



T A M I N O

The half Egyptian, half Flemish grandson of a 1950s Arab music star, Tamino is stirring up some serious excitement with his self-titled debut EP. Acoustic caught up with the talented 20-year-old

WORDS: DAN HOBSON PHOTOS: RAMY MOHARAM FOUAD

Sometimes you stumble across a little-known artist and think ‘this could be huge’. Tamino – full name Tamino Moharam Fouad – is one of those artists. With a truly unique vocal style, mesmerising lyrics, eloquent guitar playing, the looks of a star, and a songwriting proficiency way above his 20 years, the building blocks of success are certainly in place.

His backstory isn’t bad either. Named after the hero prince in Mozart’s opera ‘The Magic Flute’, Tamino is the first born son of a Flemish anthropologist mother – who named him – and an Egyptian, salesman father. His late grandfather, Moharam Fouad, who died when Tamino was five, was a renowned actor and singer in the Arab world from the 1950s to the 1980s. Inevitable, then, that Tamino would follow in his grandfather’s footsteps.

“I started playing piano very young, just hitting the keys without any knowledge,” he recalls. “By 10-years-old I was learning classical music. I liked the piano and was already performing, but I wanted a portable instrument – something I could take everywhere with me.”

Tamino found just what he was looking for upon visiting his late-grandfather’s home in Cairo, Egypt. “Aged 15, I went back to my grandfather’s apartment and in the basement there was this beautiful resonator guitar,” he remembers fondly. “I thought ‘what is this guitar doing here – why is nobody playing it?’. So I took it home and started playing it. I still use it in my live set. There is no brand on the guitar, just number 36. It’s an old guitar, I think my grandfather bought it in the 1950s or 60s.”

Tamino was a typical teen punk rocker during high school; playing in bands inspired by Billy Talent. But with the end of high-school looming, and interest in the punk scene he frequented dwindling, Tamino decided it was time to take music seriously. He left his Antwerp suburb, aged 17, moved to Amsterdam and enrolled

heard of me before getting into my music, which is really great.”

It’s easy to see why the record is causing so much excitement – there’s just something a little different about Tamino. Perhaps the Egyptian influence, perhaps the surreal nature of the songs. Either way, the debut is not only a showcase of his vocal range, but also a beautiful portrayal of his many moods: introspective yet bold, otherworldly yet grounded in tradition, electrifying yet embalmed in finesse.

“My Egyptian roots definitely have an influence on my music,” he says. “That was the first music I remember. My grandfather died when I was five years old, so I never really got to know him. My mother loves his music and always played it when I was growing up. From time-to-time she would buy me CDs of his music which I would listen to. It was a good way of getting to know where I’m from.”

“I remember being particularly taken by his live recordings with orchestra,” he adds. “There’s a certain kind of raw emotion in his singing, and in Arab music in general, that is mostly absent from Western music. Even when the tunes are kind of cheesy, there’s always something real, something sincere embedded in the voice. Complete surrender, much less calculated than most Western music. Um Kulthum, one of the most famous Egyptian singers, also had it; that intense kind of testimony about a past, scarred life of hardship and poverty. Just like Édith Piaf, someone else I very much admire.”

When it comes to inspiration, Tamino cites Jeff Buckley and Radiohead as having a big influence in his formative years. These days, however, he is drawing inspiration from many sources.

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in the city’s music academy. Three years later, his self-titled five-track debut EP is stirring-up some serious excitement.

“It’s lovely to see this reaction to my music – I didn’t expect it to be so huge,” Tamino says. “I just thought people who already knew me would buy the EP, but there are a lot of people who have never



"I really like guitarists who use different tunings. Soundgarden use some amazing tunings. I also like Nick Drake and Chris Whitley. More recently, I really like Iceage, a Danish band. They have amazing lyrics and a style which I can't really compare. Grouper, a singer-songwriter from America, she writes unbelievable songs. I also really love a Lebanese lute player called Rabi Aboukhai."

The diverse set of influences on Tamino's sound are evident. How does he go about putting them together into songs, though? "I really make time for writing music because when I write regularly I get

into a flow with it. When I've been writing songs in the days before, I get into this kind of otherworldly mode - and it starts to come more easily. Sometimes it's also a coincidence; I'll pick up a guitar at a party, start strumming and come up with a riff for the next song." He adds: "My sound is melancholic, but I would never say that it is depressing as it has hope and light."

After huge support from all levels of the music community in Belgium, and joining this summer's line-up for Rock Werchter - Belgium's largest, most renowned festival - Tamino is now looking out internationally with his music.

"This summer I will play a lot of festivals in Belgium and the Netherlands. In between the festivals, I will be writing and recording demos and I've got plans for a full album soon. But I really want to take my time with it - I don't want to set myself a deadline."

"I've never played in England before, so I would like to make that happen," he adds. "It's definitely a dream of mine to bring my music to the UK." ■

Tamino's self-titled debut EP is out now on Unday Records.

Info: www.taminomusic.com