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Lisbon: A House of Soulful Songs

By **SETH SHERWOOD**

Ana Moura is in a trance.

Eyes closed, head tilted back, the black-clad 28-year-old Portuguese diva lets her long, dark hair fall over half of her face as she fills the air with a soaring nocturnal lament.

Next to her, two guitarists pluck the minor-key accompaniment as the singer's voice echoes through the 16th-century stone walls of Casa de Linhares (Beco dos Armazéns 2; 351-21-886-5088; www.casadelinehares.com), perhaps the most atmospheric old [music](#) club in the medieval Alfama district in [Lisbon](#).

"The bedsheets, like the waves where all of our feelings got shipwrecked," she sings in Portuguese, evoking the mix of seafaring imagery and mournfulness so deeply ingrained in fado, Lisbon's traditional acoustic folk music.

When night settles over the hilltop castle of São Jorge and darkness fills the cobbled streets below, the neighborhood's venerable fado houses come alive, reverberating with nocturnal music until the wee hours of the morning. Crowds fill the vaulted stone cellars. Servers deliver plates of blood sausage, traditional bacalhau (salt cod) and bottles of Portuguese red wine. And singers of all ages, mostly female, take turns distilling stories of gut-wrenching loss into glimmering crystalline melodies.

Last year, [Mick Jagger](#), Keith Richards and other members of the [Rolling Stones](#) dropped in to Casa de Linhares to witness Ms. Moura perform. (She wound up collaborating on adapted versions of Stones classics "Brown Sugar" and "No Expectations" for a coming album of Stones songs.)

And while the origins of fado are somewhat nebulous — it has been varyingly traced back to the Moorish invaders, Brazilian slaves and homesick Portuguese sailors — its powerful emotions are clearly universal. Like midnight itself, the music is dark, mysterious and utterly enveloping.

"I once heard a lady say — she had been crying — 'I cannot understand the lyrics, but I can feel it inside,' " Ms. Moura said. "That's the thing with fado."

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