

**Resource for Teachers: Background on Cape Verde (/ˌkeɪp ˈvɜːrd/) or Cabo Verde (/ˌkɑːboʊ ˈvɜːrdeɪ/) and its music**

Read Author's Note at the end of *Seaside Dream*.

Consider this document on batuku music: [Batuku Dance as Resistance](#).

**Country Profile**

Source: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-13148486>

Poor in natural resources, prone to drought and with little arable land, the Cabo Verde islands have won a reputation for achieving political and economic stability.

Also known as Cape Verde, the former Portuguese colony comprises 10 islands and 5 islets, all but three of which are mountainous. The archipelago lies around 500 km off the west coast of Africa. It was at one time an important centre of the slave trade.

During the 20th century severe droughts caused the deaths of 200,000 people and prompted heavy emigration. Today, more people with origins in Cabo Verde live outside the country than inside it. The money that they send home brings in much-needed foreign currency.

**Timeline:**

**1462** - Portuguese settlers land on São Tiago. Cabo Verde becomes a centre for the trade of cheap manufactured items such as firearms, rum, and cloth, in exchange for enslaved people, ivory, and gold.

**1495** - Cabo Verde becomes a Portuguese crown colony.

**1960** - Many Cabo Verdeans join the liberation war against Portuguese rule in Guinea-Bissau. The struggle is led by the African Party for Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC).

**1975** - Cabo Verde becomes independent.

**1981** - African Party for the Independence of Cabo Verde (PAICV) becomes the country's sole party.

**1992** - A new constitution brings in a multi-party system.

**Césaria Évora Obituary** (This article describes the life of Cesária Évora and also includes information about Cape Verde.)

Source: <https://www.theguardian.com/music/2011/dec/17/cesaria-evora>

The singer Cesária Évora, who has died aged 70 after a long period of ill-health, rose from poverty on the Cape Verde archipelago to achieve worldwide fame in her later years. She put the islands – off the coast of west Africa – on the world music map by performing their distinctive "morna" ballads with a mix of sweetness and melancholy.

When she first came to European attention in 1988, Évora appeared an unlikely candidate for international stardom, yet within five years she was selling hundreds of thousands of CDs, with concert audiences to match. Grammy nominations, critical adulation and the praise of famous singers quickly surrounded the chain-smoking, barefoot grandmother, yet Évora remained remarkably blasé about her newfound celebrity.

She was, she always emphasised, a good singer, and thus it was natural that people would enjoy hearing her. That she had had to endure decades of obscurity was, she would add, frustrating. Eschewing false humility and proud of her heritage, Évora knew her own standing among the world's greatest vocalists.

She was born in Mindelo, a port city on the island of São Vicente. Her family was musical: her uncle B Leza was a noted morna composer. After becoming an orphan, Évora made a living from the age of 15 by singing in bars. By 1960, she was singing on local radio stations and for the Portuguese cruise ships that docked at Mindelo. On those ships she gained a certain celebrity for refusing to wear shoes and performing barefoot. This was natural enough, since she had grown up without shoes, but it became her trademark. Évora sang in Kriolu, a Creole language mixing Portuguese with the west African dialects of her enslaved ancestors. The minor-key morna ballads she sang with such stoic feeling reflected themes of loss, poverty and immigration – all constants to Cape Verdeans.

Portugal's neglect of its colony and the resulting struggle for independence, which came in 1975, provided an unpromising backdrop for Évora's early career. She raised three children largely by herself. In 1985, the Lisbon-based Cape Verdean singer Bana invited Évora to Portugal to perform.

This was the first time Évora had had the opportunity to leave the islands. Her Lisbon performances were well received by its immigrant population, and José da Silva, a young Parisian musician of Cape Verdean origin, was extremely impressed. He invited Évora to record for his tiny Lusafrika label.

Her 1988 debut album, *La Diva aux Pieds Nus* (The Barefoot Diva), and a 1990 follow-up featured an electronic pop sound unsuited to Évora. For her 1991 album *Mar Azul* (Blue Sea), Da Silva recorded Évora singing morna numbers backed by a small acoustic group. This allowed her limpid vocal style to shine, and French media began championing her. The international record company BMG signed a deal with Da Silva to distribute Évora's albums. *Miss Perfumado* (1992) was backed by a BMG campaign that helped it sell more than 300,000 copies in France.

Évora, for so long resident only on São Vicente, took to the road for the next three years, touring all over the world and establishing herself as one of Africa's most internationally successful artists. A love of rum and cigarettes – part of her performance involved taking a break on stage for a smoke and drink while the band played an instrumental – alongside a no-nonsense approach to both audiences and media helped ensure her formidable reputation. Her anti-diva behaviour was no affectation: when asked if she was impressed by performing at concert halls in the world's greatest cities, Évora shrugged and replied that if [Cape Verde](#) had access to the same resources, it too would have such venues. From 1995 to 2009, Évora recorded an album every two to three years and undertook long tours. Da Silva remained her producer and manager, and the standard of the material she recorded, almost always Cape Verdean in origin, remained very high. She was one of the few singers in a foreign language to win a large US audience.

Though success brought Évora considerable wealth, she remained a chain-smoking stoic who shrugged off fame's affectations and retained São Vicente as her home. Even after her health began to decline in 2005, she continued to work hard. Three years later, a minor stroke before a Melbourne concert caused the tour to be curtailed. In 2010, a heart attack after a Paris concert necessitated open-heart surgery, and last September she retired from performing.

Évora's voice – silky, weary, supple yet never showy, rich with her extraordinary presence – remains compelling. She is survived by two of her children.