

Marcelo G.M. Magalhães

The Brazilian choro : its history and structure

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Marcelo G.M. Magalhães

Eastman School of Music
University of Rochester
Rochester

THE BRAZILIAN *CHORO*: ITS HISTORY AND STRUCTURE

Key words: *Brazilian Music, Choro*

1. The Genre *Choro*: the Development of the Basis of Popular Music from Brazil

1.1. The Roots of the Brazilian Music

Choro is a musical genre from Brazil that arose in the late 19th century in the city of Rio de Janeiro. The word *choro* means “a cry, a weep” in Portuguese. This name was associated in music with the expressiveness of its melodies and also indicated small instrumental groups that played popular music in the ballrooms, based on the European dances, which were extremely popular in the city of Rio in the 19th century¹. In order to understand the genre, its origins and its meaning within the Brazilian culture, it is necessary to have some knowledge of the history of Brazil, because the genre is intimately connected to it.

Since its discovery by the Portuguese in 1500 until the 19th century, Brazil was a rural colony basically formed by native Indians, Black slaves brought from Africa, and Europeans. Musically, these three groups were responsible for the cultural manifestations in the colony. Yet, the contribution to the Brazilian music from the Indians was very modest, if compared to a huge influence from the Africans, as stated below²:

It is important to point out that the symbiosis of African musical folklore with the dominating European cultural baggage was very slow and almost imperceptible in the first years of colonization. Everything that was related to the slaves was despised, and the progressive rise of the *Mulattoes* in the Brazilian society did not help the acceptance of the African population. Actually, it was the opposite; the *Mulattoes* in Brazil denied any relationship that could link them with their continent of origin. [...] The slaves and their descendents (who were getting whiter at each generation)

¹ A.Z. Almeida, *Verde e amarelo em preto e branco: as impressões do choro no piano brasileiro*, Campinas 1999, p. 22.

² All translations made by the author of this paper.

became the most significant players in the music field, since in that time the musician was either an employee or a servant. Moreover, the evident musicality of the Africans lead them to be the ideal interpreters, and, in due time, the creators of the music that was being made in Brazil³.

The excerpt above indicates that the Africans had a very important role in the development of the Brazilian music. They did not impose their culture, but rather influenced the music with their musicality. One of the reasons is that they came from multiple locations, such as Angola, Congo and Yoruba, each with their own musical traditions⁴. However, once they had contact with the European music, they imprinted their culture by adding and developing it, thus creating the Afro-Brazilian variations from the European roots⁵.

The European influence in Brazilian music occurred in two ways: primarily, with the arrival of the *Jesuits* in the beginning of the colonization with modal music, which was constituted by plainchants and Renaissance's music – since Europe did not have a tonal system at that time. This, combined with the tonal music from Europe (via Portugal) brought to Brazil later on, helped to shape and to structure the harmony and the melody of popular and folk-based music⁶.

The tonal music brought to Brazil from Portugal was in fact based on the music of Austria, Germany and Italy, since at the time Portugal had a very weak musical production as compared to these countries⁷. The Portuguese also brought the rhythmic patterns that were developed by African descendents, as well as a huge variety of instruments – which include the basic *Choro* instrumentation: the flute, the guitar and the *cavaquinho*⁸.

1.2. The Development of Brazilian Music

As stated above, Brazil was greatly influenced by the music produced in Europe, whether popular or “classical”. According to Carvalho⁹, the popular cultural manifestations related to music in the first half of the 19th century were divided into two groups: those originated in Europe and those originated in Africa.

The European influence was more intense when the Portuguese court shifted the center of the Portuguese empire from Lisbon to Rio de Janeiro, escaping from the inva-

³ V. Mariz, *História da música no Brasil*, Rio de Janeiro 1983, p. 34.

⁴ T.M.L. Cançado, *An Investigation of West African and Haitian Rhythms on the Development of Syncopation in Cuba Habanera, Brazilian Tango/Choro and American Ragtime (1791-1900)*, Winchester 1999.

⁵ A.Z. Almeida, *Verde e amarelo em preto...*, p. 14.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p.13.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p.14.

⁸ According to the *Michaelis Moderno Dicionário da Língua Portuguesa*, the word *Cavaquinho* means: little guitar with four strings. Available at: michaelis.uol.com.br/moderno/portugues/index.php?lingua=portugues-portugues&palavra=cavaquinho (15.05.2012).

⁹ J.A.L.L. Carvalho, *Os alicerces da folia: as linhas de baixo da passagem do Maxixe para o Samba*, Dissertação (Mestrado em Música) – Instituto de Artes, Universidade Estadual de Campinas 2006, p. 38.

sion of Napoleon. When the court arrived in Rio, they found a very small city, without any sanitation, “with the bare minimum of educational facilities, and without printing presses”, no libraries or museums¹⁰. As stated by Magaldi¹¹, in 1808 Rio colonial setting “hosted a small aristocracy of wealthy landowners served by a majority of Blacks, Mulattoes, slaves, and freedmen, and only a thin stratum of middle-class workers.” Nonetheless, with the arrival of the court in 1808, Rio de Janeiro became the capital of the Portuguese worldwide empire. Thus, throughout the 19th century, a series of changes were made in the city, including the opening of presses, libraries, theaters, improvements in illumination and pavement, and opening of schools, among other things. All these changes contributed to the development of music. In fact, the Portuguese court tried to replicate the European environment in Rio de Janeiro.

The urge of “European things” had its source in the lack of a conscience of unity in Brazil; the “Brazilianness” that the Nationalism movement would bring in the first half of the 20th century was at that time taking shape. Consequently, this availability of European “products” had an impact on the music of the colony as well.

Among the various examples of popular and folk music brought by immigrants, there are *Schottisches*, *Mazurkas*, *Waltzes*, *Habanera* and *Polkas*. According to Castanha¹², “these dances [...] have become so common as entertainment for the elite in Rio e, that they counted on the contribution of composers of the royal period, even though they were dedicated to opera and sacred music compositions”. This popularity created the perfect environment for the development of Brazilian musical genres.

Another important historical fact of this period is that the printed music that came from Europe was generally printed for piano – it includes opera reductions, arrangements of arias for voice and piano, piano variations and fantasias of popular operatic tunes, and also piano reductions of European ballroom dances. In fact, Rio de Janeiro at that time “was an extremely profitable market for piano dealers and manufactures”¹³. Thus, the importance of piano in the development of the Brazilian music is substantial, since it was the only instrument used to transmit and re-create European culture through music.

The profession of a musician was regarded as any other manual work. For this reason, the aristocracy working with bureaucratic, administrative, and intellectual functions despised music. In general, the music in Brazil was given, or performed by the Blacks and *Mestizos*. These men, who belonged to the low and middle classes, aimed to grow socially and for this reason, they incorporated to themselves the taste and the way of life of the upper classes. Nonetheless, they kept the traditions of their place of origin in the music due to their strong connections with the African culture, as well as with the European traditions brought by poor European immigrants¹⁴.

Therefore, since the relationship of the upper class and music was restricted to consumption, the Blacks and *Mestizos* were responsible for playing the music, giving their African perspective to it. Their contribution with it occurred in two different ways:

¹⁰ D.P. Appleby, *The music of Brazil*, Austin 1989, p. 29.

¹¹ C. Magaldi, *Music in Imperial Rio de Janeiro*, Oxford 2004, p. XVI.

¹² P. Castanha, *A Modinha e o Lundu nos séculos XVIII e XIX*, São Paulo: Instituto de Artes da Universidade Estadual de São Paulo, Handout from a course on the History of Art, p. 1.

¹³ C. Magaldi, *Music in Imperial Rio...*, p. 8.

¹⁴ J.A.L.L. Carvalho, *Os alicerces da folia...*, p. 38.

first, by following the traditions of Europe (playing the music for the aristocracy of Rio with very few musical liberties); and second, when having the chance to play for their own entertainment, they played and danced the European genres, approaching them with an African interpretation, which transformed the rhythms as time went by.

1.3. Specific Genres Related to *Choro*

1.3.1. *Modinha*

As explained by Almeida (1999), before the appearance of the European dances in Brazil, the genre *Modinha* was very popular not only in the colony, but also in Portugal. This word is a diminutive form of *Moda*, which is a generic term for song or melody. According to Appleby (1983)¹⁵, it is considered the only Brazilian popular form that does not have a folk origin.

According to Guerra-Peixe, from the *Modinhas* the *Chorões*¹⁶ inherited the *baixaria*, which means: the bass line working as a counterpart, so characteristic of the *Choro*¹⁷.

It was in Rio de Janeiro that the old *chorões* found the best field to play their *serenatas*¹⁸. Musical ensemble for excellence, the *Choro* was also characterized by that mestizo's originality that was introduced by the Brazilians in the *baixaria* of the guitar (counterpart in the bass part of the instrument), since the *Modinhas* until the *Polkas* and more recently in the *Choros* (musical genre)¹⁹.

There are numerous examples of *Modinhas* in the modern Brazilian literature, which include composers such as Heitor Villa-Lobos and Antônio Carlos Jobim. It is also important to mention that *Modinha* and the Waltz have many similarities in Brazil.

1.3.2. Polka

The genre *Polka* was very influential in the music of the 19th century. Originally from Bohemia, the lively rhythm in 2/4 was one of the rhythms played and danced in the ballrooms of the *carioca*²⁰ elite. One of the major factors that contributed to the development of the *Polka* is the historical moment in which it was introduced in Brazil by the immigrants, and its immediate acceptance by the aristocracy of Rio de Janeiro, as well as by the less wealthy. Tinhorão²¹ (1975) explains what it (the *Polka*) represented in the 19th century:

¹⁵ D.P. Appleby, *The music of Brazil...*, p. 29.

¹⁶ Name given to the musicians who played the *Choro*.

¹⁷ The musical characteristics of the *Choro* are explained in detail in the next chapter.

¹⁸ *Serenata* means a romantic musical/vocal performance that is held under one's windows.

¹⁹ C. Guerra-Peixe, *Variações sobre o maxixe*, „O Tempo” 1954. Available at: www.guerrapeixe.com/index2.html (25.05.2012).

²⁰ The word *carioca* is the name given to those who are born in the city of Rio de Janeiro.

²¹ J.A.L.L. Carvalho, *Os alicerces da folia...*, p. 42.

In fact, the *Polka* launched in the concert halls of the rich and in the living rooms of those who were more wealthy the rhythm 2/4 in *allegretto*, which transmitted to the dancers such a vivacity, very similar to the euphoric moment of the Brazilian economy, destined to reach its peak with the surplus of the commercial trade in 1860²².

In the same way, Almeida²³ affirms that this genre was an aristocratic dance, as stated by Tinhorão. Furthermore, he adds that it went to the street very fast, played by small instrumental groups, called *Choro* group, being incorporated later on at the carioca Carnival activities.

Pinto (1936), in his book *O Choro: reminiscências dos chorões antigos*, give us the following explanation about the *Polka*: “Polka is like Samba: a Brazilian tradition. It is the only dance that closures our costumes, the only one that carries the *Brazilian-ness*”²⁴.



Example 1: Basic notation of the accompaniment patterns of the European *Polka*

Although many authors claim that the *Polka* influenced *Choro*, we believe that this claim may be slightly inaccurate. If we analyze an original *Polka*, we see that there is a strong emphasis on both beats of the measure, thus relating it more with marching music than with *Choro*. However, it is undeniable that the same genre had a great acceptance in the city of Rio in the 19th century. Therefore, we strongly believe that the genre in Brazil must have been played in a different way than in Europe. An argument that supports this thesis was already cited on this article regarding the personal approaches given by the musicians to European music.

If we analyze the rhythmic pattern of *Polka*, we will see that it has nothing to do with the rhythmic pattern of *Choro*. Primarily, in *Polka* the phrase accent has similar accents on both beats, whereas in *Choro* the second beat is more accentuated than the first. Another difference concerns the projection of the melody: in *Polka* the melody is straight, whereas in *Choro*, the melody anticipates the harmony.

Although we can find the *Polka* notation pattern in some compositions of the 19th century, what we actually find is a representation of how this genre was understood at that period. One example can be found in the pieces written by Ernesto Nazareth (1863-1934), a great Brazilian *Choro* composer, who was “the most important figure of the first generation of nationalist composers”²⁵. In Nazareth’s piece the same kind of rhythmic notation is found on the left hand with only some embellishments.

²² Ibidem, p. 41.

²³ A.Z. Almeida, *Verde e amarelo em preto...*, p. 20.

²⁴ A.G. Pinto, *O Choro*, Rio de Janeiro 1936, p. 153, cited in: *Polca*, [in:] *Dicionário Cravo Albin*, available at: www.dicionariompb.com.br/polca/dados-artisticos (21.05.2012).

²⁵ D.P. Appleby, *The music of Brazil...*, p. 78.

Analyzing the Polka written by E. Nazareth *Apanhei-te Cavaquinho*²⁶ (as shown in example 3), we see that even though the rhythmic patterns of the left hand could be labeled as a Polka pattern, we see that the melody would not fit the concepts of an original European Polka. On the other hand, this same melody, in straight sixteenth notes, could easily fit the *Choro* expectations, since it has some of the *Choro* characteristics, like, for instance, the three-notes as a pick up gesture in the beginning of the phrases²⁷.

Ernesto Nazareth
1914

The musical score is presented in four systems, each with a grand staff. The left hand (Piano or Pno.) plays a rhythmic accompaniment consisting of eighth notes with accents, characteristic of a Polka. The right hand plays a melody in a Choro style, featuring a pick-up of three sixteenth notes at the beginning of phrases. The score includes dynamic markings such as 'p' (piano) and 'v' (accent), and articulation like 'acc' (accents) and 'trill'.

Example 2: *Apanhei-te Cavaquinho* uses a variation of rhythmic notation of the European *Polka* on the left hand, but has a *Choro* melody on the right hand

²⁶ The piece was published and probably composed in 1914, www.dicionariompb.com.br/ernesto-nazareth/dados-artisticos (22.05.2012).

²⁷ A full detailed explanation about the characteristics of *Choro* is discussed in the following section of this chapter.

1.3.3. *Habanera*

Finally, the last major genre that is part of the development of *Choro* is the *Habanera*. According to the Oxford Music Online, *Habanera* is: “A Cuban dance, possibly of African origin, that became popular in Spain. In slow 2/4 time, with the first quaver of the bar dotted, it was further developed in South American music as the quicker but similar Tango”²⁸.

Sandroni²⁹ explains that the rhythmic pattern internationally known as “*Habanera* rhythm” is actually wrong because it leads us to think that the rhythm was introduced in the music of Latin America by the *Habanera*. Actually, the *Habanera* is only one of the manifestations of this rhythm (example 3).



Example 3: *Habanera* rhythm

Next, Sandroni points out the equivalence of rhythmic patterns that are used to characterize different musical genres, such as the Cuban *Habanera*, the Argentinean *Tango*, and the Brazilian *Tango (Maxixe)*, which leads us to a relative equivalence of genres. These genres are also associated with extra-musical ideas, such as: race mixtures, Afro-American and popular influences.

Carpentier³⁰ wrote about the way the Black and White musicians play the music in relation to the music of Cuba and we believe that we could use his words to describe the music of Brazil:

Whites and Blacks play the same popular composers. But the Blacks, they add an accent, energy, something that is not written but has a lot of spices. [...] For their insinuation in the bass, [...] a series of displaced accents, a pleasant complication, the “way-of-making”, created a habit that became a tradition³¹.

Example 4 shows the way the original rhythm could be changed with the addition of a tie in a very clear way. The rhythmic figure of the “*Habanera* rhythm” showed in example 3. Furthermore, the addition of a time also implies a harmonic anticipation. In the same way, the Brazilian rhythmic pattern present in the second half of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century is also a variation of the “*Habanera* rhythm”. As shown in example 5:



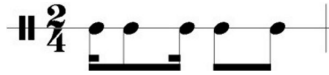
Example 4: The addition of a tie from the first to the second beat creates a syncope that is present in various Brazilian genres. This tie implies a harmonic anticipation

²⁸ Available at: www.oxfordmusiconline.com.ezp.lib.rochester.edu/subscriber/article/grove/music/12116?q=habanera&hbutton_search.x=0&hbutton_search.y=0&hbutton_search=search&source=omo_epm&source=omo_t237&source=omo_gmo&source=omo_t114&search=quick&pos=1&_start=1#firsthit (23.05.2012).

²⁹ C. Sandroni, *Rythme et Métissage dans la Musique Populaire Latino-américaine Imprimé au XIX^e siècle*, “Cahiers de Musique Traditionelles” 2000, vol. 13, p. 55.

³⁰ Ibidem, p. 57.

³¹ Ibidem.



Example 5: This pattern (*Lundu*) is extensively found in the Brazilian music from the second half of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century

This rhythmic pattern is also found in the music of the United States in the early jazz period. Example 6 is an extract of the piece *The Entertainer*, by Scott Joplin. In this example we cannot see a harmonic anticipation.



Example 6: Lack of harmonic anticipation in the *Ragtime*

1.3.4. *Lundu*

Lundu is an African genre that contributed to the development of *Choro*. Originally it is a dance of African origin, generally with a comic character, which was very popular in the 18th and 19th centuries. As explained by Vassberg³², the *Lundu* was transformed from a Black folk dance into an urban popular song, which helped the acceptability not only of the Black music, but also of the Blacks themselves.

Rhythmically, *Lundu* rhythm is characterized by the following pattern:



A good example of *Lundu* is the first movement of the *Sinfonia do Rio de Janeiro de São Sebastião*, by Francis Hime³³.

1.3.5. *Maxixe*

The fusion of the Brazilian *Polka* with the African syncopé presented in *Lundu* and *Habanera* gave birth to the *Maxixe*³⁴, which is very close to *Choro*³⁵. According to John Charles Chasteen:

³² D.E. Vassberg, *African Influences on the Music of Brazil*, “Luso-Brazilian Review” 1976, vol. 13, no. 1.

³³ F. Hime, *Sinfonia do Rio de Janeiro de São Sebastião*, Rio de Janeiro 2000.

³⁴ According to Tinhorão (1998 in: J.A.A.L. Carvalho, *Os alicerces da folia...*, p. 41): “It would be from the way these bands played, mainly the Polkas with influences of the *Lundu*, that it would shape the sound so unique for the dancers of the poor ballrooms – that seems to be called *Maxixe*”.

³⁵ *Coleção revista de música popular*. Rio de Janeiro: Funarte: Bem-Te-Vi Produções Literárias, 2006.

One could *maxixe* (verb) to various kinds of music, including *Polkas*, *Lundus*, Argentinean *Tango*, and ultimately, *Sambas*. *Maxixe* was not a specific rhythm. It was a way of moving one's body and also a way of syncopating and accenting the performance of the music. [...] *Maxixe* was not danced in the houses of "decent" people. In the dichotomous division of the social world into "house" and street", *Maxixe* belonged strictly to the street (which includes most public places)³⁶.

The genre *Maxixe* was not regarded as something artistic or refined, but rather associated with promiscuity and poverty. However, it develops and gets to theaters and salons. According to Ernesto Nazareth can be considered the one that made the *Maxixe* known, the dance genuinely from Brazil, which was free from the African-Spanic character of the *Habanera*.

Although Nazareth was a very important *Maxixe* composer, it is known that he classified many of his compositions as Brazilian *Tangos* due to the status of the word *Maxixe* in the *carioca* society of that time. His *Tangos* were a salon dance, whereas the *Maxixe* was danced in popular festivities. According to Appleby (1983, p. 81), "the most frequent rhythmic patterns in Nazareth's tangos relate to *Habanera*, but historically Nazareth's tangos relate to a popular Brazilian dance, the *Maxixe*." As it can be observed in examples 7 and 7a, both compositions have different ways of presenting the *Maxixe*. According to Almeida:

There is a difference between the *Tango Brasileiro* and *Maxixe*: the first has a slower beat and it is more elegant, mirroring the *Habanera*, presenting a more elaborate melody, and harmonic enrichment, which puts it close to concert halls. These characteristics made it a genre independent of the *Maxixe* and of the intentions that were much more musical than dancing³⁷.



Example 7: Extract from *Odeon* (1910) classified by Nazareth as Brazilian *Tango*



Example 7a: Extract from *Brejeiro* (1893), also classified by Nazareth as *Tango*

³⁶ J.C. Chasteen, *The Prehistory of Samba: Carnival Dancing in Rio de Janeiro 1840-1917*, "Journal of Latin American Studies" 1996, vol. 28, no. 1.

³⁷ A.Z. Almeida, *Verde e amarelo em preto...*, p. 61.

There is another important fact about Nazareth is his companionship with important figures of “classical” music who lived or were in Rio for a short period of time. According to Fernandes³⁸, he had classes with the composer³⁹ Charles Lucian Lambert, who may have influenced him about the music of Chopin. Another important personality that knew Nazareth was Heitor Villa-Lobos, who, later on, dedicated to him his Choro #1 for acoustic guitar. Also in the classical *milieu*, the French composer Darius Milhaud was deeply touched by the music of Nazareth, which he heard when visiting Rio⁴⁰.

All these genres were important to the formation of the *Choro* as a genre. Yet, despite the influences, *Choro* arose in Brazil as an autonomous genre, with its own characteristics, which include phrasing, inflections, rhythms, melodic shape, and harmonic projection. Joaquim Antonio da Silva Callado composed the piece *Flôr Amorosa* in 1877, which is considered to be the first *Choro* – it was meant to be a Polka⁴¹. Once again, this piece is a great example of how the label *Polka* is misled in the Brazilian music: the piece has no characteristics whatsoever of the European genre.

1.4. Musical Aspects of the *Choro*

Formally, the *Choro* is very often written in 2/4 and it is structured in such a way that we have a recurrent refrain intercalated by different sections (ABACA) with modulations. Almeida presented, in his Master’s dissertation, a very thorough work about the main musical aspects of the *Choro*. He divided the study into four distinct sections: Melody, Basses, Harmony and Rhythm.

The melody of the *Choro* is embellished with the following features: Appoggiatura and ornamental melodic enclosures, chromaticism, downwards arpeggios, long phrases, utilization of the melodic minor scale over the dominant, and melodic enhancement of the upbeat, according to Almeida⁴², Santos⁴³, and Carvalho⁴⁴. For the most part, the old *Choros* are very diatonic and very scalar and the phrases very often have a pick up gesture at the beginning, which is usually a group of three notes⁴⁵. An-

³⁸ D.C. Fernandes, *A inteligência da música popular: a “autenticidade” no Samba e no Choro*, Tese (Doutorado em Sociologia) – Faculdade de Filosofia. Letras e Ciências Humanas, Universidade de São Paulo 2010, p. 101.

³⁹ According to Appleby (1983), Lambert is French. However, according to the website: www.ernestonazareth.com.br/, he is from New Orleans.

⁴⁰ As stated by Milhaud: “The rhythms of this popular music intrigued and fascinated me. There was an imperceptible suspension in the syncopation, a languorous breath, a subtle pause, which seemed to me very difficult to capture. [...] One of the best composers of music of this kind, Nazareth, played the piano in the lobby of a movie theater on *Avenida Rio Branco*. His way of playing – fluent, indefinable and sad – helped me to better understand the Brazilian soul” (Appleby, 1983, p. 83).

⁴¹ A.Z. Almeida, *Verde e amarelo em preto...*, p. 63.

⁴² A.Z. Almeida, *Verde e amarelo em preto...*

⁴³ R. Santos, *Análises e considerações dos Choros para piano solo “Canhoto” e “Manhosamente” de Radamés Gnattali*, “Per Musi” 2002, vol. 3.

⁴⁴ J.A.L.L. Carvalho, *Os alicerces da folia...*

⁴⁵ Refer to examples 3 and 4.

other important feature of the melody is that it has inherited all the romanticism from the *Modinha*, as explained in the previous section. In a *Choro* group, the flute is the instrument responsible for the melody.

The bass has three functions: harmonic projection, melodic bass line, and bass pedal. The first function is the most common one of the bass. The bass is responsible for the conduction of the harmonies (very often, with inversions), with the accumulation of rhythm, as shown in example 7.

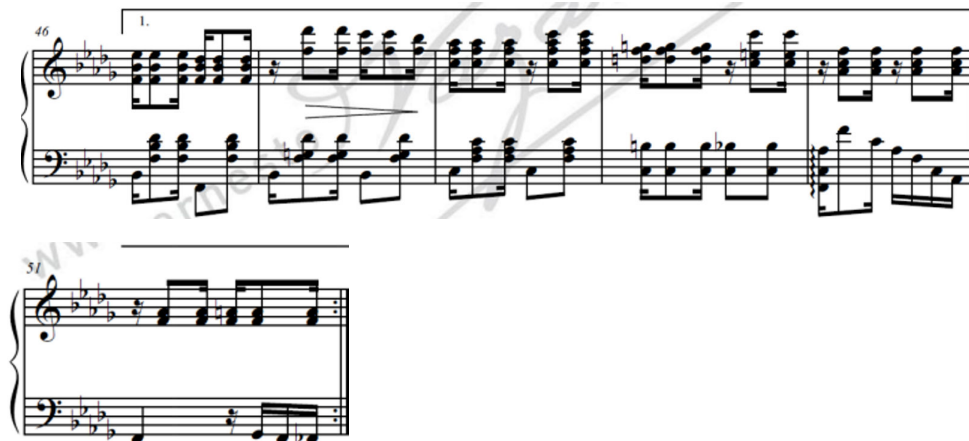
The most important feature of the bass in the genre *Choro* is when it is used as a melodic counterpart, which is referred as *Baixaria*. It can appear functioning as a counterpoint with the melody, or dialoguing with it. In a *Choro* group, the seven-



Example 8: Measures 9 and 10 of *Brejeiro* (Ernesto Nazareth). The bass is conducting the harmony and the rhythm



Example 9: Here it is possible to see the bass dialoguing with the melody in measures 2 and 4, with downward chordal arpeggios



Example 9a: Here it is possible to see the bass making a counter melody in relationship to the right hand in measures 50 and 51, with downward arpeggios and chromatic three pick up notes

string guitar is the one responsible for these features. Due to the orality of this music, it is not possible to find scores of how the lines of the bass were written. However, the piano can work as a reduction of the *Choro* group, which allows us to perceive the role of the bass inside the music, as shown in the two extracts in examples 9 and 9a, taken from *Bambino*, which was composed by Ernesto Nazareth (1912).

Also, the bass can be used as a pedal. This feature can be used in sections that function as introductions or transitions, or in wherever the harmony allows the bassist to include a pedal note. As shown in the example 10.



Example 10: This is an extract of the *Choro Lá em Casa* (2007) composed by this researcher. The bass could choose to play a dominant pedal over these harmonies

It is possible to find in the literature the bass functioning as the melody while the rhythmic patterns would be played on an instrumental group by the flute and *cavaquinho*. Example 11 is from *Odeon* (1910), composed by E. Nazareth for piano solo:



Example 11: Here we can see the bass functioning as the melody

As stated by Almeida (1999)⁴⁶, the intense and expressive bass motion has become one of the most prominent characteristics of the *Choro*. Its origin is related to the necessity of development of the simple harmonies of European dances, since *Choro* was being established as a musical genre in late 19th and early 20th centuries, thus moving away from the dancing quality.

Its harmony is characterized by the use of non-altered chords, which are very often inverted. Differently from modern jazz, the harmony of *Choro* is kept very simple. It begins to change after the influence of jazz in the Brazilian music in the first half of the 20th century.

One of the most important features of the rhythm is the syncopé as explained before. However, there is the “delay factor” in the performance of pauses. According to Appleby:

The choreographic fact and the minute differences in application of the “delay factor” give each dance its specific quality. Without the knowledge of these factors

⁴⁶ A.Z. Almeida, *Verde e amarelo em preto...*

a pianist attempting to perform the works of Nazareth is unable to capture the characteristic quality of the sound, which has been transmitted by aural tradition and escapes definition in the score⁴⁷.

According to César Albino and Sonia R.A. Lima⁴⁸, improvisation had a very important role in the formation of the *Choro*. Comparing *Choro* with *Ragtime*, it can be stated that both used a form with a recurrent refrain with modulations. Also, we can see the presence of syncopé in both genres, the same time signature (2/4), which is a common heritage of the *Polka*.

Thus far, both genres seem to be very similar; however, from 1930 on, jazz changed its path towards more improvisation, while *Choro* conceived improvisation more as variation on the melody. Both *Choro* and the New Orleans style were creating a style over the same resources, since both genres were influenced by African and European music, and both genres became autonomous from their predecessors. Yet, there is a basic difference as far as performance is concerned: while in New-Orleans style of Early Jazz we find a complex polyphonic net within the instruments, where the soloist share the “solo” with a very melodically active band supporting and dialoguing with him, in *Choro* this concept is much simpler, since the group is expected to support the soloist harmonically, with interventions of other instruments only as responses to the melody. This difference can be perceived by listening to one example of each genre: *Boogalusa Strut*⁴⁹, recorded by the Sam Morgan’s Jazz band in 1927, is a great example of the New Orleans polyphonic net whereas *Recordando*, composed by Pixinguinha, is a great example of the simpler polyphonic texture of the early *Choro*⁵⁰.

An important feature concerning improvisation in *Choro* is that it is part of the role of the bass instrument. As written by Albino and Lima:

So the most original small group of our country – the *Choro* – was formed by Callado. It was formed from its origin by one solo instrument, two acoustic guitars and one *cavaquinho*, in which only one of the components knew how to read written music; everybody else should be improvisers of the harmonic accompaniment⁵¹.

According to the excerpt above, improvisation is regarded as a promptitude to be able to make the accompaniment, rather than an ability to transform/develop a melody. Thus, the improvisation as it is known in jazz is restricted to the soloist. “The *chorão* does not commit himself with the improvisation, because the melody is rich enough, hence the spots that will be improvised are subjected to his own will”⁵². Therefore, we could affirm that in the early *Choro*, the bass part had the best opportunities to embellish the music and “conduct” the harmonic and rhythmic flow with real improvisational elements.

⁴⁷ D.P. Appleby, *The music of Brazil...*, p. 80.

⁴⁸ C. Albino, S.R.A.C. Lima, *O percurso histórico da improvisação no Ragtime e no Choro*, “Per Musi” 2011, no. 23, p. 77.

⁴⁹ Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJ1EMW18hk8 (23.07.2012).

⁵⁰ Available at: www.youtube.com/watch?v=B-ujO9Xrlw (23.07.2012).

⁵¹ C. Albino, S.R.A.C. Lima, *O percurso histórico da improvisação...*, p. 77.

⁵² SA, 2000, cited in: C. Albino, S.R.A.C. Lima, *O percurso histórico da improvisação...*

I believe that the role of improvisation in *Choro* could be regarded in two ways: the first concerns the time when the genre was still being developed in late 19th century and early 20th. In that period, improvisation as understood in modern jazz was not a part of this music. Variations over the melody seem a much more appropriate concept for the soloist, and the bass player was the one who created a more inventive playing.

The second way would be after the *Chorões* had contact with Jazz, which created a new standard of performance, when performers like Pixinguinha, Patápio Silva, and others began to include improvised sections into their music. As stated by Roschel:

These first musicians were gathered by chance and there were no rules concerning the number of instrumentalists. Due to this informality, various sorts of instrumentations today are seen in the *Choro* groups. The most important skill that a musician had to have was the ability to improvise⁵³.

Nowadays, the *Choro* is not restricted to the form established in the past, and it is completely open to sounds that were once foreign to its concepts, such as a mixture with other genres, uses of altered scales, modulations to distant keys, and others.

2. Conclusion

The genre *Choro* is an autonomous one that arose in the end of the 19th century, as a result of the mixture of cultures from Africa and Europe in the city of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Musically, it was influenced by the African *Lundu*, the European *Polka*, and the Luso-Brazilian *Modinha*. We perceive that the *Choro* acquired its autonomous status due to the fact that it is formed not only by the genres cited above, but also by local characteristics such as the language.

Differently from the Jazz, *Choro* did not have as its main feature the improvisation, despite the fact that both genres have almost the same origin. Rather, the melody, which is very lyrical and ornamented, and the bass line (*baixaria*), which works in counterpoint with the melody, are the main features of the genre.

In the 20th century, the genre *Choro* was not restricted to the street but it went to the theaters. Composers such as Heitor Villa-Lobos raised *Choro* to a new level by writing the most different kinds of pieces (Etudes, Fugues, etc) with the most diverse instrumental formation, always with the genre *Choro* as its foundation. Furthermore, with the advent of Jazz, the genre began to use improvisation and to expand the harmony and melody, always keeping the rhythmic background.

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Summary

THE BRAZILIAN CHORO: ITS HISTORY AND STRUCTURE

This article examines the Brazilian musical genre known as *Choro*. Having discussed the history of Brazil, the genre is subsequently discussed within a broader context of Brazilian popular music. Many important aspects of Brazilian music related to *Choro* are considered: (1) the influence of African culture and European music; (2) the role of classical composers like Heitor Villa-Lobos; and, (3) the influence of sacred music, opera and other popular musical types. There is also a detailed explanation of the connection between *Choro* and jazz, with special attention given to the structure of the music and the role of improvisation.

Key words: *Brazilian Music, Choro*