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Fado

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Fado is a Portuguese urban and poetic musical practice, widely spread by the media and the transnational circuits of music production. It is traditionally performed by one (male or female) singer accompanied by one or more Portuguese guitars with six courses of two strings, one or more *violas* (the local designation for the simple six-string classical guitar), and sometimes by a (four-string) bass guitar. Its main memory contexts remain in the face-to-face relational spaces of fado houses, taverns (and the so-called *tascas* that announce the performance of *fado vadio*, the local term for spontaneous fado), restaurants, as well as in recreational societies, and at events such as *A Grande Noite do Fado* (The Great Night of Fado). It was in these contexts that fado singers with great impact in the 21st century, such as Camané, Raquel Tavares, and Ricardo Ribeiro, made their debut. This entry introduces fado with a focus on its performance and recording histories.

The History of Fado

Although the singers use previously composed melodic and poetic texts, their interpretation is crucial: Each performance is marked by the way they *stylize* (perform melodic improvisation) and *divide* the text (change the rhythm of words resorting to pauses, suspensions, and breathing). The countermelodies played by the guitar reinforce the central role of the *fadista* (fado singer). The *guitarradas*, fados that are exclusively instrumental, normally intersperse fado singer performances. Guitarists like Armandinho (1891–1946) composed fados and created variations that were commercially recorded and that are currently part of the fado repertoire. Similarly, performances by great singers such as Alfredo Marceneiro or Amália Rodrigues, who were immortalized by the technologies of recording and reproduction, are essential points of reference in the initiation process of young singers in this practice. The next steps for these singers are the definition of a personal way of interpreting fados, and the creation of a fado repertoire of their own, with compositions especially written for them. Sometimes, they themselves author the lyrics and, more rarely, compose the music as well.

The poetic and musical structure distinguishes the main types of fado. In the *fado fado* (also called *clássico* [classic] *castiço* [vernacular] *rigoroso* [strict] or traditional), which is considered the earliest form, the melody varies slightly with each new verse, according to a split form, in a I–V harmonic scheme, as is the case with the *fado Mouraria* or with the *fado Menor*, published in the 19th century. By resorting to the melodic–rhythmic patterns of these and other strophic fados, the singers create different interpretations and compose new poems or have new poems written for them. The so-called *fado canção* (fado song), on the other hand, with chorus and couplets, is a variant that was probably developed when fado became a part of the *teatro de revista* (Portuguese vaudeville theater) in the late 19th century. In the 1960s, the fado song underwent new (and controversial) developments. Including in its structure complex harmonies and benefiting from sophisticated lyrics, this fado was popularized by the singer Amália Rodrigues and the composer Alain Oulman and fashioned by other singers, among whom was Carlos do Carmo. From the 1990s onward, the voices of great professionals like Mísia, Cristina Branco, Paulo de Bragança, and Mariza, among others, took fado to the circuits of world music.

The first historical references to fado date from the 1830s and 1840s. *Fado* was to be found in taverns, in brothels, in *retiros* (inns) in different neighborhoods of Lisbon but also in the outskirts of the city, in the so-called *esperas de touros* (literally “bull waits”). The legendary Maria Severa Onofriana (1820–1846), who claimed the origins of fado were to be found in the brothels of the harbor area of Lisbon, sang and played fado. Her love affair with the Count of Vimioso illustrates the presence of fado in the aristocratic and upper bourgeois milieu of Lisbon and was immortalized by operettas, by vaudeville performances, and by the first sound film directed by Leitão de Barros, titled *A Severa* (1931). The first publications of fado (accompaniment for piano and poetry) date from the second half of the 19th century. Among these, the *Álbum de Músicas Nacionais* (National Music Album) by João Ribas in 1858 and the *Cancioneiro de Músicas Populares* (Popular Music Songbook) by César das Neves and Gualdino de Campos in 1893, 1895, and 1898, stand out. In the second half of the 19th century, in the north-central region of Portugal, the appearance of fado among students at the University of Coimbra is well-documented, and at this point, fado undergoes a particular devel-

opment with the *Canção de Coimbra* (Coimbra song). These publications reveal the expansion of the performative contexts and the way in which fado began to appeal to a bourgeois audience. The first studies on the origins of fado date from this period. In the next century, periodicals such as *O fado* conquered an increasing number of passionate readers. The radicalization of the discussion about fado as a national song began in this period.

Recordings of Fado

The first recordings on 78rpm discs were produced in OPorto by William Darby for The Gramophone Company in 1900. Darby recorded the renowned guitarist Reynaldo Varela and the singer Souza. At the time, fado addressed the previously outlined topics and narrated facts of daily life; it also conveyed a message of social criticism connoted with trade union and political intervention. These dimensions were subject to censorship during the period of the dictatorship (1926–1974) when the so-called *Estado Novo* regime decreed the need for a professional license for these singers/players and started organizing events like “A Grande Noite do Fado,” which from 1953 on has been taking place at the *Coliseu dos Recreios* (Coliseum of Lisbon), one of the most eminent popular performance halls in Portugal.

Mechanical reproduction of sound enabled the immortalization of the interpretation of guitarists like Reynaldo Varela (1867–1940) and Armandinho (1891–1946), and of singers such as Alfredo Marceneiro (1891–1982) and Amália Rodrigues (1920–1999), among many others. Marceneiro is one of the 20th century’s foremost exponents of fado. He used to compose his own fados that he would then sing with a unique vocal style (he was a woodworker, hence his nickname *Marceneiro*—the Portuguese word for his profession). “Estranha forma de vida” (Strange way of life), a fado that is part of the repertoire of many fado singers, was composed by Alfredo Marceneiro (music) and Amália Rodrigues (lyrics). But the undisputed key figure of fado is Amália Rodrigues, who was also an actress who worked in theater, film, and television. Her interpretation of fados such as “Povo que lavas no rio” (music by “Fado Vitória” for a poem with seven syllables in six-line stanzas, by Pedro Homem de Mello) highlighted her vocal qualities and her capacity for constantly re-creating the way she expressed herself; it also opened the doors of the most prestigious concert halls for her. The way she would stand on stage—almost always in a long black dress and wearing a shawl—became an icon of *fado* itself.

From the last decades of the 20th century on, learning how to sing or play *fado* has entailed listening to the records of the great singers; the process is often complemented by a pilgrimage to the memory settings of the song. This is no doubt the path that Portuguese emigrants take when they want to start a career as *fado* singers outside of Portugal.

In the 21st century, fado deals mainly with themes such as nostalgia and longing, misfortune, love, and jealousy. On this account, it is important to remember that *fado* means fate, destiny, and fortune. In 2011, fado was recognized by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

See also [Portugal: History, Culture, and Geography of Music](#); [Portugal: Modern and Contemporary Performance Practice](#); [World Music](#)

Further Readings

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