PORTUGUESE MUSIC – FADO

THE ORIGINS OF FADO

THERE ARE AT LEAST 4 THEORIES ABOUT THE ORIGIN OF FADO. Some are based on resemblances and common tones between fado and other kinds of music such as arabic or provenzal, others more on a sort of mythology that links fado with the true nature of Portuguese people or to their main activity, that of mariners and fishermen.

In fact the only theory that derives from some evidence is the one that sees fado originating in Brazil. Its ancestors were two genres that were born in Brazil: the MODINHA and the LUNDUM when Brasil was a colony of Portugal. Clearly these ancestors are very different from the fado that developed in the course of two centuries.

The modinha, is a type of sentimental love song. The lundum comes from Angola, another Portuguese colony. It is generally considered that these are at the roots of the Brazilian popular music, because they were the first representative music of the people of Brazil, at the time of getting their identity as Brazilians, not the dwellers of Portuguese colony. The sources that refer to this tradition are scarce, because this type of music, especially the lundum, was generally associated to negroes dancing and singing in the streets, which was despised by white colonizers.

However European travellers were fascinated by this kind of sensual and rythmic dance that was locally also called Fado (one source is the Italian geographer Adriano Balbi who describes these Brazilian dances as Fado in 1822) . Another source, a French traveller in 1827 distinguishes clearly the dances that were held in aristocratic salons (modinha) and the popular dances that were danced in the streets (lundum). He calls fado, a variety of lundum. He also defines lundum as a very indecent genre.

BRAZILIAN INFLUENCE IN PORTUGAL

The lundum was very appealing to popular classes also in Portugal, but at the time the absolutist King Joao V was rejecting any form of Enlightenment, differently from other European countries, and linked his government to the strict values of the Church. Therefore LUNDUM was considered sinful. The rising middle-classes were more tempted by modinha, the other major musical genre coming from Brazil.

While LUNDUM is rythmical and sensual, modinha is lyrical and refined. It is sung to the piano notes, and later to the classical guitar, an instrument that reached Portugal through the trading classes of English and French people.

With time the two genres will contaminate each other: this contamination will occur in LISBON living origin to the traditional fado.

THE HISTORY OF FADO REFLECTS THE HISTORY OF PORTUGAL

In November 1807 the Royal Family flees to Brazil, since they are incapable of governing the country. Together with the Braganza court, many courtiers and servants follow them in the New World: (about 14.000 people). Portugal is occupied first by the French and then by the English.
Then follows the Liberal Revolution and the return of the Braganza court, in a totally changed context (1820s). In fact Brazil becomes independent, Portugal is in a state of political chaos when liberal forces fight dictatorial attempts.

Society evolves rapidly, changing from a dominant aristocracy to a dominant upper middle-class that has also taken possessions of the religious properties that have been taken away from the Church by the liberal revolution. Below the upper middle-class, a large number of bureaucrats is also gaining power and a social role. The working classes populate the cities and people migrate from the countryside. THERE IS THE SPREAD OF A NEW CULTURE, modelled on the European one and based on urban sociality for the upper classes. The working classe also develop their own forms of culture and entertainment. It must be remembered that these included also the ex-courtiers and servants that were forced to come back from Brazil after the independence.

Among these, many servants were black. It is in the poor areas of Lisbon that the traditional fado is born.

THE TRADITIONAL FADO: A HYBRID GENRE

The fado culture in Lisbon generates from the life experience of the new urban working-classes, mixed with the feelings of servants and mariners who share their stories in ambiguous coffee-places and brothels (casas de fado), but these places are also attended by the new aristocracy who is not scared to mix with the popular classes and enjoys the bohemian life of the underdogs: criminals, prostitutes and also bullfighters.

It is the result of the need to express the poor people sadness concerning their economic and social condition (their destiny, their fatum), and at the same time it is the moment of liberation of feelings and the senses in a world where the social rules were not strong (the world of prostitution gambling and crime). THENCE, the new complexity of the genre which mixes popular traditions (in many cases religious traditions), with the feeling of saudade of the sad fatum, and with the lyricism of some songs, and with the audacious sensuality of music and gestures of the fadistas. Thence also the love affair between the Count of Vimioso and the fadista Maria Severa.

THE MYTH OF MARIA SEVERA: from prostitute to talented singer and performer.

The Fado Choradinho and many more tell her story: the romantic destiny of prostitutes, their parable as victims of the whims of love and her untimely death.
THE BIRTH OF A VARIED CANON

Many fadistas follow Maria Severa's style, while other popular fados are connected to working life stories and take names from typical jobs. Some fados are ironic, but all mix song and dance. Some fados contain a refrain, but none is fruit of professional study.

However, there starts to be a corpus or collection of popular fados whose themes are:

- Life and death of fadistas (male and female)
- Love (sensual)
- The hard life of work
- Popular traditions and religious celebrations
- Current stories of killings and crime
- Towns, boroughs, villages and the people that live them
- Religious stories
- Bullfighting
- Wordgames and popular obscene jokes
- Other word virtuosism
FADO AS A FORM OF ART

Things change with social change. Between 1850 and 1870 Lisbon sees the middle-classes in expansion (public administration, trading classes and industry). These classes want entertainment: the theatre develops and among the shows occasionally some fados are sung. Another cultural factor is the birth of romanticism and national arts throughout Europe, which also affects Portugal, that at the time did not have a strong national cultural heritage.

In fact from 1869 on, actors and actresses start performing the fado on stage. It's hugely successful and this makes FADO a form of art. Little by little the guitar replaces the original piano and with the guitar a new form of fado develops that exploits the musical features of guitars. It is interesting to remember that the classic guitar is called viola in Portuguese, while the guitarra portuguesa has 12 strings and a different shape.

THE BOHEMIAN YOUTH AND THE FADO DE COIMBRA

While fado gains popularity in the bourgeois salons and in the theatres, a new population of University students (upper middle-classes and aristocracy) fill the streets of Lisbon and enjoy the most traditional locations of fado in the 1860s Lisbon. This youth becomes so embedded with the mystic of fado that they develop a cultural variation in the most important university city of Portugal, Coimbra. The fado de Coimbra is different from the Fado de Lisboa and it has not changed in time.

This new form of fado is sophisticated, with poetic lyrics and original themes, such as student life, youth and male solidarity, the mystic of youth and love and nostalgia for the places and times gone.

Today the traditional University SERENATAS and the traditional university rites of the WEEK of the QUEIMA recall this spirit.
THE DECLINE OF PORTUGAL AND THE END OF THE MONARCHY

Following the Berlin Conference, led by Bismarck, about the European control of Congo and other parts of Africa, Portugal lost lands and commercial power in favour of the other European powers, mainly France, Germany and Belgium. Consequently the Portuguese people felt that the interest of the country was not protected by the king Carlos I, who was in fact killed in Lisbon in 1908. The regicide was followed by political chaos and eventually the Republic was established on 5 Oct 1910.

FA DO AT THE TIME OF CHANGE

From 1890 on, fado takes on a modern political interest which derives from its social origin but also from a new genuine desire for social justice. It may also be linked to primitive forms of working-class revendications, and in fact people speak of socialist or republican fados. Many fados are also explicitly anti-clerical.

On the other hand fado becomes also the expression of national disillusion, with tones that are patriotic at times, also recovering the traditional religious themes, but not pro-war, because of the idea that war was against the popular masses. Therefore while losing the patronage of the aristocracy, fado does not gain real revolutionary force. This explains the “passivity” of the Portuguese “saudade”. (During the republic World War I broke out and Portugal participated, but not with the enthusiasm that the government expected).

In this period of crisis, artistic variations are many; experiments are made and professional fadistas and guitarists compose new patterns and new forms. Another novelty is the invention of recording on vinyl records and the radio, which will contribute to the popularity of fado. Now fado is acknowledged as the NATIONAL music style, and is collected and studied.
THE FALL OF THE REPUBLIC, DICTATORSHIP AND THE GLORY DAYS OF FADO

At the end of WW1 the Republican party had extinguished its power, and after a new period of political experiments and a civil war (1919), a shortly restored monarchy left space first to a renewed republic and from the 1920s to a dictatorship.

During the régime of Salazar (one of the most close-minded dictators of the modern age), lyrics were subjected to censorship (1927) and singers had to obtain professional licenses. FADO lost its improvisation and spontaneous nature but gained a wider audience and projection featuring widely in theatres, radios and sound films. A FADO “star system” raised and the Fadistas (FADO singers) became popular idols.

It is in this time that the CASAS de FADO change their role and become respectable entertainment places, where the fadistas take an attitude of their serious role.

Fado loses movement and the fadista acts a precise performance. People must be silent and praise the virtuosism. THUS FADO BECOMES A MYTH

AMALIA RODRIGUES (1920-1999)

Amalia Rodrigues was a singer and an actress. Her performances and choice of repertoire pushed Fado’s boundaries and helped redefine it and reconfigure it for her and subsequent generations.

Her relationship with poetry contributed to major changes in traditional fado. Great poets started writing specifically for her. While Amalia conquers the hearts of fans all over Europe, ending with being herself the image of Fado, the traditional subdivisions of fado become canon.
The Lisbon style is the most popular, while Coimbra's is the most classical. According to tradition, to applaud fado in Lisbon you clap your hands, while in Coimbra one coughs as if clearing one's throat.

THE DECLINE OF FADO AND ITS PRESENT REBIRTH

From the Portuguese Revolution days of 1974 to 1990 FADO went through a crisis. During the 1970s, FADO was associated to Salazar and his archaic and dictatorial regime. However some songs that tell about the revolution recall the progressive spirit that was present in some previous fados.

Today fado has been revitalized thanks to new artists. There are many new fado singers: some are more traditional, some experiment. Among the most important women singers: Mariza, Misia, Dulce Pontes. Among the men: Zeca Afonso (who was also the author of the song that gave the signal for the revolution: Grandola Vila Morena) and Camane, one of the best beloved today.