

03 Aug 1999 17:05:20 -0600

From: E. David Gregory

To: George W. Lyon

Yes, I did see a DIY article by Hasted on a tub bass. You now have me worried that it did not say three string (although if it didn't, I'm surprised that my brain/memory would have made up three, since I agree that one string was the norm in skiffle tub basses), so I will have to check. When I tell you the result of my checking, I will give you the exact reference for inclusion in the notes.

Dave

04 Aug 1999 16:16:46 -0600

From: E. David Gregory

To: George W. Lyon

I don't have a photocopy of the Sing article by Hasted about making a tub bass, but the brief notes I made definitely say three-string bass rather than one-string. Hasted advises potential tub bass players to listen to Chris Barber (accompanying Ken Colyer and/or Lonnie Donnegan), so I think he had in mind something more elaborate than the most basic washtub bass. The piece is in Hasted's regular column in Sing which was usually titled "A Singer's Notebook" but which I think was left untitled on this occasion. If you want to footnote it, the reference is: Sing 3.4 (Oct-Nov, 1956), p. 60.

On reflection, it occurred to me that if you provide a note for that one, you should also allow me to document my next assertion about Hasted being a champion of skiffle. Among other places, that occurred in the next "Singer's Notebook" column, the reference being: Sing 3.5 (Dec 1956-Jan 1957), p. 70. I was trying to avoid too much scholarly paraphernalia, but on reflection I agree that these two bits of documentation probably should be added.

Dave.

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In the northeast of Portugal, in the hilly, long-isolated region of *Tras-os-Montes* ("over the mountains"), there is an area adjacent to the Spanish border (Zamora province) where an old language is spoken: *Mirandés do Douro* ("Miranda of the [river] Douro"). *Mirandés* is a combination of Portuguese and old Asturo-Leonese, and is spoken in an area of some 500 square km, by somewhere between 5,000 and maybe (unlikely) as many as 15,000 people, all of whom now also speak Portuguese.

So, what was an anglophone Canadian doing as a member of the jury for the best newly composed song in *Mirandés*? Well, I'd been in Bragança, a medieval city now on the crumbling, shabby side, but with its castle more or less intact, just south of the Spanish border. I was using it as a base for fieldwork excursions, mostly to villages in *Tras-os-Montes* with a long history of secret Jews from Inquisition times, and mostly hitching, since the buses rarely went where I needed to go, and almost never when I needed to go there. Some villages I'd been to before, others were a first-time excursion—and maybe there was something in the air, but the usual tooth-pulling routine ("No, we don't sing those old reaping and threshing songs any more....") was magically unnecessary: at times it felt as if I were sitting in a ballad orchard with ripe songs falling into my lap (well, microphone). Anyway, I phoned my friend/colleague Mario Correia of Oporto, on the Atlantic coast, who has long been involved with Portuguese traditional and popular music, and has edited several CDs of his documentary recordings in the Miranda area. It turned out he was going to Miranda for the festival of new *Mirandés* song, and the city commemoration day, and *pauliteiros* (stick dancers with pipe-and-tabor accompaniment) festival, and suggested he pick me up in Bragança and tell the organizers to give me the same semi-spiffy lodging and good meals treatment he and other jury members were getting.

"But they haven't asked me to be on the jury!" I protested, in my dubious Portuguese.

"Oh, that's ok, I'll tell them to," replied Mario.

Actually, they knew me slightly at Town Hall in Miranda,

as I'd been there before, once with Tamar and once alone, on fieldwork excursions, and in fact had met Mario in a nearby village, or rather in the isolated church on a windswept hilltop outside the village one icy November night, when he was recording their women's group (but that's another story). Anyway, I ended up both sitting on the jury and opening the festival, singing a few songs in *Mirandés*, including one which I also played on pipe-and-tabor, which is not generally played by women in Spain or Portugal.

Miranda do Douro was established back in 1286, but only in 1545 (on July 10, the day of the festival) was it elevated to city status. It was part of Spain for a while, in the 18th century, and till the 1970s was more or less in a state of decadence. Now, with the border between Spain and Portugal erased, as a result of the European Community agreements, there is much more coming and going across the border, but it is hardly what one would think of as, say, bustling. The remains of the castle are a few crumbled bits of wall, there are a handful of mildly picturesque whitewashed streets, and an antiseptic, mercifully small, new section. A few short kms away there are unexcavated Celtic *castros* (stone settlements), and in the main square there's a great little Ethnographic Museum with a long history of productive activity, now in the hands of Antonio Mourinho, who took over from his illustrious uncle, Father Mourinho, who died in 1996.

Anyway, the song festival included several entries, some in 60s light rock style, all very earnest, and all in *Mirandés*, which only that very day received its first book of orthographic standards, painstakingly put together by linguists and handed out free by Town Hall to every family in the region. It was supposed to start relatively early, by 9 or 9:30 pm, but at 9:30 pm all the jury members, along with the mayor and most of Town Hall, hadn't even started on dessert and coffee. When we finally got to the main square, where a stage and sound system had been set up, no one seemed upset, families were chatting amiably, kids were jumping and climbing on and off the stage, the

sun had finally gone down and with it the intense heat. As planned, I started off the festival—not as part of the competition, which was for newly-composed songs—with a couple of songs and a pipe-and-tabor piece in Mirandés (excusing myself for speaking only *fidalgo*, which in Mirandés means speaking Portuguese, the "upper class" language. People were rather surprised, but some had seen me before and by now I seem to have acquired a reputation in the region's villages as a sort of harmlessly mad ageing hippie professor who wanders around without a car, with a video camera and a decrepit knapsack (and sometimes a much more with-it teen-aged daughter), looking for old songs: as a single, middle-aged woman, so far removed from any possible classification system that they've given up trying to categorize me (instead, they sing for me and the women feed me, in both cases a distinct improvement over classification). By the time we jury members got around to our deliberations, in an impressive chamber of Town Hall looking over the main square, it was midnight, and by the time we emerged with our collective verdict, well past 1:00 am. The evening was supposed to end with a *Çarga de lágrimas* (a "cascade of tears" with fireworks), but for unknown reasons they somehow didn't get around to it.

The songs weren't great compositions, but the mere fact that they are new songs in a very old language in danger of extinction, and mostly new songs by young people, is the important factor. Outside the city, there are still quite a few people who sing the old songs, and some young people are learning at least parts of the repertoire, though generally not the most complex vocal aspects and rarely in the old performance style I love and whose passing I mourn, ethnomusicologically incorrect though the lamenting may be.

Some 10 days later, I was a few hours' south of Miranda, back in Belmonte, the Crypto-Jewish village/small town par excellence, where much of the research for my ongoing project (thanks, SSHRC and York University!) has been centred. Back in 1997 in Belmonte, it had been my inexperienced but dogged potato-hacking (meant to be peeling, but it was a knife more suited to slaughtering buffalo than to delicately peeling new potatoes) which won the hearts of some of the normally suspicious (with reason) Crypto-Jewish women's. This time, it was having seen me on Portuguese TV, in my unlikely Mirandés musical role. I hope you don't find it too sobering a thought that I'm their only role model for the image of the Canadian ethnomusicologist/folk singer....

—Judith Cohen