



José Manuel Cerqueira Afonso dos Santos, also well known as **Zeca Afonso** or only "Zeca" (August 2, 1929 – February 23, 1987) was born in Aveiro, Portugal, son of José Nepomuceno Afonso, a judge, and Maria das Dores. A popular singer, composer and poet, a remarkable left-wing portuguese man with strong anti-fascist beliefs and intervention, with a huge role in the Democratic Carnation Revolution and the following process, Zeca was one of the most important personalities in the portuguese 20th century. Zeca will be forever remembered as someone who never turned his face from difficulties, always fighting against unfairness, always at the service of the Portuguese working people, always fighting for what he believed to be a better Portugal, a Socialist Portugal.

Early Life

José Afonso was born in Aveiro, on August 2 of 1929.

In 1930 his parents travelled to Angola, a portuguese colony at the time, where his father had been placed as a Judge in the city of Silva Porto. José Afonso stays at Aveiro, in a house named "Fonte das Cinco Bicas", due to some health problems with his aunt Gigé and his uncle Xico, which called himself "republican and anticlerical".

In 1933 Zeca travels to Angola, by his mother's order. In the ship Zeca meets a missionary that becomes his company during the travel. José Afonso stays three years in Angola, where he begins his primary education.

In 1936 he returns to Aveiro.

In 1937 he travels for the second time, this time to Mozambique where his parents were now, with his brother and sister, João and Mariazinha.

He returns to Portugal in 1938, this time to his uncle Filomeno's house, mayor of the town of Belmonte. There he finishes the fourth grade. His uncle, a fierce fascist supporter, makes him a member of the "Mocidade Portuguesa" a youth organization with fascist guidelines.

He heads to Coimbra in 1940 in order of prosecuting his studies. He studies in D. João III high school and lives with his aunt Avrilete. His family goes from Mozambique to East Timor, where his father continues doing his job of Judge. Mariazinha goes with them while his brother João returns to Portugal. With the occupation of Timor by the Japanese, José Afonso receives no news from his parents for three years, until the end of World War II in 1945.

The University Years

In that year he starts singing his first songs as *bicho* (it means something like a beast or a worm), a rank of University of Coimbra tradition for the high school students (José Afonso was in the 11th grade). He was known as "bicho-cantor" (the singing beast), which grants him the right of not being "rapado" (head shaved) by the organized "trupes" (groups) of older students that were one of the most important symbols of the university tradition.

From 1946 to 1948 he finishes high school, after two failed attempts due to his chaotic lifestyle in the middle of the older students. He meets Maria Amália de Oliveira, whom he marries secretly due to his parents' opposition. He travels with some of the most important university musical groups and plays football for the Associação Académica de Coimbra.

In 1949 he starts studying History and Philosophy.

In January of 1953 his first son is born, José Manuel. He releases his first recordings, of which there isn't any copy today.

From 1953 to 1955 he joins the compulsory military service. He was sent to Macau, but he escapes due to health problems. After that he is placed at Coimbra. He experiences many economical difficulties and gets divorced. After the military service, and now with two children, José Manuel and Helena (born in 1954), Zeca finishes the studies with an 11 (in 20) with a thesis about Jean-Paul Sartre.

The Beginning of the Political Intervention

In 1956 he releases his first record, *Fados de Coimbra*.

In 1956/57 he becomes a teacher and works in the south of Portugal.

Due to his financial problems he sends his children to Mozambique in 1958 where his parents were at the time. In that year he gets amazed by Humberto Delgado's presidential campaign (which Humberto lost due to the massive fraud led by the fascist regime).

In 1959 he starts singing in many popular groups around the country, which grants him more and more contact with the harsh living of the portuguese people.

In 1960 is released his fourth record, *Balada do Outono* (Autumn Balad).

From 1961 to 1962 he follows from very close the student strikes and demonstrations demanding democracy and the end of the fascist regime which were brutally repressed by the police.

He continues releasing many of his songs and introduces important new guitar arrangements.

He plays in Switzerland, Germany and Sweden, in a group of fado and guitars, with Adriano Correia de Oliveira, José Niza, Jorge Godinho, Durval Moreirinhas and the singer Esmeralda Amoedo.

In May of 1964, José Afonso plays on the Musical Society *Worker's Brotherhood* in Grândola, where he gets the inspiration to compose the song *Grândola, Vila Morena*, which would be the signal for the start of the carnation revolution in 1974.

In that year is releases the album *Cantares de José Afonso*.

Also in 1964 is released the album *Baladas e Canções*.

From 1964 to 1967, José Afonso is at Lourenço Marques (now Maputo) with Zélia (his second wife) there he meets his children. In the last two years he teaches in Beira, there he composes a music for Bertolt Brecht play *The Exception and The Rule*. In 1965 his daughter Joana is born.

In 1967 he returns to Lisboa impressed by the brutal colonial reality and by the colonial war against the liberation movement of Mozambique, FRELIMO and leaves his older son, José Manuel, with the grandparents in Mozambique. He becomes a teacher in Setúbal, after that he gets a severe health crisis which takes him to be hospitalized for 20 days. When he leaves the hospital he had been expelled from the public teaching because of his leftist influences and because the regime censors considered his songs strongly subversive. His book

Cantares de José Afonso (José Afonso's songs) is published. The Portuguese Communist Party invites him personally to become a party's member but Zeca refuses because of his burgeoise origins. In that year he signs a contract with *Orfeu*, which would record 70% of his works.

Expelled from the teaching job he becomes a personal helper for some students and he starts singing much more regularly in the popular groups of the south margin of the Tagus river (Margem Sul do Tejo in portuguese, a fierce communist supporting region with strong popular movements and associations, even before the revolution). By christmas, Zeca releases the album *Cantares do Andarilho*, with Rui Pato, the first album recorded for *Orfeu*. His contract is very special: He receives 15.000 escudos per month but he must record an album per year.



The Anti-Fascist Resistance

In 1969 with the replacement of António de Oliveira Salazar by Marcello Caetano the fascim gets a very slight taste of democracy, like the allowance for the rebuilding of a democratic Labour Union movement. José Afonso joins the movement and supports it the by all the means he can, he also takes part in the second wave of student rebellion against the regime in Coimbra. He releases the album *Contos Velhos Rumos Novos* and the single *Menina dos Olhos Tristes* which contains the popular song *Canta Camarada* (Sing, Sing, Comrade!) which became an option for beeing adopted by the Portuguese Communist Party as a non-official anthem, but in the end, it didn't. He receives an award for the best album, which he receives again in 1970

and 1971. For the first time in a Zeca's Album is used other instrument than the guitar. His fourth and last son is born, Pedro.

In 1970 is released the album *Traz Outro Amigo Também* (Bring another friend too), recorded in London, in the Pye studios, the first album without Rui Pato, forbidden by PIDE (the fascist political police) of traveling. On March 21 he receives from the portuguese press an award for his *high quality work as singer and composer and for his decisive influence in the portuguese popular music*. He participates in a International Festival in Cuba.

By the end of 1971, is released the famous album *Cantigas do Maio* (Songs of May), recorded near Paris, in Herouville studios. The album is generally considered the best album of his career.

In 1972 the album is called *Eu Vou Ser Como a Toupeira* (I Will Be Like the Mole), recorded in Madrid, at Cellada studios.

In 1973 José Afonso continues his *pilgrimage*, singing everywhere. Many of his sessions were forbidden by the PIDE/DGS. **In April he is arrested and stays for 20 days in Caxias prison (a prison mostly used for political prisoners) until the end of May.** In the prison he writes the poem *Era Um Redondo Vocábulo*. By Christmas, publishes the album *Venham Mais Cinco*, recorded in Paris, in which José Mário Branco colaborates. In the song *Venham Mais Cinco*, participates Janine de Waleyne, from the Swingle Singers, a famous jazz vocal group.

In March 29 of 1974, the *Coliseu*, in Lisbon, gets full house to listen to José Afonso, Adriano Correia de Oliveira, José Jorge Letria, Manuel Freire, José Barata Moura, Fernando Tordo and many others, that end the concert singing *Grândola, Vila Morena*. Some soldiers from the revolutionary movement that would take part in April in the carnation revolution, the *MFA* are in the audience and choose *Grândola* for the countersign of the Revolution. A month later, in April 25 the fascist regime is destroyed in a bloodless military coup. He releases the album *Coro dos Tribunais* (Courthouse chorus), recorded in London, again in Pye, with musical arrangements from Fausto. The album includes brechtian songs, composed in Mozambique in the period between 1964 and 1967, *Coro dos Tribunais* and *Eu Marchava de Dia e de Noite*.

The Revolutionary Period

From 1974 to 1975 he gets directly involved in the popular revolutionary movements. The PREC (Ongoing Revolutionary Process) becomes his passion. He sings in March 11 of 1975 (the day of a failed fascist coup) in the RALIS (a leftist military stronghold) for the soldiers. Zeca establishes a collaboration with the extreme-left movement LUAR. LUAR releases his single *Viva o Poder Popular* (Hail to the people's power) with *Foi na Cidade do Sado* in the B side. In Italy, the revolutionary organizations *Lotta Continua*, *Il Manifesto* and *Vanguardia Operaria* release the album *República*, recorded in Roma in September 30 and October 1. The money achieved with the sales of the album meant to support the striking workers of the newspaper *República*. The album is almost unknown in Portugal and includes the songs *Para Não Dizer Que Não Falei de Flores*, *Se os Teus Olhos se Vendessem*, *Foi no Sábado Passado*, *Canta Camarada*, *Eu Hei-de Ir Colher Macela*, *O Pão Que Sobra à Riqueza*, *Os Vampiros*, *Senhora do Almortão*, *Letra para Um Hino* and *Ladainha do Arcebispo*.

In 1976 he supports Otelo Saraiva de Carvalho's presidential candidature, Otelo was one important commanders of the April 25 military operations, Zeca would supporte him again in 1980. Zeca releases the album *Com as Minhas Tamanquinas*.

The album *Enquanto Há Força*, released in 1978, again with Fausto, shows some of Zeca's concernings about colonialism and imperialism and is also a critic against the Catholic Church.

In 1979 is released the album *Fura Fura*, with the help of the popular artist, Júlio Pereira. The album contains many songs that were meant to be for theater plays. He participates in Brussels in the Anti-Eurovision Festival.



The Last Years

In 1981 after two years of silence, he returns to Coimbra with his album *Fados de Coimbra e Outras Canções*. He plays in Paris at the *Teatre de la Ville*.

In 1982 he starts to develop the first symptoms of his severe disease, an amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. He plays in Brouges at Printemps Festival.

In January 23 of 1983 Zeca, weakened by the disease, plays with some difficulties in a huge show in the full housed *Coliseu* with Octávio Sérgio, António Sérgio, Lopes de Almeida, Durval Moreirinhas, Rui Pato, Fausto, Júlio Pereira, Guilherme Inês, Rui Castro, Rui Júnior, Sérgio Mestre and Janita Salomé. In that show is recorded the live album *Ao Vivo no Coliseu*.

In the end of 1983 he releases *Como Se Fora Seu Filho*, a political testimonial. It contained the following songs: *Papuça, Utopia, A Nau de António Faria, Canção da Paciência, O País Vai de Carrinho, Canarinho, Eu Dizia, Canção do Medo, Verdade e Mentira* and *Altos Altentes*. The city of Coimbra gives him the City's Golden Medal. *Thanks Zeca, this is your house*, he heard from the mayor, Mendes Silva. *I don't want to become an institution, but I feel very gratefull for the homage*, Zeca answered. After that the president, Ramalho Eanes, wants to give to Zeca the Order of Liberty, but Zeca refuses to fill the papers.

In 1983 José Afonso is reintegrated in the official teaching, he is sent to Azeitão, he had been expelled in 1968. His sickness starts to spread and his health gets worse.

In 1985 is released his last album *Galinhas do Mato*. Zeca is unable to sing all the themes in the album, being replaced by Luís Represas (*Agora*), Helena Vieira (*Tu Gitana*), Janita Salomé (*Moda do Entrudo*, *Tarkovsky* and *Alegria da Criação*), José Mário Branco (*Década de Salomé*, duet with Zeca), Né Ladeiras (*Benditos*) and Marta Salomé (*Galinhas do Mato*). Musical arrangements are from Júlio Pereira and Fausto. The album included also: *Escandinávia Bar-Fuzeta* and *À Proa*. In 1986 he supports the presidential candidature of Maria de Lourdes Pintassilgo, a progressive catholic Women.

José Afonso died at Setúbal in February 23 of 1987, at 3 AM, victim of the sclerosis that had been diagnosed in 1982. His funeral was attended by 30.000 people, in Setúbal. The funeral took 2 hours to cover 1300 meters. His coffin was covered by a red flag with no symbols as he asked, and it was carried by Sérgio Godinho, Júlio Pereira, José Mário Branco, Luís Cília, Francisco Fanhais and others.



After Zeca's Death

In November 18 of 1987 the Associação José Afonso (José Afonso Association) was created with the objective of fulfilling Zeca's intentions in the area of portuguese music and art.

In 1991, the city of Amadora inaugurated a 12 feet tall statue of Zeca Afonso in the city's Central Park.

In 1994, inside de programme of Lisboa-94, European Capital of Culture, takes part at June 30 a festival of homage to Zeca. Many portuguese musicians from the new generation participated in the festival called *Filhos da Madrugada*, like Brigada Victor Jara, Censurados, Delfins, Diva, Entre Aspas, Essa Entente, Frei Fado D'El Rei, GNR, Madredeus, Mão Morta, Opus Ensemble, Peste & Sida, Resistência, Ritual Tejo, Sérgio Godinho, Sétima Legião, Sitiados, Tubarões, UHF, Vozes da Rádio and Xutos & Pontapés singing Zeca's songs. Thirteen years earlier, Zeca mentioned that "If rock is the musical style that youth prefers, than we should ask for good quality rock". In that same year, BMG released an album with the same title of the festival, in the same format, with portuguese artists singing Zeca's songs.

In 1995 José Mário Branco, Amélia Muge and João Afonso, Zeca' nephew, released an album of homage to Zeca, called *Maio, Maduro Maio* that included many of his songs and two Zeca's previously unreleased songs: *Entre Sodoma e Gomorra* and *Nem Sempre os Dias São Dias Passados*.

In the 10th aniversario of Zeca's Death, in 1997, EMI released for the first time in CD format the album from 1964, *Baladas e Canções*.