

**Review****CMA VIVA! & Gala: Ana Mauro, Fado of Portugal (March 22)**

by Nicholas Jones



Fado, the music sometimes called the "Portuguese blues," is a relatively conservative genre. But recently, fado, like the Portuguese navigators of the Renaissance, has begun to explore the globe, and Ana Moura has been at the forefront of that exploration.

Ana Moura's concert Friday at Gartner Auditorium in the Cleveland Museum of Art showed an enthusiastic audience — a nearly packed house — how the sad ballads of fado can cross over into jazz, blues, and folk.

Moura's deep contralto voice, throaty and intense, evoked the *saudade*—meaning, roughly, "yearning" — that is at the heart of fado.

Backed up by a five-man band, she gave her concert in a single set of about ninety minutes. There were no song names given, either in the program or on stage, and no summaries of what the songs were about. But without knowing what the words meant, Friday's audience could feel the emotions.

She began with fairly traditional fado. In Moura's impassioned singing, these ballads became much more than mere narratives about abandonment and loneliness. Dressed all in black, she embodied the emotions she was singing about. Small, graceful hand gestures — touching her cheek, caressing a fringed shawl — were balletic moments, occasionally expanding into poignant dances that physicalized these already very intimate songs.

Fado is traditionally accompanied by acoustic guitar (the "viola da fado") and the pear-shaped steel-string Portuguese guitar (the "guitarra"). For this U.S. tour, Moura added keyboard, bass guitar, and a drum set. The vocalist and the individual instrumentalists were all amplified, a bit much for my taste. Fortunately, in the intimate fado numbers — which are usually heard without amplification — these additional instruments stayed mostly in the background, allowing the voice and the Portuguese guitar to weave in and about each other.

In the middle of the set, Moura took a break while the band played a piece in a jazzy mode, in which extended solos allowed each of these excellent players to show off their chops. It is unlikely that anything like this would have been tolerated in the fado cafes of Lisbon, but here the audience warmly welcomed these idiosyncratic excursions: a tender lead-in by Pedro Soares on the acoustic guitar, Angelo Freire's steely syncopations on the

Portuguese guitar, a funky keyboard romp by João Gomes, an unusually introspective and complex meditation on the bass guitar by Andre Moreira, and an astonishing rhapsody on the drum set by Mário Costa.

As Moura returned to the stage for the second part of the program, the musical temperature had risen, and the quiet yearning of fado had morphed into a more intense mode. Her cover of Joni Mitchell's "A Case of You" took Mitchell's clear, acoustic folk sound into new territory of sultry melancholy.

As the gloves came off, the music became more infused with sounds of rock, perhaps as a consequence of Moura's recent collaborations with Prince and the Rolling Stones. As the numbers got hotter, so did the audience, joining in with clapping and even some dancing in the aisles. The concert ended with "Desfado," the title song of Moura's newest CD, but extended applause brought the group back for an encore ("Goodnight, Cleveland!") that had most of the crowd on their feet.

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