



Amalia Rodrigues: The Spirit of Fado ★★1/2

(2006) 65 min. DVD: \$19.95. Music Video Distributors (avail. from most distributors). Color cover.

A portrait of the great lady of 20th-century *fado*, the moody form of song that, because of its lachrymose quality, has sometimes been referred to as the Portuguese blues, this hour-plus documentary recounts the life and career of Amalia Rodrigues, who rose from an impoverished background to become a national icon in her homeland by the time of her death in 1999. Combining newsreel footage and excerpts from her feature films and television appearances (some on U.S. TV circa the 1950s, like *Coke Time* with Eddie Fisher, where she sang her trademark hit "April in Portugal"), accompanied by adulatory narration, *Amalia Rodrigues: The Spirit of Fado* doesn't delve very deeply into its subject's personality, preferring to accept Rodrigues' own statements at face value, and technically it's completely conventional, with video and audio varying according to the quality of the sources. Moreover, given the emphasis that Rodrigues put on the lyrics to her songs (going so far as to commission poems for them), it's unfortunate that they are not translated in the subtitles—a major oversight. But given the dearth of similar material, this otherwise competent introduction to a 20th-century artist who symbolized her country's culture as fully as Edith Piaf did France's—with DVD extras including 10 audio clips and an equal number of video excerpts—should be considered a strong optional purchase. Aud: C, P. (F. Swietek)