

The CAVAQUINHO

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Introduction note

The original text in Portuguese was extracted from the book “Instrumentos Musicais Populares Portugueses” (Portuguese Popular Musical Instruments), written by Dr. Ernesto Veiga de Oliveira and edited by the Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, Lisbon 1966, 1st ed. (1982, 2nd ed.). Although this book is considered without any doubt a reference for the knowledge of the Portuguese popular musical instruments, surprisingly, to my knowledge there is not an edition in English.

On that book there is a chapter dedicated to the Cavaquinho, from which I do not know any integral English version available yet, but only some either incomplete or even adapted ones. So I did this version of the entire chapter in English. I believe non-Portuguese readers, interested in this peculiar musical instrument or in its Brazilian or Hawaiian descendents, would appreciate having full access to this famous study of Dr. Veiga de Oliveira.

Quotations of his study and even the original text in Portuguese with photos can be reached in several Portuguese sites in the net. Try for example the sites of [Júlio Pereira](#) or [Grupo de Cavaquinhos do Porto](#).

This translation, the sub-titles, the added notes and references are of my responsibility. I hope you find it readable, interesting and useful. While doing this work I had to overcome some difficulties coming, on one hand, from my lack of experience on these adventures, on the other hand, from Dr. Ernesto Veiga de Oliveira's somehow difficult writing style. But I tried to respect it as much as possible.

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The name

The **Cavaquinho** [1] is a popular string instrument of small dimensions, of the same type as the flat back and soundboard guitar — and so belonging to the European guitars' family — body of double belly and slightly waisted, with four strings, made of gut or metallic— of «wire» (i.e., steel) — [2], depending on one's taste. On the traditional ways, the strings are attached on top, by wooden pegs on the head back, and, at the bottom, on the bridge plate, laminated [3] at the centre of the lower body soundboard, the same way also used on the guitar.

Besides this name we can find, for the same instrument or others related to it, the designations of *machinho*, *machim*, *machete* (what seems to be a word out of use, but subsisting in the islands [4] and in Brazil), *manchete* or *marchete*, *braguinha* or *braguinho*, *cavaco*, etc., that we will analyse further down in this text.

Inside the general category with the above characteristics, there are currently in Portugal's mainland two types of cavaquinhos, corresponding to an equal number of regions – the “**Minhoto**” type [5] and the **Lisbon** type.

We can say without any doubt that it's mainly in Minho where, today, the **Cavaquinho** shows up as a typical popular musical instrument, deeply connected to the essential shapes of the characteristic music of this Province.

1. It means in Portuguese a small “*cavaco*”, a piece of firewood.

According to **Ernesto Vieira** on his *Dicionário Musical* [27], “Cavaquinho is the popular name given in Lisbon to the *Machete*”.

From **Prof. Manuel Morais** (born in Lisbon in 1943), in “A Madeira e a Música- Estudos”, “Os Instrumentos Populares de Corda Dedilhada na Madeira”, published in 2008, by Empresa Municipal “Funchal 500 Anos”, page 085, note #63, the oldest reference to the name cavaquinho is dated from 1822 in a book from the Italian geographer Adrien Balbi (1782-1848), “Essai statistique sur le royaume de Portugal et d'Algarve”, Paris, Vol II, pag 223, and also from Francisco Solano Constâncio (1777-1846), on his “Novo dicionário crítico e etymológico da língua portuguesa”, Paris 1863, page 240, “Cavaquinho, ..., musical instrument of four strings, smaller than *machinho*.”

This very Portuguese name may have been suggested by its aspect of unfinished woodwork given by the soundboard deprived of any kind of varnish or wax.

2. Nylon is not used;

3. Strongly glued; Through the holes of the bridge plate;

4. Portuguese archipelagos of Azores and Madeira;

5. Means “*from Minho*”, a Province in the northwest region of Portugal, placed between the rivers Douro and Minho;

Cavaquinho Minhoto: Anatomy and construction

The **Cavaquinho Minhoto** has a fretted fingerboard, which is levelled with the soundboard as in the “viola” [6], and twelve frets; the sound hole is frequently shaped as of a ray mouth [7], sometimes with downwards openings; but there are as well cavaquinhos with round sound holes. [8]

The dimensions of the instrument may slightly differ from case to case [9]: on a common sample, those dimensions are, 52 cm of total length, of which 12 are for the head, 17 for the neck and 23 for the body; The width of the wider belly is of 15 cm and of the less wide one, 11; The useful length of the strings is 33 cm. The depth of the body can vary around 5 cm for the majority of the cases, but we can frequently find cavaquinhos quite thin, with a more strident sound (which are called “*machinhos*”, at *Terras de Basto*, [10] and at other regions of Minho.

The woods vary as the quality of the instrument: The best soundboards are from pine of Flanders; more commonly, are made of linden or poplar; the sidewalls and bottom (back) are in linden, walnut or cherry. Usually both soundboard and bottom are from a single sheet of those woods, but, not rarely, cavaquinhos are made in such a way that the upper half of the soundboard is made in Blackwood [11]; the sidewalls and the bottom are also, frequently, of this wood. Neck, head (or pegbox) are made of alder; the head is usually cut with many indentations, following different and characteristic shapes. The edges and sound holes are always enliven with decorative friezes. The bridge plate is almost always in Blackwood [12]; already the “**Regimento para o ofício de violeiro**” [13] from **Guimarães**, by 1719, indicates they are like that for the “violas”.

The cavaquinhos Minhotos are built by an industry placed, in former times, mainly in Guimarães and Braga, and, today, in Porto and surrounding region of Braga. At Guimarães these instruments were built already in the XVII century, and the “Regimento” of 1719 refers, between the species fabricated at that time, “*machinhos*” of four and, other, of five strings.

6. Viola here means the “*viola braguesa*”, a traditional and very popular Portuguese guitar from the city of Braga, with five double strings. Its tuning is, from low to high pitch, C/dó-G/sol (low)-A/lá-C/ré-G/sol;
7. Ray fish mouth or “*boca de raia*” in Portuguese;
8. A unique characteristic from the Cavaquinho Minhoto is that the soundboard is left in raw wood, polished but without a finishing of varnish, like the rest of it. All the other types of Portuguese Cavaquinhos (Lisbon, Algarve, etc) and other cavaquinhos (Brazilian, Cabo Verde) have varnished soundboards. The reason for this can be the way how cavaquinho minhoto is played most of the time, the “*rasgado*” [17], what would rapidly scratch the soundboard destroying any varnish layer and turning it anaesthetic. By the same reason, are made cavaquinhos minhotos with the upper half of the soundboard in Blackwood, much more resistant to nails and plectrums’ attacks than the pine of Flanders [11].
9. Depending on the luthier (guitar constructor) and on his own drawings, as this is still an handcraft object mostly handmade;
10. *Terras de Basto* (Lands of Basto) is a wide region east of Braga, the centre-east of Minho province;
11. These cavaquinhos are simply called “*meio tampo*”, meaning “half-soundboarded”; The upper half of the soundboard in Blackwood is much more resistant to nails and plectrums’ attacks than the pine of Flanders;
12. The same for the saddle when is placed on the soundboard, separated of the bridge, where it stays still just by the pressure of the strings;
13. Original title: “Regimento dos Oficiais dos Ofícios em 1719”, “*Regulation for the Craftsmen of Crafts in 1719*”. This book established the maximum prices to be asked for handcrafted goods in the region of Guimarães, where the guitar makers (*violeiros*) had a dedicated chapter the “Regimento do ofício de violeiros”. There, the prices of *violas*, *machinhos* of five and four strings, etc, are fixed in detail, including per type of wood used on its fabrication, as well as the fees to be applied to those who did not respect the regulation.

The use

The Cavaquinho is one of the most favourite and popular instruments of the “*rusgas*” [14] from Minho, and, like these ones and the type of music specific to them, has a character exclusively and strongly playful and fun, with absolute exclusion from any ceremonial or grave occasions.

Not many decades ago, it was still rare a rural house in the villages of Guimarães where the cavaquinho was not present and was not played.

We can play it solo, as an harmonic instrument, for accompaniment of singing; more frequently, however, it is seen together with the viola, and many times also with other instruments — namely the bass guitar, the guitar, the fiddle, the banjo and the harmonica or accordion, plus the percussion ones, drum, triangles and “*reque-reques*” [15] — usual of those festivity groups.

On the Terras of Basto [10] and Amarante, there is a clear distinction between the “*rusga*’s” instrumental type, used for “*canas-verdes*” [16] and “*malhões*”, comprehending cavaquinho, bass guitar (*violão*), nowadays harmonicas and accordions, drum and triangle, and the instrumental type for the “*chula*” or “*vareira*”, which comprehends the fiddler (nowadays, on its place, some times the harmonica), “*violas*” [6] (one high, tuned as the portuguese guitar, and another bass), bass guitars (“*violões*”) muted on the 6th or 7th fret, drum and triangle, without cavaquinhos.

On this region we can see that, the Cavaquinho and the “*chula*” fiddler are used alternatively in the role of high pitch instrument, depending on the cases.

14. “*rusgas*” are “raids”, not from the police, but from folk groups playing while moving along the streets of the villages;
15. Instrument made of a piece of wood, with a variable shape and decoration, with notches cut along the edge and over which a rod is rubbed to produce a rhythmical sound;
16. The *canas-verdes*, *malhões*, *chula* and *vareira* are types of popular songs (and dances) of the NW region of Portugal;

How it is played

The Cavaquinho is usually played on strumming (as "rasgado" [17]), with the four smaller fingers of the right hand, or just using the thumb and the index [18], as harmonic instrument; however, a good player, with the smaller fingers of the left hand over the high pitch strings, is able to draw there the singing part that will outstand the strumming sound, while simultaneously the low pitch strings produce the accompaniment chords.

17. By moving your thumb and indicator or middle fingers forwards and backwards across the strings; "Rasgado" is also the term and one of the ways used to play the flamenco guitar, in Spanish "rasgueado";

18. Or thumb and middle finger, depending on the player;

Tunings

The Cavaquinho has many tunings, which, as it happens with the "viola" [6], vary as the region, the piece of music, and even the player; commonly, to play in a group, it is tuned after the "viola braguesa"; the string with higher pitch is stretched as high as possible. The Natural Tuning seems to be **D/ré-G/sol-B/si-D/ré** (from low to high pitch), but it is also used **G/sol-G/sol-B/si-D/ré** (or **A/lá-A/lá-C#/dó sharp-E/mi**, from low to high pitch).

Some players from Braga use however, other tunings besides these ones, specific of other forms, where the higher pitch string (D/ré) is, either the first (from below) or the third, as the tuning for the strumming (with the first from below being higher), corresponding to **G/sol-G/sol-B/si-D/ré**, above mentioned.

The tuning for the "malhão" and "vira", on the older «old tune» (**G/sol-D/ré-E/mi-A/lá**, also with the first from below being higher); In Barcelos they prefer **G/sol-C/dó-E/mi-A/lá** (tuning from «Maia»); other tunings for "malhão" and "vira", and still other with the third (from below) being higher; etc.

Today the Cavaquinho is used also for "fado"(as well as the other instruments from the "rusgas"), with the corresponding tuning, and also with the first string from below being the highest.

The origin

The origin of the Cavaquinho is not quite certain. According to **Gonçalo Sampaio** [19], who explains the primitive Hellenic modes survivals he finds on the music of Minho, under the light of hypothetical Greek influences (or Ligurian) over the primitive Calaicos of that Province, highlights, not more than that, the relation between the Cavaquinho, the four stringed instruments and the Hellenic system.

He is of the opinion that, with the viola, it came to Braga brought by the Biscayans [20], without further explanation to support this opinion; in fact there is in Spain a musical instrument similar to the Cavaquinho, from the family of the guitars --- the "*requinto*" --- with four strings, fretboard levelled with the soundboard and ten frets, which is tuned, from low to high pitch, **D/ré-A/lá-C#/dó sharp-E/mi**.

Jorge Dias [21] also seems to consider it coming from Spain, where we can find under identical terms, the *guitar*, *guitarrón* or *guitarrico*, like the italian *chitarrino*; he adds: «without being able to precise the introduction date, we have to recognise the the cavaquinho found in Minho a uncommon welcome, as a result of the predisposition of the people's musical temper to vivid and cheerful songs and to the quick dances...The Cavaquinho, as instrument of rhythm and harmony, with his vibrant and jumping tone, is, like few, adequate to accompanying "*viras*", "*chulas*", "*malhões*", "*canas-verdes*", "*verdegares*", "*prins*".»

On top of that, in Minho it is remarkable the taste for over high pitch female voices, sometimes even strident, which fit well together with the Cavaquinho's character of tones.

19. **Gonçalo** António da Silva Ferreira **Sampaio** (1865-1937), Portuguese botanist born in São Gens de Calvos, Póvoa de Lanhoso, Minho;

20. Biscainhos, Portuguese name for the people from Gulf of Biscay's region. In Braga there is a XVIII century palace, Palácio dos Biscainhos, and a Museum of Biscainhos;

21. In "O cavaquinho : estudo de difusão de um instrumento musical popular" /**Jorge Dias**.- Porto : Junta Distrital do Porto, [1967].- 23 p. : il.; 23 cm.-Sep. Revista de etnografia, nº 16/Música popular / Etnologia / Instrumentos musicais; António **Jorge Dias** (1907, 1973), Portuguese ethnologist and anthropologist born in Porto;

Other types of cavaquinhos: The family

Coimbra

The Minhoto type of Cavaquinho, fretboard levelled with the soundboard with twelve frets, was quite frequent in the region of Coimbra still at the end of XIX century, appearing, side by side with the “viola” [22] on the people’s hands and, namely at Saint John’s festivity, at the city’s street fires, together with the Portuguese Guitar, tambourine and triangles, and at the Academy serenades, with a lot of references, under the name of “*machinho*”, in **Macarronea** [23]. Some decades ago (middle of XX century) it was still visible at those occasions, but on rare cases already, and most of the times played by students from Minho. The **Cavaquinho from Coimbra**, was tuned, matching the “viola” of that region, **D/ré-G/sol-B/si-E/mi** (from low to high pitch); one sample out of the hands of **António dos Santos** – another old luthier well known in the city, at Rua Direita –, that can be found at the city’s Ethnographic Museum, has 50cm in total length, being 9.5 cm of head, 17 cm at the neck and 23.5 of body (with 23.6 from the nut to the bridge plate); The upper body is 10,5 cm wide, the lower body 13,5 cm; the waist 7,8 cm; the depth of the body is 3 cm up, and 3,4 cm down.

It seems though to be there a local species, which was extinguished like the “viola” [22], surpassed by the guitar. But, as a matter of fact, the sample of **António dos Santos**, from that time, proves not only its local use but also its local fabrication.

22. The “viola” here refers to the “viola toeira”, another popular musical instrument original from the region of Coimbra, rarely seen being played nowadays, with five sets of strings, the three higher being doubled and the two lower being tripled and which tuning is, from low to high pitch, **D/ré-G/sol-B/si-E/mi**;

23. The “Macarronea Latino-Portuguesa” is an old book of humoristic Latino-Portuguese poems, published in Lisbon at the Oficina Patriarcal de Francisco Luiz Ameno, in 1765;

Lisbon

The **Cavaquinho from Lisbon**, similar to the Minhoto on its global aspect, dimensions (slightly shorter the neck and longer the body which is slightly wider than in the Minhoto model; on the cavaquinho from the south, as the fretboard goes till the edge of the sound hole, it measures in length more 5cm than the northern ones) and stringing, it differentiates essentially from this one by the fretboard which does not level with the soundboard but outstands it, by the number of frets which are 17 and go till the sound hole; like in the bass guitar (*violão*) and on the Portuguese guitar and, in general terms in all the other stringed instruments from the banjolin family, the sound hole is always round.

The bridge is different from the one in cavaquinhos Minhotos, a thick straight plate with an horizontal groove in the middle, where the strings are tied up with a sliding knot after going, as on the other cavaquinho types, through the four holes defined by the soundboard and the grooves underneath the bridge plate.

Apparently it was there more a “tuna” instrument, of mainly bourgeois urban use which, in the middle of the XIX century, the teachers of dance used for their lessons, and that sometimes was played by the ladies; for this purpose it is played by plucking, with plectrum, as well as the banjolin type of instruments, usually making the “tremolo” over each note.

Algarve

In **Algarve**, the Cavaquinho is also known as a “tuna” instrument – “played solo or with mandolins, violas (bass guitar), guitars and other instruments” -, with use as in Lisbon, urban-popular or bourgeois, for students’ musical groups, serenades, etc.

Madeira

In the island of **Madeira** there is also the corresponding type of these stringed instruments under the names of *braguinha*, *braga*, *machete*, *machete from braga* or *cavaquinho*. The *braguinha* has the same dimensions and number of strings as the Cavaquinhos from Portugal’s mainland, same characteristic shape

of the Cavaquinho from Lisbon: fretboard over the soundboard, 17 frets, round sound hole; the stringing seems to be from gut, but the people usually replaces the first string by steel wire; its tuning is, from low to high pitch, **D/ré-G/sol-B/si-D/ré**.

Gonçalo Sampaio highlights the differentiation between the instruments from **Minho** and from **Madeira**, or *machete*, which he knows only as a soloist instrument and, as we saw already, with different characteristics from that one; **Carlos Santos** [24] considers it even as of insular invention, explaining its name, according to the author of the **Elucidário Madeirense**, [25] because the instrument was played by people which were wearing *bragas*, an old costume of the islander countryman. But, this opinion seems to ignore the instrument from the mainland, close to which, in spite of the referred differences, we can't ignore it approaches the shape. Besides, other authors from Madeira, like **Eduardo C. N. Pereira**, [26] although highlighting certain particularities of *braguinha*, as its tuning by the guitar, they definitely incline to the hypothesis of the Portugal's mainland origin of the Madeira's *braguinha* or *machete*. And we notice the appointed name of *machinho* in some lands of the **Lower Minho** and region of **Basto**, and already in the *Regimento de 1719* [13] referred to Guimarães.

In fact, the *braguinha* from **Madeira**, under its social context point of view, presents itself, on one hand, as an instrument of a clear popular character, suitable for the "villain", rhythmic and harmonic, for accompaniment, played strumming; on the other hand, an urban instrument, a city dweller and burgher, for the "tuna", melodic and singer – in fact the unique singing instrument from Madeira --, played plucked, with plectrum or, preferably, with the nail of the right hand thumb as a plectrum, alternating with some strummed chords made with the indicator, medium and ring fingers (which makes its execution quite difficult); and having as such been present in groups with representatives of the highest social levels from the city of **Funchal**, persons with musical knowledge, and at the service of an erudite type of repertoire, in more or less adequate arrangements.

Although morphologically identical, the rural *braguinha* is extremely rustic and poor, while the burgher one is usually of a well-cared manufacturing, made of luxury woods, with embroidered works, etc.

24. **Carlos Maria dos Santos** (1893-1955), a folklorist and musicologist born in Funchal, in his book "Tocares e Cantares da Ilha – Estudo do Folclore da Madeira", published in Funchal in 1937.

25. "Elucidário Madeirense" by Padre **Fernando Augusto da Silva** (1863-1949) and **Carlos Azevedo de Menezes** (1863-1928). Published in several volumes, in Funchal by Junta Geral do Distrito, 1921–1925

26. Padre **Eduardo Clemente Nunes Pereira** (1887, 1976), born in Câmara de Lobos, Madeira, in his book "*Ilhas de Zarco*", vol. II. Funchal, C.M.F., 1957, 2.^a ed.;

Azores

The *Dicionário Musical*, from **Ernesto Vieira** [27], and also the **Grove's Dictionary of Music** [28], refers to a **Cavaquinho** in **Azores**.

In fact, at the **Island of Pico**, we found an excellent informer, in spite of his high age -- **P. Joaquim Vieira da Rosa**, 90 years old in 1963 --, who, in his childhood, had used the Cavaquinho at Prainha do Norte, his birth village, at this island; and we have news of its existence at the neighbour **Island of Faial**, namely in the village of Flamengos, close to **Horta**.

In the **Island of Terceira** cavaquinhos are also made today, but on demand of the American people from Lages airport, or to people from **Terceira** living at North America, and labelled "ukulele".

27. **Ernesto Vieira** (1848-1915), a Portuguese musicologist. Author of "**Diccionario Musical**", published in Lisbon by Companhia Typographica Editora, 1st edition in 1890; *Machete*, page 321, 2^a ed. - Lisboa : Lambertini, in 1899;

28. A Dictionary of Music and Musicians in four volumes (1878, 1880, 1883, 1899) edited by Sir George Grove;

Brazil

The **Cavaquinho** is also in **Brazil** (where it enjoys a bigger popularity than in Portugal), being present in all regional groups of *choros*, *emboladas*, *bailes pastoris*, *sambas*, *ranchos*, *chulas*, *bumbas-meu-boi*, *cheganças de marujos*, *cateretês*, etc., together with the guitar, bass guitar, mandolin, clarinet, tambourine, fiddlers, flutes, ophiceildes, "reque-reques", "puita" [29], "canzá" [30] and others, depending on the cases,

with a popular character, but urban; it differs from the Cavaquinho Minhoto, having as the Lisbon and Madeira types, the fretboard over the soundboard, 17 frets, the sound hole always round, but smaller, as in general all the other dimensions; its tuning, after **Oneyda Alvarenga** [31], it is, like in Madeira (and like some Minhoto cases), the inverted chord of **G major/Sol major**; but **Câmara Cascudo** [32] informs that also there, several tunings are used.

The Brazilian authors, in general, **Oneyda Alvarenga**, **Mário de Andrade**, [33] **Renato Almeida**, [34] etc., unanimously consider the Brazilian Cavaquinho as having Portuguese origin, and **Câmara Cascudo** refers more specifically regarding this topic, the Madeira Island. [35]

In summary though, to the clearly popular musical instrument, from Minho, (and originally from Coimbra), played strumming, corresponds the old type of fretboard levelled with the soundboard and 12 frets; while to the instruments of a city dweller and burgher character, from Lisbon, Algarve and Madeira – though less attached to the tradition –, played plucking, correspond the type of fretboard over the soundboard, and 17 frets, which suggests having suffered influence from those more developed instruments, the bass guitar, the guitar, or the banjo.

The **Brazilian Cavaquinho**, although popular, is from this last type; but we saw that are the urban popular struments that mainly use it. However this rule is not general: the *braguinha* from **Madeira**, strongly popular, is, in spite of that, morphologically equal to the urban one.

29. Puita or Cuica, a Brazilian keg like popular musical instrument emitting a grunting sound;

30. Native musical instrument of African origin;

31. **Oneyda Paoliello de Alvarenga** (1911-1984), folklorist and musicologist born in Varginha, Brazil;

32. **Luís da Câmara Cascudo** (1898 -1986), Brazilian antropologist and folklorist, born in Natal, Brazil He wrote the “Dicionário do Folclore Brasileiro” 1st edition in 1952.

33. **Mário Raul de Moraes Andrade** (1893-1945), a writer folklorist and musicologist, an important Brazilian intellectual personality, born in São Paulo;

34. **Renato Monterisi de Almeida** (1895-1981), folklorist and musicologist born in Santo Antônio de Jesus, Brazil; Wrote the “História da Música Brasileira” (1922 1st ed.);

35. Also the “cavaquinho” in Brazil has had other names in the past, not in use nowadays. Formerly “machete” was the popular designation. “O Machete” is the title of one story written by **Machado de Assis** (1839, 1908), a renowned Brazilian writer born in Rio de Janeiro (see “Obra Completa, de Machado de Assis, vol. II, Nova Aguilar, Rio de Janeiro, 1994);

Hawaii

Finally, in **Hawaii Islands** there is an instrument equal to Cavaquinho – the “ukulele” –, which seems in fact to have been brought there by the Portuguese. Like the Portuguese Cavaquinho, the Hawaiian “**ukulele**” has four strings and the general form of a cavaquinho; some luthiers make it with the outstanding fretboard and 17 frets, like the general case of the stringed instruments of this family, and though, like the Cavaquinho of Lisbon, Madeira and Brazil; but there are “ukuleles” of English manufacturing of the Minhoto type, fretboard levelled with the soundboard and only 12 frets.

The ukulele natural tuning is, from low to high pitch, **G/sol-C/dó-E/mi-A/lá** (or **A/lá-D/ré-F#/fá sharp-B/si**, or still **D/ré-G/sol-B/si-E/mi**, as per some English manuals).

Carlos Santos and **Eduardo Pereira** refer to the dissemination of *braguinha* throughout the world due to tourism and cinema, and above all, exportation and emigration of islanders colons to **the Americas, North and South**, to Sandwich Islands, etc.; they even quote some of the first exporters which, in the beginning of this (20th) century, ship them, on demand, to **Barbados, Demerara** [36] and **Trinidad**.

In fact, the Cavaquinho, or *braguinha*, was introduced in **Hawaii** by an inhabitant of **Madeira** with the name **João Fernandes**, born in Madeira in 1854, and that sailed from his island to **Honolulu** on the sailboat «**Ravenscrag**» in a contingent of emigrants – 419 people, including children –, destination to the sugar cane plantations, in a voyage during four months and 22 days crossing **Cape Horn**. Among those emigrants, were travelling five men who are linked to the history of the introduction of the Cavaquinho in **Hawaii**: two good players, the already mentioned **João Fernandes** (who also played *rajão* (see below in this text) and “*viola*” [37]) and **José Luis Correia**; and three constructors, **Manuel Nunes**, **Augusto Dias**, and **José do Espírito Santo**.

The «**Ravenscrag**» arrived at **Honolulu** on the 23rd of August of 1879, and **João Fernandes** (according to a report to the magazine *Paradise of the Pacific*, from January of 1922), when he was landing, transported on his hand a *braguinha*, property of other emigrant also a passenger in «**Ravenscrag**», **João Soares da Silva**, who was not a *braguinha* player but who lent it to João Fernandes so that he could play and entertain the other passengers during the long journey to Hawaii.

The Hawaiians listening to João Fernandes playing the small instrument, were amazed, and immediately named it “ukulele”, which means “jumping flea” in Hawaiian, imitating the peculiar way it is played.

Later, after being installed in the island everybody asked João Fernandes to play, which he did with pleasure, on balls, parties, serenades, etc., having formed a musical group with **Augusto Dias** and **João Luis Correia**. This way he played to the **King Kalakaua**, on his birthday special event, to the **Queens Emma** and **Liliuokalani**, in the palace of **Ilakia** and in the summer **Pavilion of Iolani**, a centre of music and culture.

The “ukulele” became then extremely popular in **Honolulu**. **Manuel Nunes**, in the furniture factory he had opened at King Street, started to build these instruments which he did not know how to play, but which he passed to João Fernandes: the people joined at his workshop’s door to listen. Later on the Hawaiians discovered that the instrument was not difficult to play and started to buy the models built there, the price of which was of 5 dollars at that time.

This activity of **Manuel Nunes** is documented since 1884, but, according to the oral tradition of his family since then settled in **Honolulu**, it was initiated right after his arrival; at the same time, **Augusto Dias** also opened a shop for the fabrication and sale of “ukuleles”; the same did **José do Espírito Santo** in 1888. These three first luthiers started using the local woods of *kou* and *koa*, from which they made instruments of very good quality.

Manuel Nunes has left descendants in Hawaii and one of his grand-grand sons, Mr. **Leslie Nunes**, a great “ukulele” culture man, author of a small publication about its origins, and to whom we owe the information we are using here, believes his grand-grand father is the main responsible for its diffusion on these islands, and afterwards in the United States.

Nunes is also the family name of the most famous **Madeira Island** stringed instruments’ manufacturers, namely **Octaviano João Nunes** (who has offered one *braguinha* from his workshop to the **Austrian** imperatrix **Elisabeth**, currently in **Museum of Vienna**), as well as of his nephew **João Nunes “Diabinho”**. According to the information we received from a nephew of the latter Mr. **Bartolomeu de Abreu**, neither of those manufacturers followed their fellow countrymen in the referred emigration movement, nor were ever in Hawaii or in the United States. It remains to investigate if Mr. **Manuel Nunes**, who went to Hawaii and, as we could find, was also a cavaquinhos’ manufacturer, may belong to the family of the old **Nunes** luthiers of **Funchal**. [38]

36. Demerara is the old name of the former British Guiana, now one of three counties of Guyana;

37. Viola here is very probably referring to the “*viola de arame*” from Madeira;

38. Two comprehensive studies on the origins of the Hawaiian Ukulele and its relation with the “machete” or “braguinha” from Madeira are now available, included in the before mentioned book which **Manuel Morais** has coordinated, “A Madeira e a Música - Estudos” [1] : “A História das Origens do Ukulele Havaiano” by **John King** and **Jim Tranquada**, and “Da Madeira para o Hawaii: Um Contributo Musical” by **Susana Caldeira**;

Cabo Verde

There is also a **Cavaquinho** in **Cabo Verde** [39], with a bigger shape than the one of the instrument in Portugal, fretboard over the soundboard down to the sound hole and 16 frets, very linked to the local shapes of traditional music.

39. Country and archipelago in the Atlantic coast of Africa, a former Portuguese colony.

The epopee of Cavaquinho – A globe trotter

Can it be the Cavaquinho had a global expression in the whole country in former times and that was slowly extinguishing itself with time, just subsisting on disperse stains of major or minor importance relative to the

local musical forms? Or rather a species fixed mainly in Minho, from where it irradiated, directly or indirectly, to all or some of the places where it exists today – Coimbra, Lisbon, Algarve, Madeira, Azores, Cabo Verde and Brazil –, finding distinct acceptance from case to case?

Jorge Dias [21] seems to be inclined to this last generic hypothesis, but, more precisely, considering the diverse characters the instrument shows in Minho and in Algarve, his opinion is that possibly the instrument has arrived to Algarve brought by emigrants returning from Madeira or Brazil – to where it was certainly brought by people from Minho. And the same we may understand has occurred in what regards to the Lisbon type. This way, from the northern province of Minho, the cavaquinho may have spread to Madeira via emigrants from Minho. Away from its birth place, and so, less attached to its more tight tradition, it changes the shape under the influence of more advanced species of instruments there existent, with which step by step it has been associated; in Funchal, at the same time it preserves its popular character, it gains a new and higher *status*. And it is as such that it returns to Portugal's mainland, Algarve and Lisbon, on the hands of people from those areas, who only know it there under that aspect.

The same must have occurred in Brazil, although, in this case we also may have to admit there may have been direct relations between Madeira and that country.

Other members of the family

The Ukélélé or Kerontjong from Indonesia

Leme Berthe mentions also another type of this instrument, which occurs in **Indonesia** – the *ukélélé*, or *kerontjong* –, as accompaniment in the orchestra with the same name of *kerontjong*, side by side with a big guitar (*guitarre*), a cello and a bass, and an alto (*virole*). This orchestra corresponds to an Indonesian musical form that occurs in the beginning of the XVI century, after the contact with the Portuguese music, influenced, depending on the region, by the traditional styles like the gamelan.

The Rajão from Madeira and the Cavaco

In **Madeira**, besides the “braguinha”, there is another stringed instrument of the same family – the **rajão** – the same shape as its and the “viola”, but of an intermediate size – around 65 cm in length (from which 22 in the harmonic box) by 21 in width –, with 17 frets and, usually, five strings, sometimes in “wire” or the first and fourth (tone sting) in “wire” (N. ° 10 or 8, and 4 respectively), the second and third in gut or bass string – tuned, from low to high pitch, **D/ré-G/sol-C/dó(low)-E/mi-A/lá**, or **E/mi-A/lá-D/ré(low)-F#/Fá sharp-B/si**; as an accompaniment instrument, it is played like the braguinha, strummed “rasgado” [17], equally with strums from top to bottom, with the indicator, medium and ring fingers of the right hand, alternating with other strums, from bottom to top, with the thumb.

Carlos Santos [24] and **Eduardo Pereira** [26] consider this instrument of Madeira's invention, imitating the guitar in smaller size. Although we saw in the **Regimento dos Violeiros de Guimarães**, of 1719, [13] that there were «*machinhos*» of five strings built there (and others of four which correspond to the present ones), being so possible to admit that it may existed in Portugal's mainland, a bigger type which would correspond to the *cavaco* (mentioned by several authors). However it did not survive afterwards. This instrument after being carried to Madeira, could subsist there having modified its original type, in what regards to the neck's shape and number of frets, certainly due to influence of the guitar made popular in the beginning of the XIX century, and which carries those characteristics.

And this hypothesis seems to be strengthened furthermore with the tuning of **rajão**, similar to other Spanish instrument in the five strings guitar family – the *guitarro andaluz* –, assumed predecessor of the *cavaco*, or, in other words, that *machete* of five strings in the **Regimento of 1719**.

Besides that, the **Enciclopédia Universal Espasa** [40] refers to “a cavaco from the Portuguese, that is like a cavaquinho with bigger dimensions”; also the already mentioned Mr. **Leslie Nunes** tells us about another Hawaiian instrument of Portuguese origin – the *taro-patch* –, like a small guitar, with five strings (in certain cases of four), which, by its dimensions, would be related with the **rajão** from Madeira, and that was spread in those islands by the same people that brought in there the *braguinha* in the occasion reported before.

So, in summary, big “*machinhos*” of five strings were known in Portugal mainland in the XVIII century, which survived in Madeira and in Hawaii, but have disappeared in mainland (and which are not known in Brazil where there are big and small cavaquinhos).

40. Enciclopedia Espasa or Enciclopedia Espasa-Calpe (which original title was Enciclopedia Universal Ilustrada Europeo-americana), one Spanish encyclopaedia, published for the first time in 1908 by Editora Espasa Calpe S.A.

Another cavaquinho from Lisbon?

Finally, in certain cases, very rare indeed, namely in Lisbon, an instrument similar to cavaquinho in shape and in general dimensions, but with a higher number of strings (though with a wider fretboard), also takes the name of cavaquinho. However, it may be of a different lineage and nature of this one.