

## **Institutionalizing and materializing music through sound sources. The case of Bruce Bastin's fado collection in Portugal**

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I would like to thank the organizers of this conference for all the work to manage so many different proposals and sensibilities and also for giving me the opportunity to join you for the first time. I'm almost an outsider in the field of sound archives and I've been dealing with the subject in the way as all the ethnomusicologists necessarily do: using sound sources as a complement of my work.

Thus, for my prime time in this forum I choose to speak about fado (otherwise nobody will believe that I am a Portuguese ethnomusicologist). As you certainly know, last November fado was declared by UNESCO as a World Cultural Heritage. In the core of the process of the UNESCO's fado submission, was a particular collection of 78 rpm discs, recorded during the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that was forgotten during almost 50 years. This collection was "discovered" outside Portugal in 1993 and since the moment it was defined as a "Portuguese patrimony" it suffers a very interesting transformation according to the way it has been conceived by different agents and discourses. So, my paper will address the following questions: which kind of transformation can occur to a set of discs when it becomes an archive? In the era of information access which value can a sound archive acquire, when conceived as collective memory?

### **Bruce Bastin and the collection of 78 rpm of fado – from silence to treasure**

In 1993 the Portuguese editor José Moças, found in London a commercial CD called "**Fados from Portugal 1928/1936**". In his words, this was "a very curious happening!" In fact all the repertory on fado recorded in Portugal or abroad during the first half of the century, was completely unknown to the Portuguese due to two main reasons: (1) As Portugal never had a sound archive

there's no law for music storage. Consequently all the recordings registered and even published in Portugal did not necessarily remain in the country (2) The fadista Amália Rodrigues, who's first record was published in 1945, established a performative style for fado - vocal, visual and emotional - that somehow overshadowed almost all the singers before her, and conditioned the way new fadistas were promoted or excluded. This situation created a hollow of 50 years information that transformed the London episode in a kind of strange discovery, amplified by the fact that the old recordings of fado were found outside Portugal.

The Portuguese editor quickly tried to find out the origin of the recordings and got in touch with Bruce Bastin, a British folklorist and music collector who, in 1988 had bought in Portugal a 78rpm collection of 2500 discs (5000 recordings), which was stored in a warehouse near the northern city of Oporto. Those discs were recorded in Portugal and also abroad by Portuguese emigrants. They were edited by His Master's Voice, Columbia, Homokord, Victor and Gramophone, between 1904 and 1945, and included fado and "teatro de revista" (theatre music).

At the time, the biggest collection of 78 rpm discs known in Portugal, was composed by 1300 recordings which were stored at the Theatre Museum of Lisbon, including especially music for theatre. In this sense, Bastin's collection represented the most important archival unit on fado and other Portuguese urban music. In 2001, after several attempts to convince Bruce Bastin to sell the editorial rights to Portugal, the Portuguese editor José Moças - to whom the press has called "the discoverer" - gets the authorization of the Portuguese government to initiate formal contacts with Bruce Bastin and to prepare the acquisition of the entire collection. And this was the beginning of 10 years' negotiation between Bastin and the Portuguese officials - that includes the Ministry of Culture and the Municipality of Lisbon - to whom the acquisition of the collection constituted a national duty.

However, the high price of the discs - 1,1 million euros - represented a problem for the officials. Therefore, the Ministry of Culture nominated a commission of

experts - musicologists, anthropologists and ethnomusicologists - in order to validate scientifically the collection. As a consequence between 2001 and 2007 Portugal witnessed a long public discussion about this process, promoted through the mass media. And suddenly, the music registered on those discs - and the discs themselves - was transformed into a "treasure". We may say that it was monumentalized (le Goff), and conceived as something that belongs to the Portuguese patrimony because it represented our cultural memory. In 2003, a Portuguese important newspaper reported the collection through the following words:

*"Somewhere outside London there is a treasure trove of incalculable value for the memory of fado and Portuguese music of the twentieth century, waiting for official 'green light' to return home: a private collection of around 5000 unreleased recordings (predominantly fado, but also theatre repertoire, traditional folk music and 'historical enactments'), including the earliest records of fado, 1904, which was lost until now."* (João Lisboa in Jornal Expresso, Caderno Actual, 3/05/2003)

In fact, all the speeches about the collection referred to it through expressions of monumentalization like: "the biggest of the world", "our cultural memory", "an inestimable treasure", "essential for our history", "a precious piece", "a rare specimen", etc, etc. The information related to the number of recordings was extremely variable, ranging between 900 and 10000. This depended on the reference to the support type, the number of recorded tracks, the discs exclusively dedicated to fado, and the difference between the original and the upgraded collection of Bastin which was gradually completed following the interest of acquisition. A long discussion about the concept of phonogram was developed in the newspapers in order to determine if the word refers to a musical support (wax cylinder, magnetic tape, 78 rpm, etc) or to a track in a disc. And gradually, due to the way as the mass media followed and emphasized the subject, a kind of a national conscience grew up generating a citizenship movement to force the government to buy the fado collection. In 2003, one of the more important Portuguese newspapers provoked his readers as following:

*"Fado is ours? Yes, it is. But who has an important part of it is a vassal of His Majesty, Bruce Bastin, a collector (...)In those five thousand copies, is*

*printed the origin of fado. It's a question of soul! Our soul!"* (Fernando Magalhães In *O Público* 2/03/2003)

After this moment, fado became a national cause. And this gave rise to a national movement of citizenship in order to obtain the money to buy the collection. At least three public initiatives were signalized:

1. In 2004, the municipality of the city of Coimbra – which maintains a very important tradition of fado - created the “Heart Operation” asking to the citizens of Coimbra for their donations in order to guaranty a contribution of 150 000 euros.

2. In the same year, one of the most representative national newspaper (*O Público*), edited a collection of 20 fado CDs which were sold along with its weekly edition for 6,5 euros, of which 60 cents were designed to buy the Bastin’s collection.

3. On the 8th June 2005 took place in the historical Estoril Casino a gala for the celebration of fado, charging 125 euros per entry. One important Oporto wine producer and the Raymond Weill watches trade, shaped a limited collection of their products to be sold during the gala with the label “100 years of fado”. Several fadistas sang for free during the gala and the national television broadcasted it. During the live broadcasting ,national television reported the Portuguese on a bank account number where they could deposit their donations to purchase the collection.

So, in 19th September 2006 the Ministry of Culture, the Municipality of Lisbon and EGEAC (a public company responsible for the fado museum) signed an official agreement for the joint management of the collection after its acquisition. During the ceremony, which took place in the Fado Museum, the Ministry of Culture announced the creation of a National Sound Archive – which remains in project till today - in order to receive the discs. In the official text of the protocol the collection is presented as “*a singular source for the knowledge of an important part of music history and culture in the twentieth century in Portugal*”. Finally, in

21st December 2007, the acquisition protocol with Bruce Bastin was signed up and during the year of 2009 the collection was transferred to Portugal and stored in the Fado Museum where it has been being digitized under the supervision of the Institute of Ethnomusicology.

Throughout the long process of 11 years since the collection was “discovered” in London by the Portuguese editor José Moças, until its acquisition, by the Portuguese officials, the value of the collection had good and bad moments. However, when in May 2004 the President of Lisbon Municipality officially announced the intention to submit fado to the UNESCO Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, the collection acquired a superior value as an important argument for the application and its acquisition becomes irreversible. In the words of the President of the UNESCO Application Commission – the musicologist Rui Vieira Nery who was, at the same time, one of the members of the committee to evaluate the Bruce Bastin’s records – the collection was *“an invaluable contribution to the UNESCO’s submission. It represents the centrepiece to declare fado as Immaterial Heritage of Humanity, because one of the requirements is precisely to show that Portugal is making efforts for the preservation and study of fado patrimony”* (In Diário de Notícias 5/08/2005). In fact, due to the absence of a relevant sound documents related to fado , the Bastin’s collection, that was named after its purchase as “The Fado archives”, was the strongest documental piece to justify the candidacy. In 29th November 2011, exactly 10 years after the first efforts to acquire the “Fado archives”, UNESCO declared fado as Immaterial Heritage of Humanity.

### **Institutionalizing and materializing music through sound sources: desired objects, imagined music**

I now return to my original question: what kind of transformation can occur to a set of discs when it becomes an archive? To answer this question we have to focus on three universes of signification: the discs as an object, the music registered on the discs and the knowledge produced by different agents and speeches about both universes (the intersubjective knowledge):

1. The discs acquired different status along the years: they were recorded between 1900 and 1949 as commercial and sophisticated objects; between 1949 and 1988 they were transformed into a set of "things" stowed in a warehouse of Oporto; in 1988 they became a private collection of Bruce Bastin; after 1993 they were discovered by a Portuguese editor and transformed into the "Bruce Bastin's Collection"; between 2003 and 2007, through a process of institutionalization, they became the "Fado Archive";
2. The **music** was recorded, between 1904 and 1945, as a way to promote Portuguese fadistas; between 1950 and 2003 it was completely forgotten and smashed by the Amália's phenomena; after 2003 it acquired the status of historical memory, materialized through a disc shape and imagined as the voice of the ancestors who were supposed to represent the *real* and the *original* fado; in 2011 it was converted into an object of research and preservation. And this was a condition to validate the UNESCO title of Patrimony of Humanity.
3. All of the above transformations were shaped through different discourses produced by politicians, collectors, journalists, academics, institutions and public opinion.....

In fact, the notice about Bastin's collection arrived in Portugal as a double surprise: firstly, Portuguese (including institutions and individuals) were then realizing that 78 rpm discs, in spite of being commercial resources, could be considered as an archive subject. In addition, it seemed to reveal a world prior to Amália, offering to fado a place of heroism and ancestry which could be listen instead of remaining imagined. As a consequence Fado Archive was monumentalized, institutionalized and transformed in a *Lieux de Mémoire*.

Fantastic and glorious discourses about the Bruce Bastin's discs, produced by journalists, musicologists, anthropologists and politicians, suddenly transformed the collection in a "document monument", according to the proposal of Jacques Le Goff. Through those discourses, the collection became the

materialization of the fado's history. And its importance lies especially in the evidence of its existence more than in the effective knowledge about its contents. Even so, Portugal testified a national civil movement in defense of the collection which led to its institutionalization and finally, to the development of an institutional and national conscience of the importance of recorded sound as a testimony of an historical memory (*Lieux de memoire* – Nora 1984-1992).

In the aftermath of the nomination of Fado as a UNESCO Intangible Heritage – to which the collection of fado was crucial - public opinion is now appealing for another archive of fado: they want finally to know what is stored in those discs, requesting for the “deinstitutionalization” of the collection, the re-materialization of fado into digital free access sounds, in order to transform the “archive of fado” into an “archive for all”. And this is, probably, the beginning of a new journey for the collection of fado, shaped by a new public conscience about the concept of archive, information and collective memory.