

Cape Verdean Musical Traditions

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Over its history, Cape Verde has developed a musical tradition of surprising vitality. It has received, combined, transformed, and re-created elements from other latitudes, producing original forms, strongly distinctive and firmly rooted in Cape Verdean experience. The melodies and styles we adopted became ours, as did the instruments we use to play our music: the guitar, the *kavakinhu* (*cavaquinho*) (ukelele), violin, and others. Cape Verdean music has come to represent the particularity of our people: our attachment to the land, the problems of our environment, and our ways of living and expressing joy, nostalgia, hope, and love. Music has accompanied and shaped many activities in Cape Verde, from work and children's play to weddings, funerals, and saint's-day processions.

Work songs on S. Antão and Brava include the sorrowful yet serene *kola boi* (*cola boi*) that a person sings as he drives the oxen that are yoked to a *trapixe* (*trapiche*) (sugar mill) around and around to provide its power. On Brava, Osvaldo Osório writes in his book *Cantigas de Trabalho*, songs called *bombana* are sung "during the planting of the sweet potato...and are generally nostalgic, their themes being longing, love, and farewell to those in faraway lands." Agricultural songs on S. Nicolau, S. Antão, Santiago, and Fogo are usually related to sowing or weeding. Some are meant to drive away sparrows, others to protect crops from crows and wild chickens. These songs may have a complex melodic structure, or they may be chanted recitatives, formulaic phrases performed in various styles. Maritime work songs are fewer in number but portray Cape Verdeans' occupational and emotional ties to the sea and their depen-

dency on it for survival.

Lullabies once sung by grandparents to their grandchildren are almost forgotten today. Many Cape Verdean infants have been rocked to this tune:



Other forms of Cape Verdean children's lore that seem to be falling from use are ring-play songs, or play-parties, and counting songs. Many Cape Verdeans remember "*Una, duna, trina katarina, barimbau, são dez,*" or "*Doll in dol fatatitina,*" ring-songs that would delight children during moonlit nights before television became part of everyday life in the islands. [Editor's note: Neither of the sets of words has an obvious meaning in Kriolu.]

Repertoires of religious songs are found especially on S. Antão, Fogo, and S. Nicolau. Such songs, always sung outside the church and on particular days of the liturgical calendar, are performed a cappella by women and men, either in three separate voices, in uni-

Musicians serenade Cape Verdean immigrants from the classic morna repertoire, in the city of Mindelo, S. Vicente. They include Malachias, violin; the late Tchufe, middle guitar; and the composer Manuel d'Novas, to his left.



Photo by Ron Barboza

Morna de Despedida

EUGÉNIO TAVARES

(1867-1930)

Hora di bai,
 Hora di dor!
 Ja'n q're
 Pa el ca manchê!
 De cada bês
 Que n' ta lembrá,
 Ma'n q're
 Fica'n morré!

Hora di bai,
 Hora di dór!
 Amor,
 Dixa'n chorá!
 Corpo catibo,
 Bá bo que é scrabo!
 Ó alma bibo,
 Quem que al lebabo?

Se bem é doce,
 Bai é maguado;
 Mas, se ca bado,
 Ca ta birado!
 Se no morré
 Na despedida,
 Nhor Des, na volta,
 Ta dano bida.

The Hour of Parting

(translated from the Kriolu of Brava)

Hour of parting
 Hour of pain!
 The dawn would never come!
 Every time
 That I remember,
 I could wish
 To stay and die!

Hour of parting,
 Hour of grief!
 My love,
 Let me weep!
 Captive body,
 You who are a slave, go!
 O living soul,
 Who can carry you away?

If coming home is sweet,
 Departing is bitter;
 Yet, if one does not leave,
 One can never return.
 If we are close to dying
 While saying farewell,
 God, when we return,
 Will give us life!...

son, or as solo voice with a responding choir. Among these songs are the *divines* on S. Nicolau, sung with three voices in a very archaic style, the *ladainha* and the *Salvé Rainha* on S. Antão, and the *resas* on Santiago.

Songs of the Christmas and New Year season are sung on all the islands, especially on December 31st (St. Silvester's Day). On January 6th, called Twelfth Night or Day of the Kings, children go from house to house at sunset, singing and playing a rattle made of metal bottle caps flattened and nailed to a piece of wood (an instrument called *rekordai* [recordai] or *pandier* on S. Antão, *chokalho* [chocalho] in some parts of Santiago, and *pander* on Boa Vista). Adults sing the songs later at night, accompanied by the guitar, the *kavakinhu*, and the same rattle. Today, though, these Twelfth Night songs are disappearing. Many children don't know them, and many adults don't seem to have the patience to listen to them and teach the children. They just open the door, give the children money, and let them go.

Traditional Cape Verdean folktales sometimes include recurring, pentatonic melodies, such as those in *Pastorinho de Kabra* (*Cabra*) (The little goat shepherd), *Bulimundo* (World shaker), and *Kova Figueira* (*Cova Figueira*).

On S. Vicente and elsewhere funeral music is played with a martial rhythm. Wind instruments predominate. There is only one song traditionally associated with funerals (popularly known as "Djosa why did you die?"), but today the saddest of *mornas*, "*Morna de Despedida*," known widely as "*Hora di Bai*" (The hour of parting), is often heard.

Wedding songs (*saúde*) to the bride and groom are played on rural islands like S. Nicolau and S. Antão. On Boa Vista wedding music includes drumming and chanted phrases to the bride ("Young lady,/ Today is your day./ Show this way,/ Show that way"). A dance of African origin known variously as *landu*, *land*, or *lundun* is performed with strong and spinning movements in wedding celebrations around midnight.

Annual saint's-day pilgrimages are musical occasions common to all the islands. To the accompaniment of drums, celebrants parade through streets and other public places. The very popular Feast of Saint John the Baptist is celebrated on every island on the summer solstice. On S. Vicente the drum rhythm associated with the midsummer event is called *kola San Jon*, and its dance is a balanced movement that brings each pair of dancers together to touch in the navel region. On S. Nicolau the rhythm is slightly slower, and the dance, especially in the area of Praia Branca, consists of two lines of women facing each other and making sensual movements and erotic insinuations directed to men.

Batuku (*batuque*) music and dance of African origin apparently exist in Cape Verde only on Santiago. According to Dulce Almada, the *batuku* is a variation of the rhythm of *kola San Jon*. Recited in the same *batuku* beat, the *finacon* is a chain of proverbs or allegorical poetic images, sometimes improvised at the moment of performance. These improvisations can go on for hours.

The *tabanka* of Santiago and Maio Island



Photo by Ron Barboza

is a dance procession accompanied by a suite of instruments composed of drums, horns, and conches, the latter usually of three different pitches. As Cape Verdean ethnographer Eutrópio Lima da Cruz has observed, the dancing of the *tabanka* is an important group expression; it obliges individuals to act in solidarity with each other to create a procession with good organization, size, and rhythm. The community effort is also fine entertainment. [Editor's note: See Gabriel Moacyr Rodrigues's article for more on *batuku*, *kola*, the Feast of Saint John, and *tabanka*.]

Years ago in Cape Verde a reel-like dance of Irish origin was played on Boa Vista. Also gone is the *maxixe* from Brazil, a dance with African rhythms and a warm and sensual style. Some researchers say the *maxixe* is a variation of the *lundun*.

The tango, a dance from Argentina, also existed in Cape Verde, as did the *xotis* (schottische) and the *gallop*, a fast dance in two-four time. The latter is still danced at wedding celebrations in some islands and is part of the *kontradansa* (*contradança*) instrumental tradition still preserved on S. Nicolau, Boa Vista,

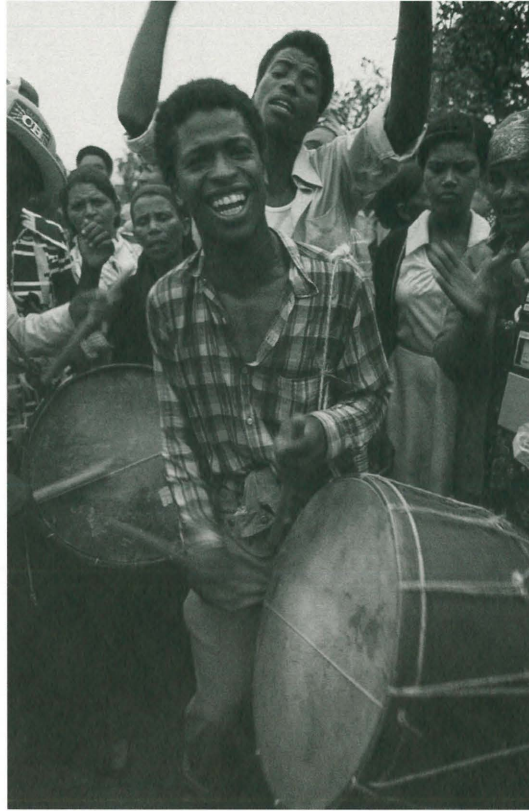


Photo by Ron Barboza

and especially on S. Antão.

The *kontradansa*, according to Teófilo Delgado of Fontainhas on S. Antão, probably originated from the English country-dance taken to Holland and France in the middle of the 17th century. Adapted by the French, it spread among the middle classes. The *kontradansa instrumental* was introduced to Cape Verde by the French.

The mazaruka, a popular dance from Poland, is still present in most of the islands of Cape Verde. Its Fogo variation is called *rabolo*. The waltz is also played at rural dances.

Of all Brazilian forms of music, the samba is the most prevalent and has become part of the Cape Verdean traditional repertoire.

Funana is an indigenous Cape Verdean form. Once played only with the button accordion (*gaita*) and the iron bar (*ferrinho*) in the interior of Santiago, *funana* became electrified after it was brought to the city, around the time of Cape Verdean independence. From Santiago the *funana* traveled to other islands and became very popular. It is danced in pairs with rhythmic, sensual, and lively movements of the hips.

Left: Cape Verdean-American *batuku* dancers celebrate the annual Cape Verdean Independence Festival at India Point Park in Providence, Rhode Island.

Right: A *kola* drummer celebrates the Feast of Santa Ana in the village of Nossa Senhora do Monte on Brava.

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instruments.*

Kodé di Dona is one of the originators of the *funana* form of music in Cape Verde. In this composition, he speaks as one of the thousands of Cape Verdeans who were compelled by famine and colonial neglect to become contract laborers performing backbreaking work in the tropical plantations of São Tomé and Príncipe Islands, off the west-central coast of Africa. The lyric dwells on the time of parting to express important themes about social life, as do many Cape Verdean poems.

The Famine of '59

KODÉ DI DONA

Translated by Richard Zenith

It was in '59
when there was no rain
despairing of my life
I went to sign up for São Tomé

I went in Praia by Santa Maria
to the office of Fernandi Sosa
I put my name on the list
my number was 37

I headed for the square
I arrived at Bibi di Riqueta's
and explained my problem
she gave me something to eat
4 days and 4 days
it was 4 in the morning

I saw the ship Ana Mafalda
I saw its lights fill the bay
they said the Ana Mafalda
would take people to São Tomé
and Príncipe

I lowered my head and sat down
to think about my life

I got together my things
put them in a burlap sack
and took a skiff out to the ship
Packed in like sardines
eating nothing for many days
fasting for many days
going hungry for many days
in the ship's hold we sailed...

Koladera (*coladeira*) was born in Cape Verde in the 1950s, and its rhythms continue to be influenced by those of Latin American music. It is played and danced at parties and get-togethers, and, like *funana*, *koladera* has become a creative vehicle for many popular electric bands. *Koladera* especially seems to lend itself to social commentary.

The *morna* is regarded as the national form of song, the most authentic and characteristically Cape Verdean. About a century and a half old, the *morna* emerged in urban settings out of human feelings associated with emigration: nostalgia for home and longing for absent lovers and family. It is distinguished not only by the caliber of the poets who penned its verses and of the composers who created its music, but also by the number and dedication of the scholars and critics who have wrestled with its significance. Among them are Baltazar Lopes, Félix Monteiro, Aurélio

Gonçalves, Jorge Monteiro, Manuel Ferreira, José Lopes, and myself.

The artistic style of the *morna* has changed over the decades, even though its themes of the sea, love, the moon, and attachment to the native land have not. *Mornas* acquired greater musical richness, according to Lopes, because of the compositions of B. Leza and Luís Rendall. Cape Verdean musicologist and composer Vasco Martins confirms this, pointing to B. Leza's decisive influence on the development of the *morna*'s harmonic setting. If someone had directed B. Leza not to change the *morna* lest he spoil it, and if he had listened, then today we would not enjoy beautiful *mornas* like "Eclipse," "Noite de Mindelo," "Lua nha testemunha," and many others. I hope this observation moderates the strong criticism leveled against composers of today's *mornas* and encourages all who would caringly engage Cape Verde's rich musical heritage.