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MUSIC REVIEW | ANA MOURA

Sorrow in Seductive Adornment

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Sorrow wrapped in guitar filigree, elegant romance with a tragic undercurrent — that’s the tradition of Portuguese fado that Ana Moura joins. At [Symphony Space](#) on Friday night she started her [World Music Institute](#) concert facing not the audience but a band member: Angelo Freire on guitarra (Portuguese guitar), the round, high-strung instrument that’s inseparable from fado. She sang to the guitarra, begging it to break the silence and save her. She was dressed in black, with a shawl over her shoulders.



Jack Vartoogian/FrontRowPhotos

Ana Moura in a World Music Institute concert at Symphony Space.

Fado (“fate”), which arose out of Lisbon cafes to become the most prized music of Portugal, takes itself that seriously. Every few songs in Ms. Moura’s set, she sang about fado itself. When she decided, just into her 20s, to sing fado rather than pop or rock, she had a fado written for her: “Sou do Fado, Sou Fadista” (“I Am of the Fado, I Am a Fado Singer”), a ballad that she sang on Friday more as a confession than a declaration. For one song she set aside the microphone to sing fado unamplified, as it is still sung in cafes and fado houses. Her voice swelled to fill Symphony Space.

In its most traditional form, fado is a collection of established melodies for which poets wrote sets of lyrics — analogous, in that way, to early blues. But fado is also, more flexibly, a musical style and a mindset. Along with [Norah Jones](#) and [Sheryl Crow](#), Ms. Moura was asked to record [Rolling Stones](#) songs for an album produced by the Stones’ saxophonist, Tim Ries. On Friday night he sat in as she filled the Stones’ “No Expectations” with the pensive resignation of fado.

Her own group was a bare-bones trio: just Mr. Freire, José Elmiro Nunes on acoustic guitar and Filipe Larsen on acoustic bass guitar. They were all she needed to create fado’s slow-motion ballads or light-fingered oompahs, topped with the scurrying countermelodies

of the guitarra. It’s music that exposes every vocal nuance, and Ms. Moura had nothing to hide. Her lush alto voice can be smoky and hesitant or clear and pointed, working up to a tremulous insistence that hints at fado’s Arabic connections. She made each song a series of small dramatic surges: glimmers of hope, hints of sensuality, passages of melancholy, glints of determination

Fado isn’t always slow and mournful. Ms. Moura’s version of “Barco Negro,” a ghostly love song made famous by the queen of fado, Amália Rodrigues, had a swinging bass vamp while the musicians tapped percussively on their guitars. Ms. Moura’s fado never forgets about the music’s past, but it lives in the moment.