

Former members of Madredeus (from left to right): José Peixoto, Pedro Ayres Magalhães, Teresa Salgueiro, Carlos Maria Trindade and Fernando Júdice



→ BEGINNER'S GUIDE

MADREDEUS

The Portuguese band return after a six-year hiatus with a new line-up and new album. Alex Robinson examines the group's lasting appeal

I'll never forget the first time I heard Madredeus. I was sitting in an ugly little tapas bar in Mérida when 'Claridade' (from the album *O Paraíso*) – cut through the traffic noise and backchat like a shaft of light through dusty air. I was instantly captivated. Yet I couldn't place the sound – like the best 'world music,' it defied categorisation. It was very Portuguese, filled with the sweet melancholy of *saudade*. There was *fado* in there too, and Portuguese folk. Yet this was something contemporary, fresh. Entirely new.

Madredeus began when two young Portuguese folk rockers – Pedro Ayres Magalhães (of Os Heróis do Mar) and Rodrigo Leão (of Sétima Legião) – came together in 1985 determined to re-invent

Portuguese traditional acoustic and folk music. They were tired of anodyne Portuguese pop and uninterested in looking back to traditional *fado*. They wanted to be contemporary yet rooted, open to the world but distinctly Portuguese. As they began to write and recruit musicians (cellist Francisco Ribeiro and accordionist Gabriel Gomes), they found a new sound and imagined a particular voice to sing to accompany it – female, young, clear, pure... But months of auditions in Lisbon proved fruitless. Then one night when in the Bairro Alto, Leão heard a young girl spontaneously singing *fado* to her friends. He was transfixed. This was the voice the band had been searching for. It belonged to Teresa Salgueiro – an unknown 18-year-old from

the Lisbon suburbs. She was invited to rehearse with the band – in the old Madre de Deus convent in the Xabregas region of Lisbon. The convent gave the band their name and the mix of Salgueiro's pure, limpid singing and Magalhães and Leão's sophisticated acoustic compositions gave the band a unique, trademark style and a recording contract.

Madredeus released their first album *Os Dias da Madredeus* at the end of 1987. It was fairly rough and ready but so unusual in contemporaneous Lisbon that it earned the fledgling band sufficient critical acclaim for them to embark on a widespread national tour. This was a great success and over the following five years, Madredeus built a devoted following. In 1990 they released

their second, more polished CD, *Existir*. By the end of 1992 they had become a national name. But they were still almost unknown beyond their homeland. This changed in 1994 when Magalhães met Wim Wenders, who invited the band to contribute to the soundtrack of his forthcoming film.

"It was a crucial moment for Madredeus," says Magalhães. "We were recording our new album *O Espírito da Paz* at that time. The impetus from Wim's invitation enabled us to promote ourselves internationally. We were no longer some fringe Portuguese folk or fado act. Now we were the soundtrack band for a forthcoming Wim Wenders film."

By the time *Lisbon Story* was showcased at Cannes, Madredeus had toured from Tokyo to São Paulo, with stops in cities

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Contemporary, yet rooted, open to the world but distinctly Portuguese

including London in between. The release of *Ainda* (the film soundtrack) in 1995 saw them increasingly celebrated worldwide. Back home in Portugal, all of their albums including *O Espírito da Paz* entered the national top 20.

But the success was bittersweet. Frustrated by the amount of time and work he was having to devote to Madredeus, Leão left the band in 1994, followed a short while later by Gomes and Ribeiro. But Madredeus continued, without strings and accordion and with Carlos Maria Trindade taking over from Leão on keyboards and Fernando Júdice adding acoustic bass. And in 1997 they released what is arguably their finest album, *O Paraíso*. It was peppered with gorgeous, life-affirming songs like 'Claridade'

and more than any other previous Madredeus release had a completeness, an integrity: each song slipped effortlessly into the next, taking the listener on a journey of subtly shifting moods.

The band consolidated the success of *O Paraíso* with a series of solid albums. *Movimento*, released in 2001, was darker. *Um Amor Infinito* and *Falvas do Tejo* are two very similar collections of odes to Lisbon – recorded concurrently and released in 2004 and 2005. Then in November 2007 Salgueiro announced her departure. And Madredeus was left voiceless.

For four years Madredeus as such ceased to exist and Magalhães flirted with a new project – a jazzier, theatrical, multi-vocal venture called Madredeus e a Banda Cómica. It was a kind of Lusitanian Cinematic Orchestra, with a repertoire of smoky late-bar music, sweetened with a mix of slinky Brazilian and sultry European Portuguese singing.

This year sees the return of Madredeus proper – as a larger band, with a small string section – and a new album, *Essencia*. "It's an exploration of the essence of our music, hence the name," Magalhães says. "Like *O Paraíso*, it was written on manuscript before we recorded it, giving it richness and complexity."

Madredeus has a new voice too – Beatriz Nunes. "She's a wonderful singer," Magalhães enthuses, "classically trained with all the rigour and precision that brings, yet able to sing freely with gorgeous, youthful purity." **M**

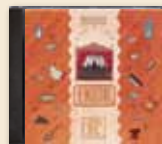
DATE Madredeus perform at the Barbican on April 16. See *Gig Guide* for details
ALBUMS *Essencia* and *The Spirit of Lisbon* are released in April. See reviews in next issue

BEST ALBUMS



O Paraíso (EMI Portugal, 1997)

Madredeus' classic – filled with gorgeous lilting melodies and reflective lyrics. Tracks like 'Haja o Que Houver,' 'O Sonho' and 'A Andorinha da Primavera' are imbued with that uniquely Lusitanian lullaby sweet sadness – *saudade*, yet are as bright and warm as a Lisbon summer.



Existir (EMI France, 1990)

The best album from the first era, with an enchanting mixture of instrumental and vocal songs including Magalhães' 'O Pomar das Laranjeiras' and Leão's 'Tardes de Bolonha'.

BEST COMPILATION



Antologia (EMI Classics, 2000)

This release is a 'Best Of' with a selection of choice songs from the group's first five albums.

BEST AVOIDED



Electrónico (Virgin, 2002)

Madredeus meets dub and club. But they don't get along.

Competition



We have three copies of *The Spirit of Lisbon*, *The Very Best Of Madredeus* to give away.

To enter, simply answer the following question:
What is the name of the band's newest female lead singer?

See p7 for *Songlines* competition rules and address.
Closing date May 11, 2012

IF YOU LIKE MADREDEUS, THEN TRY... DULCE PONTES



O Primeiro Canto (Universal, 1999)

Dramatic, florid and with all the emotional charge of a great *fadista*, Dulce Pontes has one of Portugal's most magnificent voices. Like Madredeus she renders the country's traditional musical tropes contemporary, especially on this magnum opus.



The new line-up, featuring singer Beatriz Nunes

PEDRO CLAUDIO