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Half in love with easeful death

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.....The sensibility that ran from Dowland to Joy Division crops up elsewhere as well: in Portuguese *fado*, in the *Sodade* of the Cape Verde islands; in Klezmer laments. Fifty years ago, the women patrons of Bucharest cafés were, reputedly, wild for falsetto Gypsy singers, and the greatest was Dona Dumitru Siminica. A new re-release captures him in full melancholy flow. Siminica's songs are paeans to misery. I was having too good a time, he wails, I didn't notice that she loved the other man.

These songs were recorded in the early 1960s in Romania, but have been scrubbed up with startling clarity by Marc Elsner. The remastering makes them sound fresh but, paradoxically, even older. You can easily imagine the adolescent Patrick Leigh Fermor, on the way to Constantinople, stopping off between the woods and the water to listen to this in a café. As with Dowland, Siminica's unhappiness is immensely cheering....