new theatre monologue "In the frontline" that was about his life story and activism. Both productions received great reviews.

In 2017 he follows it up with the new album "Resala ela magles el amn" (A letter to the UN Security Council), produced by Andreas Unge (Oumou Sangare, Cheikh Lo, Searching for Sugarman, Tigana Santana etc) and released through Universal Music Mena.

The album is a musical melting pot where the force of Kurt Cobain, the street cool of Joe Strummer, the crossover adventure of Rachid Taha and social criticism of Billy Bragg all come together in a musical journey straight outta Cairo. An album where heavy rock riffs join forces with infectious oriental beats and political street poetry demanding social justice, gender equality and human rights. The album is a megaphone of the streets that captures the hardships in ordinary people's daily life as well as the dreams of a better future.

With the album Ramy once again proves he is an artist of and for the people, with songs built on the words of the streets. Or as Tom Morello (Rage Against the Machine, Audioslave etc) puts it: Ramy is like a "rock Bob Dylan of the Middle East".

He remains to be one of the loudest voices for the young generation in Egypt and its struggle for a progressive and modern society, and has become an international symbol of social activism and a beacon of uncommon bravery in the Middle East. In 2011 he received the Freemuse Award, in 2016 he was titled "IMC Music Rights Champion" by IMC (Unesco's advisory body on matters of music) and in 2017 he received the prestigious "Spirit of Folk Award" at Folk Alliance International Conference.

But as the live artist Ramy has always been, that's where it all comes together. With a band of prominent Swedish and Egyptian musicians, the shows are rock n roll molotov cocktails in music and words that will probably be as close to a real revolution as most people will come.

"Ramy has made a huge and lasting stamp on me and my consciousness after my recently hearing him play live and hearing him speak on a panel discussion at Folk Alliance 2017. His message about activism through one's work, his courage, his strength, and the power of his music affected me deeply. I am inspired by the risks he has had to take, and the voice he is using for social justice causes, which may eventually put his own safety at personal risk. This talent and musicality of him and his bandmates drew me in, and I will find a translation of his lyrics so I can fully understand at all levels. For the love of the humanity that he knows and speaks for through song, Ramy's music takes on an even more compelling timber."

-Monica Mansfield, producer of Mostly Rock 'n Roll TV show

"I saw Ramy Essam and he was breathtaking. I learned his backstory and it brought me to tears. Then I saw him live and was blown away by his power and passion and complete soul-driven delivery. Love, loved him! He's a force of nature."

-Lisa Schwartz, Festival Director, Philadelphia Folk Festival

"I got the chance to meet and spend time with Ramy Essam this past weekend. He is an Egyptian activist and musician now living in Sweden and was one of my favorite musicians I heard at Folk Alliance. He came with his incredible band, his agent and management team, and delivered stunningly beautiful music and a message that touched us all.".... "I loved his music, his team, his passion for life. It was wonderful to see him receive The Spirit of Folk Award. He touched anyone who heard his music and saw his zest for life."

-Valerie Denn, Val Denn Booking Agency

"Really enjoyed the performance at Folk Alliance. I was a volunteer this year outside one of the rooms. I saw a lot of great stuff but your work was a real highlight."

-Jason Riley, Folk Alliance

One of the biggest highlights of this year's Folk Alliance International Conference was discovering Ramy Essam. I first caught him doing an impromptu performance in the hallways of the Westin hotel with Kansas City artist Calvin Arsenia. Although both artists had just met, they played together beautifully. They mesmerized everyone that walked by and attracted a captive audience. Later, I caught the full band for his official performance that was both breathtaking and inspirational. His story of overcoming struggle and using music to protest oppression is extremely powerful.

-Rhonda Lyne, Midwest Music Foundation