

Pacific Sun

>> MUSIC

Not fado away

Ramana Vieira welcomes back the Portuguese 'cousin of the blues'

By Greg Cahill

"It's hard to explain," says singer Ramana Vieira when asked to describe fado, the mournful Portuguese folk songs that are a cousin of the blues. "How do you explain the soul of someone's music? It's just one of those things—you either know that someone has it or they don't."

The critical consensus is that Vieira has it. Says Susan Frances of *Jazz Review*: "Vieira's songs are regal with exotic rhythms and warm esthetics that wrap the melodies in a beauty that appeals instinctively to the masses. Vieira's vocals have a poetic resonance that makes the listener hang on every word and feel for the stories being told in the verses without possibly even understanding what is being said."

To which Andrew Gilbert of the *San Francisco Chronicle* adds, "No one in the United States is doing more to breathe new life into fado than Ramana Vieira, a

sultry, dramatic singer."

Vieira owes that exotic sound to her roots. Her family originated on Madeira, a tropical island off the coast of Portugal. But the singer grew up in a large, hardworking clan in San Leandro, home to a thriving Portuguese community. As a child, Vieira listened to her mother's fado albums, especially those of fado legend Amália Rodrigues, and sat mesmerized as relatives sang Portuguese folk songs at family gatherings.

As a teen, Vieira began performing musical theater. She later studied at the American Conservatory Theater in San Francisco, training that has contributed to the dramatic torchlike quality of her own fado.

"One reason I didn't pursue musical theater is that I had a different calling, a calling to sing fado," Vieira explains, "because I feel I can deliver it."

She certainly delivers it on her new CD, *Lágrimas De Rainha* (*Tears of a Queen*),

COMING SOON

Ramana Vieira performs Saturday, April 18, at 8pm, at the **142 Throckmorton Theatre**, 142 Throckmorton Ave. in Mill Valley. \$25, \$35. 415/383-9600.



Ab fado.

which features both English and Portuguese lyrics.

The riveting title track embodies the drama of the fado style. The song recounts a popular Portuguese tale of star-crossed lovers, a sort of 14th-century Romeo and Juliet tragedy. In the tale, lady-in-waiting Inez de Castro falls in love with Prince Don Pedro and marries him after he ascends to the throne. But Inez is slain by jealous courtiers. In retaliation, the king has his murdered bride exhumed and paraded through the streets, so that her

subjects can kiss her hand one last time.

"They say there is a fountain in Coimbra [Lisbon] that flows with the tears of Queen Inez de Castro," Vieira explains.

It's the kind of tale that contributes to the emotional atmosphere of Vieira's shows.

"When I perform, I want the audience to come along on the

journey, because I go into another space altogether, one in which I *am* in Portugal and I'm taking them on that road—we're reliving these stories," she says. "I want them to leave their troubles behind for that two hours and to transcend space and time." ★

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