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150 Years of Choro – Where Are We Now?

ABSTRACT
According to a Brazilian saying, choro is the father of samba and the grandfather of bossa nova. Starting off as a way of interpreting European music with an African twist, it developed from a lower middle-class style played for fun and without monetary ambition to one of Brazil's most revered genres, played by all classes. Choro fell in and out of fashion various times: It was declared to be the embodiment of Brazilianness in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1970s, and almost vanished twice (in the 1950s and 1960s, and from the 1980s into the early 1990s), because it was considered old-fashioned. When exactly choro saw the light of day, is a matter of discussion. This will be described in the article. We come to the conclusion that choro can claim to be 150 years old and has now reached its most diverse stage so far. It boasts a fairly good infrastructure with institutes, schools, concerts, jam sessions, sheet music, method books, books, an online magazine, CDs, films, radio broadcasts, TV productions, websites, and diligent studies, both by instrumentalists and scholars. Furthermore, it is by now played on all inhabited continents.

KEYWORDS
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Bossa nova
Samba
Roda de choro
Conjuntos regionais

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Introduction

Sometimes a simple question from a fellow musician can have an enormous effect. After we had played "Bb Minor Bulgar" by Dave Tarras with a trio in a *klezmer* session, I remarked that the piece reminded me, in some respects, of *choro*. The flutist asked me why and what *choro* was, and I explained the similarities in the harmonies and the three-part structure. I felt that I could have given a more satisfying answer, and the day after the session started digging deeper into the definition of the genre, its history, and its present situation. Moreover, I learned dozens of pieces on various instruments, and started to frequent and host *choro* sessions. During my studies, some of my questions have been: What makes a *choro* piece a *choro* piece? Why are there differing answers as to when *choro* arose? How could *choro* develop from a very local to a national, and then an international phenomenon? I also noted that some claims in the literature had been repeated again and again, but urgently needed more precision (for instance the concept of *choro* as the first urban genre in Brazil), while other phenomena like the increasing number of strings on various *choro* instruments had gone more or less uncommented. Additionally, when I started writing this article, I was not aware of any satisfactory up-to-date overview of the *choro* infrastructure in Brazil today, nor of any publication that had ever tackled the question on which continents *choro* is played and whether it is played the world over by now. Some authors had mentioned *choro* outside Brazil, but these reports were various years old and rather incomplete. They only covered a fraction of the countries in which *choro* can now be found.

In order to write this article I not only considered about 80 publications ranging from articles and interviews to books and dissertations, but also consulted hundreds of web pages and contacted more than 60 musicians – some of them absolutely vital for the establishment of *choro* in particular continents, countries, or regions – to make sure I could include the very latest developments. 12 of these musicians filled in a questionaire I had sent them. This number seemed too small to present the results systematically, but the filled-in questionaires nevertheless contained a wealth of information concerning activities in various countries, performance practice, and motivation for playing *choro*.

Choro at a Glance

Choro, pronounced ['ʃoɾu] and sometimes spelled *chôro*, is a mainly instrumental Brazilian genre, which evolved in the 19th century – when and how exactly will be discussed in the next two sections. It combines European and African influences. In this

respect it is similar to *danzón* (Cuba), *beguine* (Martinique), tango (Argentina) and ragtime (USA). Table 1 shows how the genres are related. We omitted *danzón* and *beguine* for clarity's sake (they would fill boxes analogous to tango), but added two other important genres of Brazilian music to show their relationship with *choro*. We could possibly make the case for *choro* even stronger, since according to Sivuca, one of the most revered musicians in Brazil, the following holds: "For any and all Brazilian instrumental music, if it really is Brazilian in origin, we must consider *choro* as its basis" (Livingston-Isenhour and Garcia, 2005: 177).

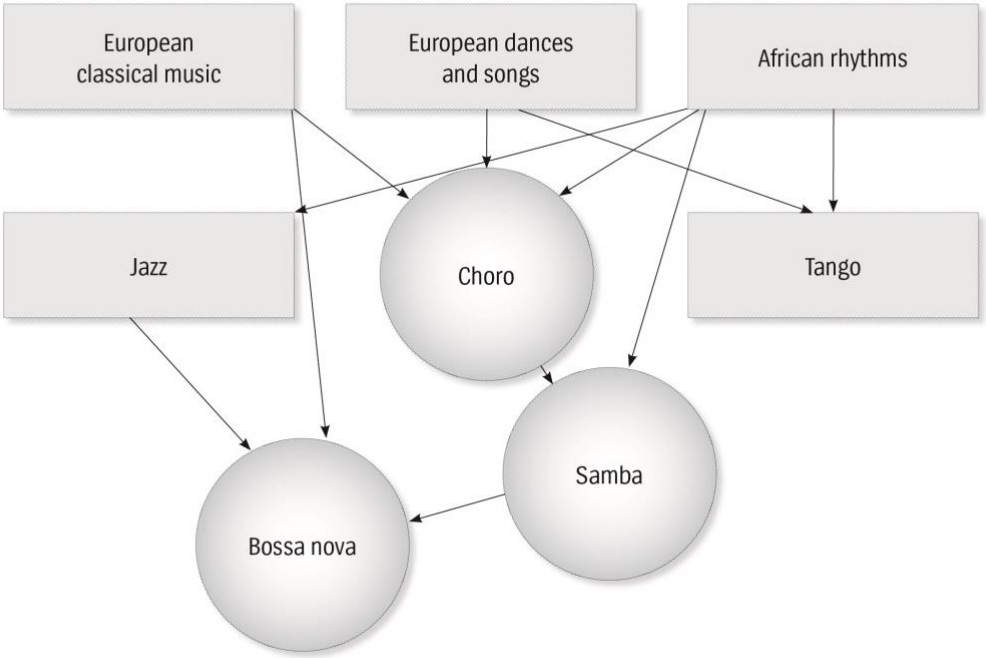

Table 1. *Choro* in context: its origins and its influence on other Brazilian genres of music together with some of the styles from the same sources

Those who are interested in what exactly the European and African influences on *choro* are, should refer to Livingston-Isenhour and Garcia (2005: 17 ff), Magalhães (2014), and Diniz (2003: 17-18). Likewise, we will not repeat the discussion on the etymology of the word *choro*. Suffice it to say, that Brazilians connect *choro* with the word *chorar* (to cry), because of the allegedly wailing sound of the first *choro* musicians. However, the most likely origin seems to be the word *choromeleiros*, designating musicians playing the *charamela*, a folk oboe. For further details see Livingston-Isenhour and Garcia (2005: 59 ff), Ramos (2015: 12), or Valente (2014: 27).

What is common to all incorporated styles, with the exception of the waltz, is that they are written in 2/4 signature. Only in the last few years other signatures have been introduced; interestingly, these are sometimes only kept up for one or just a few bars. It should also be noted, that notated *choros* only approximate the way the music is played, since the swing of African rhythms is not easy to transcribe by Western means.

If asked for the instrumentarium of *choro*, most people with a background of *choro* music would answer: flute (or alternatively, a clarinet or mandolin, which is *bandolim* in Portuguese), *cavaquinho* (relative of the ukulele, with four strings tuned to D_4 G_4 B_4 D_5), a guitar with six strings (*violão seis cordas*, V6C), a guitar with seven strings (*violão sete cordas*, V7C; like a V6C with a an additional C_2 or B_1 below the E_2) and a *pandeiro* (a tambourine like instrument, which looks like a *riqq*, but is played differently). This has certainly been the paradigm, particularly from the rise of the so-called *conjuntos regionais* onwards (sometimes only *conjuntos* or *regionais*; literally: regional bands; these were formed by and for radio companies). However, there is a huge amount of variation. Historically, *choro* started with a combination of flute, *cavaquinho* and one or two V6Cs – all but the flute were considered to be instruments of the lower classes. The piano, a distinctly upper-class instrument, has also had its place in *choro* almost from the beginning. In the late 19th century, military and other brass bands started to play *choro*. Heitor Villa-Lobos and other composers have integrated stylistic elements of *choro* into their classical compositions and have called some of their compositions *choros*. Also, there are a number of arrangements for solo guitar. Today, almost anything goes, particularly if it is also used in the framework of classical, jazz, or other Brazilian music.

Perhaps – at least in the context of bands and *rodas de choro* (literally: *choro* circle; jam sessions; more in the sections on the history and *choro* worldwide) – one should not think so much in terms of instruments, but more in terms of four functions: *choro* needs someone to play the melody and improvise (*solo*), then someone is supposed to play the chords (commonly called *centro*), someone is to provide the bass line, often in the form of counterpoint (*baixaria*; today usually the V7C, but in earlier times it could also be a V6C or the now-extinct ophicleide), and someone is needed for the rhythm section *(ritmo)*. Musicians are allowed to change between these functions within a piece, if their instrument allows for it.

The three most important stringed instruments of *choro* – the *cavaquinho*, the *bandolim,* and the guitar – have, over time, shown a tendency to pick up more strings, which is probably due to the fact that because of the early piano influences a lot of *choro* pieces stretch over considerably more than two octaves. Today you find *cavaquinhos* with an added A_3 or G_3 string, or even *cavaquinhos* with six strings tuned like a guitar, but one octave higher, so the *cavaquinho* player can easily play three octaves instead of two. The *bandolim* now sometimes has a fifth pair of strings, giving access to another fifth below (particularly since Hamilton de Holanda, the contemporary reference, when it comes to playing the *bandolim*). The seventh string of the guitar was added as early as the 1920s. It became common in the 1930s and might go back to a – differently tuned – Russian seven-string guitar the members of the famous *Os Oito Batutas* discovered in Paris in the early 1920s. There is a photo of them from that time in the collection of the Biblioteca National in Rio de Janeiro, in which guitarist China, brother of the famous flutist, sax player, and composer Pixinguinha, is sitting on the far left with a V7C in his hand.

Choro has a prototypical form which has been used almost exclusively until the middle of the 20th century: AABBACCA. In practice, however, particularly at *rodas,* with many people playing *solo*, repetitions are more frequent than the standard scheme suggests: a C part may be played four times in order to make sure everybody gets to *solo*; or the B part is played again repeatedly after the C part has already been played. Breaking up the AABBACCA scheme normally does not create chaos. Each part usually has a different pick-up preceding it, mostly three sixteenths, so musicians usually have a little time to understand what the *solista* (soloist; here referring to someone playing melodies or improvisations) is up to.

Apart from the three-part *choro*, there are two-part or even one-part *choros*. Two-part *choros* (AABB or ABA) occasionally go by the name of *chorinho* (little *choro*), a name which some people apply to any piece of *choro*. This is not received well by many *chorões* (*choro* musicians), who retort that since one does not call jazz *jazzinho* or *bossa nova* *bossinha nova*, one should refrain from using the diminutive for *choro*.

Dating Problems

When *choro* arose is a matter of debate. If we look at various sources, we find answers, which in part seem mutually exclusive. The dates given range from an imprecise "19th century" (Ramos, 2015: 8) via "mid 19th century" (Mair, 2000: 14), "around 1870"

(Vasconcelos, 1986: 193; Diniz, 2003: 9; Coelho and Koidin, 2005: 37), "in the end of the 1870s and the beginning of the 1880s" (Cabral, 2009: 10) to "late in the 19th century" (Magalhães, 2014: 79), which at times means the 1880s or 1890s, but can apparently also refer to the 1870s (compare Livingston-Isenhour and Garcia, 2005: 17 versus the chapter heading "1870 to 1920" on page 58 of the same book).

While the vague "19th century" has the advantage of being irrefutably correct, the range of almost 50 years in the other answers seems unsatisfying. It must, however, be considered that we only have limited knowledge of the habits of the lower middle class, which emerged in the 19th century in Brazil and developed *choro*. Furthermore, we have to bear in mind that the term *choro* has undergone a metamorphosis over the course of time. According to Alexandre Branco Weffort (2002: 6; as cited in Valente, 2014: 26), the term first designated a social event, then a musical practice, later a repertoire, after that, a way of interpreting pieces, and finally, a genre. One might add that the former meanings did not completely die out when new meanings arose and that *choro* can also refer to a group of musicians playing *choro* music. This is an old meaning of the word which is still understood by Brazilians today, as can be seen in band names like today's *Choro Livre*. Bearing this in mind, you can give different dates according to which sense of the word *choro* you refer to. Marilynn Mair, for instance, claims that *choro* as a performance style started in the mid-1800s, while the first *choro* compositions in print appeared in the 1870s (Mair, 2000: 13). You may then continue to say that the genre arose at the end of the 19th century, as do Livingston-Isenhour and Garcia (2005: 66), who point to the fact that the word *choro* was first used to designate a genre in 1889 with the publication of Chiquinha Gonzaga's composition *"Só no choro"* (Only in *Choro*).

In the context of this article, we date *choro* back to around 1870, not because this date is in between the mid 1800s and the late 19th century, but mainly because Joaquim Antônio Callado's influential band *Choro Carioca* was founded in 1870. It was the first *choro* band ever to carry *choro* in its name. Another reason is the fact that some pieces we now consider part of the *choro* repertoire were composed and/or published around that time. *"A flor amorosa"* (The Loving Flower) was composed in 1867 or 1868, but only published in 1877 or 1880 (Delarossa, 2019). *"Querida por todos"* (Cherished by Everybody) was published in 1869 as was *"A sedutora"* (The Seductress). One must consider that the word *choro* had a derogatory ring well into the 1920s, so people avoided the term. For a long time composers used other genre names, when they in fact

published *choros*. Ernesto Nazareth, for instance, did not even use the term *choro* once. He called a *maxixe "tango brasileiro"* and a *choro* "polka" (Livingston-Isenhour and Garcia, 2005: 76). So, we believe that by 1870, *choro* already had a firm place in Brazilian music, and it is safe to speak about 150 years of *choro* in 2020.

Before we look at the development of *choro*, another dating issue should be mentioned. It is generally claimed that *choro* was the first typically urban genre or the first popular genre of music in Brazil. It should be noted that *choro* was neither, if this is understood as "played on Brazilian soil". In this case, the medal should go to the *modinha* and the *lundu*, both of which were already played in Brazil in the 18th century. If, on the other hand, we talk about "developed in Brazil" or about Brazil as an independent state (i.e. Brazil after 1822), the claim is correct.

A Short History

If we want to know where *choro* stands now, we need to know where it has come from. Since the development of the genre and the lives of its greatest proponents have already been subject to a number of studies (see for instance Diniz, 2003; Livingston-Isenhour and Garcia, 2005; Mair, 2000; Valente, 2014; Vasconcelos, 1986), we can concentrate on the following aspects: performance settings, social class, politics, and times of particularly high or low interest in *choro*. Since all these aspects are intertwined, we will treat them together.

In 1808 Napoleon invaded Portugal, and King João VI fled to Brazil and made Rio de Janeiro the center of the Portuguese empire. In 1822 João returned to Portugal, and his son Dom Pedro declared Brazil's independence. Under both kings Rio and the arts thrived, and particularly after the independence the king needed people to administrate the country. In Rio, which had been the capital since 1763, a middle class arose, consisting of whites, blacks, and people of mixed-race. In 1845 England's Aberdeen Act prohibited Brazil from trading slaves, so many Europeans came to Brazil in order to work there. They brought their songs and dances with them, most notably the polka (slavery within Brazil was only abolished in 1888, by the way).

While in former times the aristocracy had mainly left making music to their servants, there was now a growing number of people in the cities, who had jobs and enough spare time to gather in the evenings or on weekends and make music. They mainly played

flute, guitar and *cavaquinho* and created this genre in between classical, European, and African, which we now call *choro*. The first *chorões* were not particularly interested in making money with their performances, because they had jobs. But they were often invited to play at parties, which they only did when the food promised to be good. While most of the *solistas* could read music, the majority of the accompanying musicians could not, and improvised chords over the melodies. For many *chorões* the favourite format was the *roda de choro*, an informal gathering, where *choro* would be played without a set list, without arrangements, and without using sheet music. *Rodas* were held in bars, music shops, private homes, and out in the open – for instance, in parks. They are the only format used throughout the history of *choro,* and by and large, still follow the rules the early masters set up – at least in Brazil.

From the 1890s onwards, *choro* was also played by brass bands, and it is mainly these you can hear in the first *choro* recordings (from 1902 onwards), since at that time brass music was easier to record than most other instruments. In 1922 Brazil celebrated the centenary of its declaration of independence with the *Semana de Arte* (Art Week), which "aided the acceptance of Brazilian popular music as a legitimate national expression and facilitated the rise of the professional *choro* ensemble, the *conjunto regional*" (Livingston-Isenhour, 2005: 82). This same year, the first radio broadcast went on air. From that time on, *choro* spread to the remotest corners of the country. During the 1930s and 1940s almost every radio station had its own *conjunto regional*, which functioned as an in-house orchestra and played various genres, particularly *choro*. The *conjuntos* often accompanied singers. For these, lyrics had to be written, mostly to *choros* which had been composed many years before. The genre also profited from the fact that the nationalist dictator Getúlio Vargas, who was president from 1930 to 1945 and again from 1950 to 1954, assumed power and took control of the media. He used *choro* "to represent his ideas of a unified Brazilian culture" (Livingston-Isenhour and Garcia 2005: 106). In the early 1950s, however, radio stations turned to prerecorded music, jazz and samba seemed more attractive, and Vargas' reign came to an end. *Choro* fell out of fashion. It survived mainly in *rodas*, while a new Brazilian style took the world by storm from the end of the 1950s onwards: bossa nova, directly influenced by samba, particularly the *samba canção* (samba song), and indirectly by *choro*. In stark contrast to *choro* and samba, it was associated with modernism, intellectualism and the (white) upper middle class.

After hibernating for about two decades, *choro* was brought back into the limelight by musicologists, journalists, critics, and musicians. The *choro* revival of the early 1970s was created and staged as an act of salvaging an almost extinct, but valuable, authentically Brazilian music from oblivion. *Choro* clubs were founded, and festivals were held. The state also played a huge part in the revival. General Ernesto Geisel, president from 1974 to 1979, had to fight an economic and social crisis. Various musicians in Brazil had a predilection for the American protest song, prominent in the USA from the 1960s onwards, and sang about the miserable situation of the people and of the country as a whole. In order to keep the masses quiet, Geisel supported the mainly instrumental genre of *choro*. Livingston-Isenhour and Garcia suggest that "the state intended to use the *choro* revival as an overt attempt to win over the conservative middle class that was beginning to side with the radicals in their demand for democracy" (2005: 149). After Geisel, the state withdrew its support, which had an imminent negative impact on *choro*: No more festivals were organized, and many *choro* clubs closed down. Since most of the *chorões* of the revival had only reproduced the sound of the *regionais* of the 1930s and 1940s, hardly any innovation had taken place. By the time the military rule came to an end in 1985, most music lovers turned to rock and roll, *axé*, *pagode*, *sertaneja* and funk. *Choro* again had to wait in the wings for almost 15 years, until it was rediscovered by music enthusiasts in the course of the world music boom and via the Internet.

Brazil Today

Even if *choro* musician and composer Danilo Brito (2019) regrets that, unlike in jazz, there are hardly any specific places dedicated to *choro,* and that *choro* musicians therefore have to play in concert halls, theaters, and bars, *choro* is now better off than at any other point in its history. There is a thriving scene, which developed from the late 1990s onwards. As V7C player Lucas Telles said in conversation with Paulo Henrique Silva (Silva, 2019) there are now more than 30 *rodas de choro* per week in Belo Horizonte alone – and this city has never been a *choro* hotspot. Unlike during the *choro* revival of the 1970s, when most *choro* musicians aimed at reproducing the music of the great masters of the past as accurately as they could, there are now three tendencies, and the traditional is only one of them (see the detailed discussion, including examples, in Valente, 2014: 99-143). Number two could be called erudite *choro*. It is close to chamber music, borrows from classical music, has tight arrangements, leaves little room for

improvisation, and is best heard in concert halls or other quiet places. The interest in classical music, particularly baroque music, is not new. In fact, classical music was one of the sources of *choro*. Early masters like Ernesto Nazareth had profound knowledge of classical music; Heitor Villa-Lobos regularly played in *rodas* and was heavily influenced by *choro* (Livingston–Isenhour 2005: 186-192). The exponents of the third and most prominent approach to *choro* today could be called transformers (*transformadores*, see Valente, 2014: 100). These are musicians who want to make *choro* more interesting by changing its structure, altering the beat, refraining from using pick-ups (in the sense of anacruses), playing improvisations influenced by other styles (mainly jazz), incorporating other genres (particularly music from the northeast of Brazil, funk, and rock), introducing new instruments like the mouth organ (*gaita*), or expanding the repertoire by playing Japanese folk songs or the music of the Beatles in *choro* style.

The past thirty years have seen the establishment of various institutes linked to *choro* music. The most important ones are the following three: the *Instituto Moreira Salles* (founded in São Paulo in 1992), which hosts the personal archive of Pixinguinha, most likely the most influential *choro* player ever, material by Ernesto Nazareth and the archive of Chiquinha Gonzaga; secondly, the *Instituto Casa do Choro* (House of *Choro*; founded in Rio de Janeiro 1999), which focuses on musical education, preservation, and the distribution of *choro* music; and thirdly, the *Instituto Jacob do Bandolim,* which is responsible for the archive of Jacob do Bandolim (founded in Rio de Janeiro in 2003), the *choro* musician who made the *bandolim* the most common *solo* instrument of *choro*. The *Instituto Cravo Albin* (founded in Rio de Janeiro in 1992) should also be mentioned: though it does not specialize solely in *choro*, but in Brazilian music in general. It does a lot to promote *choro*, for instance, via *Rádio Cravo Albin*.

In the same period various *choro* schools have been established. The first one was the *Escola Brasileira de Choro Raphael Rabello* (Brazilian *Choro* School Raphael Rabello), named after an important V7C player, in 1998. Interestingly, it did not open in Rio de Janeiro, where the genre originated and which is still seen as the center of *choro* activities, but in far away Brasília, which has been the capital of Brazil since 1960. This is due to the fact that Jacob do Bandolim spent six months there and instilled a strong interest in *choro* in the local musicians. Also, the *choro* club founded in Brasília in 1977 was one of the first to come into existence. The president of the school is Reco do Bandolim, leader of the band *Choro Livre* and president of Brasília's *choro* club. The most

important school in Rio is the *Escola Portátil de Música* (Portable Music School), founded in 2000, which has a branch in Florianópolis. It was initiated by the *Instituto Casa do Choro*. The school's policy is not only to teach *choro*, but to educate socially and emotionally as well – an aim which is also followed by the *Escola de Choro e Cidadania Luizinho 7 Cordas* (*Choro* School of Luizinho V7C) founded in Santos in 2011. Apart from these and various other schools, one can also study *choro* at some universities and conservatories, amongst them the *Conservatório de Tatuí* (teaching *choro* since 1993), and the Bituca: Universidade de Música Popular, opened in Barbacena, Minas Gerais in 2004. Additionally, there are workshops in many places throughout the country. Last, but not least, *choro* clubs still exist. They organise tuition, host concerts and *rodas*. In 2010 Juliana Bastos (cited after Valente 2014: 242) listed 17 such clubs in her M.A. dissertation, not including Fortaleza, Curitiba (listed, however, by Livingston-Isenhour and Garcia, 2005: 170) and the first *choro* club ever, which, according to Livingston-Isenhour and Garcia (2005: 138), was founded in Rio in 1975 and whose function is today served by the *Casa do Choro*.

From 1995 to 1997 there was a magazine, *Roda de Choro*, solely dedicated to the genre. It contained articles on *choro* history and practice and featured contributions from well known musicians like Mauricio Carrilho, Henrique Cazes, and Luciana Rabello. It sold about 800 copies and shut down for financial reasons. Now there is an online publication. Established by Leonor Pellicione Bianchi in 2014, it is hosted from Lumiar, Nova Friburgo, Rio de Janeiro, and is available for a yearly subscription price of 240 R$ (approximately 50 €). It features articles on *choro* players and bands, both within and outside of Brazil. According to Bianchi (email correspondence with the author) a fair number of subscribers are from abroad, and she has various correspondents outside Brazil. Bianchi's publishing company, *Flor Amorosa*, also publishes books on *choro*.

Sheet music is readily available; in fact, it has been available for a long time. But some of the first publications are not held in high esteem, since they contain a lot of mistakes. One such faulty book containing 84 *choros* has now been replaced by *O Melhor do Choro Brasileiro, Vol. 1-3* (The Best of Brazilian *Choro*, Vol. 1-3), edited by Irmãos Vitale in 1997 (vol. 1 and 2) and 2002 (vol. 3). These still contain some mistakes and a few pieces are printed in keys that differ from the ones generally used, but these editions have the advantage of being typeset in a font which is easy to sight-read. It is also not difficult to navigate the AABBCCA structure of the songs. The standard edition amongst *choro*

musicians (also outside Brazil) now is Songbook Choro 1-3, published by Lumiar in 2009 (Chediak; Sève; Souza, Rogério; Dininho) (vol. 1) and 2011 (Chediak; Sève; Souza, Rogério; Dininho) (vol. 2 and 3). This edition is more difficult to read because of the font. Finding the next part of the *choro* to be played can be difficult as well, but these editions contain some more interesting chord progressions, include written bass lines, and use the keys in which the pieces are normally played. Apart from that, there are method books like Mario Sève's *Vocabulário do Choro* (Vocabulary of *Choro*) (Sève, 1999) and Pedro Ramos's book on the basic concepts of *choro* (Ramos, 2015). When it comes to CD productions, the first label specializing in *choro* is *Acari Records*, founded by the musicians Mauricio Carrilho, Luciana Rabello and the producer João Carlos Carino in 1999. They have scanned the major public and private archives in Rio and have found more than 1300 composers (and over 8000 compositions) born before 1900 alone, and want to make some of them known to the general public through recordings and by publishing scores with historical information. They are also dedicated to contemporary *choro*.

Choro is still far less prominent on the radio and on TV chanels than Brazilian pop, rock, bossa nova, and samba, but it does have its place. Apart from the aforementioned programs on *Rádio Cravo Albin*, there is a series by *TV cultura* (TV Culture), broadcast on Sundays at 12 o'clock, called *Brasil toca choro* (Brazil Plays *Choro*). The episodes are dedicated to particular persons, styles or instruments, have a net length of about 50 minutes, and feature *choro* stars of the past and present, talking about and playing *choro*. They are readily available on YouTube. Apart from these programs, the most important documentary on the genre was made in 2005 by the Finnish director Mika Kaurismäki. It is called *Brasileirinho* (Little Brazilian; after the famous composition by Waldir Azevedo of the same name) and features clarinetist Paulo Mouro, V7C player Yamandú Costa, and the Trio Madeira, among others.

The Internet provides a lot of information on the history of *choro* and its protagonists, as well as a wealth of (sometimes illegally provided) sheet music. According to many *chorões*, the most significant website has for many years been the *Agenda do Samba & Choro* (www.samba-choro.com.br). However, it was under construction while we prepared this article. Before, it gave a good overview of *choro* activities, publications, and productions in Brazil and provided links to other *choro* websites. In addition to this

resource, many *choro* artists have their own websites, where they inform the public about concerts and CD releases.

In 2000 the *Dia Nacional do Choro* (National *Choro* Day) was introduced on the initiative of Hamilton de Holanda and his disciples from the *Escola de Choro de Raphael Rabello*. The date chosen was April 23th, for a long time thought to be Pixinguinha's birthday. In November 2016 it was discovered that Pixinguinha was actually born on May 4th 1897 (Wikipédia, 2019). The date of the National *Choro* Day, however, was not altered. In the state of São Paulo there is also the *Dia Estadual do Choro* (State Day of *Choro*) on June 28th. On this day the *choro* guitarist Garoto, who hailed from the state, was born.

Choro now has a firm place in Brazil as an important style of music. Considering the many schools, institutes, concerts, *rodas,* and the emerging academic interest in this genre throughout the country and beyond, it is unlikely that it will ever disappear again as completely as it has at various times. What is just as noteworthy is that now Brazilian professionals of all styles of music cherish this genre and know its role in the history of their music. Many of them include at least one or two *choros* in their repertoire because, as the well-known singer Edson Cordeiro remarked during a concert in the Brazilian embassy in Berlin on November 5th, 2019 before singing the *choro "Carinhoso",* (Affectionate) "there is no music which expresses the Brazilian soul as well as *choro*, and particularly this song by Pixinguinha."

Choro Worldwide

Although in the last two decades *choro* has come to the attention of many listeners and musicians worldwide through the world music boom and the Internet, particularly YouTube, this was not the first time, *choro* fell on the ears of foreigners. In 1921 *Os Oito Batutas* spent six month in Paris. After this they toured Argentina. During his reign, Getúlio Vargas also ordered the famous music program "A Hora do Brasil" ("Brasil's Hour") to be broadcast from Argentina. In the 1940s, Carmen Miranda became a big star in the USA, where she mainly sang sambas, but also *choros*. Of her musicians, particularly guitarist Garoto kept close contact with many jazz greats, among them Art Tatum and Duke Ellington. He showed them how to play *choro* and learned about jazz music from them. Definitely from the 1950s onwards, possibly earlier, *choro* artists were also sent abroad by the Brazilian Foreign Ministry, the Itamaraty. One such musician was *cavaquinho* player Waldir Azevedo, who toured South America and Europe extensively

and played in a BBC program, which was transmitted to 52 countries. Today, various *choro* artists like Reco do Bandolim, Yamandú Costa, Hamilton de Holanda, and *Choro das 3*, regularly play concerts outside of Brazil.

	Bands	Choro Clubs	Concerts	Festivals	Musicians	Publishers	Rodas	Schools	Workshops
Argentina		x	x		x		x		
Austria		x	x		x		x		x
Australia		x	x		x		x		
Belgium	x		x	x	x		x		
Brazil	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x	x
Canada	x	x	x		x		x		
Chile					x		x		
China					x				
Colombia					x				
Denmark			x		x		x		
Finland	x		x		x				
France	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
Germany	x		x		x		x		x
Israel	x		x		x		x		
Italy	x				x		x		x
Japan	x		x		x		x		x
Korea					x				
Mexico					x		x		
Mozambique			x						x
Netherlands	x	x	x	x	x		x	x	x
New Zealand		x	x		x		x		
Peru					x				
Portugal		x	x		x		x		x
Spain	x		x		x		x		
Sweden	x				x				
Switzerland	x		x		x		x		
Taiwan					x				
U. Kingdom	x		x		x		x		
United States	x	x	x	x	x	x	x		x
Uruguay					x		x		

Table 2. *Choro* worldwide: activities sorted by countries

Now music enthusiasts on all inhabited continents have discovered *choro*, as table 2, which lists the *choro* activities we came across while preparing this article, demonstrates. An X in a box denotes that we found at least one incidence in the respective field in the history of *choro*. We only list activities, which have also occured outside of Brazil. So TV programs on *choro* and specialized record companies are not mentioned, because we are not aware of the existence of any of them outside of Brazil.

There is little interest in *choro* in Africa, however, possibly because spicing up European songs and classical music with African rhythms seems somewhat pointless on a continent which still abounds with these kinds of rhythms. Hence, we only found a few activities in Mozambique: a concert and a workshop by Reco do Bandolim's *Choro Livre* in 2017, the celebration of the Day of *Choro* in 2018, and a note that Brazilian Cibele

Palopoli toured Mozambique with a *choro* group consisting of musicians from the University of São Paulo in 2010.

There is more interest in South and Central America, for instance in Argentina, which has a *choro* club in Buenos Aires with sessions on the first Saturday of each month, and musicians like Diego Jascalevich (now living in Germany), who plays *choro* on his *charango*, a stringed instrument the size of a *cavaquinho*. Uruguay, at the very least, had a *roda*. The last announcement we found was from the end of 2018. In Chile *rodas* are held in a bar in Santiago. In Colombia, musician Oriana Medina is very knowledgeable about *choro*, and in Mexico, we found evidence of a *roda* in Mérida in 2014. According to Naomi Katamoto (email correspondence with the author), there are also activities in Peru.

US mandolinist and *choro* expert Marilynn Mair told us in an email that whenever she wants to join a *roda*, she goes to Rio. This, however, does not mean good *rodas* do not exist in the USA: there are quite a few, particularly in the Bay Area. Brian Moran from the *Grupo Falso Baiano* wrote us that he teaches a monthly workshop combined with a *roda* at Ashkenaz in Berkeley. He goes on: "Other *rodas* are more informal and attract passionate amateurs such as one being organized monthly at Café Chiave. ... Others are attended in houses and private locations, and tend to be frequented by professional musicians. ... There are two regularly working *choro* groups, ours and *Berkeley Choro Ensemble*, as well as other talented *chorões* such as Rebecca Kleinmann, Marcelo Meira, a guitarist here for a year working on his PhD named Julio Lemos and others. This group will often combine with visiting Brazilian artists like Danilo Brito, Rogerio Souza, Almir Cortes and others." Also there is a *Berkeley Choro Festival,* started by Brian Rice and Jane Lenoir in 2013. The last one before handing in this paper was held in 2019. There are workshops and summer camps in San Francisco, Port Townsend, New York and other places, *choro* clubs in Los Angeles and Miami, and biweekly *rodas* in New York, hosted by the *Regional de New York*, a five-piece band dedicated to *choro*. Other groups include *Choro Louco*, *Choro de Ouro* and *Dois no Choro*, the last one founded as early as 1997. The US is also the homebase of *Choro Music*, a publishing company founded in 2006, which specializes in songbooks that come together with play-along CDs. They contain pieces by masters like Jacob do Bandolim, Ernesto Nazareth, Joaquim Callado, Pixinguinha, and Altamiro Carrilho. In Canada there is a *choro* club in Montréal, presenting concerts and

hosting *rodas*. Tio Chorinho from Toronto claim to be the only *choro* ensemble in Canada. They host a monthly *choro* club which in fact seems to be a *roda*.

Concerning Australia, we talked to Doug Vries, who is the leading musician in this part of the world, when it comes to the Brazilian repertoire. His involvement with *choro* goes back to the early 1980s. He has played and recorded with Mauricio Carrilho, Paulo Aragão and Yamandú Costa amongst others and has hosted a *roda* in Melbourne since 2001. Julian Scheffer wrote his dissertation about this *roda* in comparison to *rodas* in Rio (Scheffer, 2010). There are additional *rodas* in Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth. Sydney has had a *choro* club since 2017, organized by flutist Sara Muller and guitarist Douglas Aguiar, who plays *pandeiro* in the weekly *rodas* they hold in a café. The club has organized various events, including workshops. *Choro* is practised and taught at Melbourne University as chamber music option. In New Zealand, *choro* is played in Wellington and Christchurch.

In East Asia, the place to go for *choro* is Japan. The country is crazy about Brazilian music, and you can hear it in bars, restaurants, shopping centers, and elevators. Livingston-Isenhour and Garcia (2005: 51) mention Shigeharu Sasago, the founder of the Japanese band *Choro Club*, who came to Brazil from 1987 onwards to learn the repertoire. Just before that, Paulinho da Viola visited Japan. Now there are *rodas* in Okinawa, Fukuoka, Hiroshima, Osaka, Nagoya, Fujisawa, Tokyo, and Hokkaido, as Naomi Kumamoto wrote us in an email. She founded the *roda* in Osaka in 2001. This is held in the bookshop *Chove Chuva* (It's Raining; after a song by Jorge Ben Jor) and is the only one in Japan in which *chorões* play by heart, just as they do in Brazil. Kumamoto, who moved to Brazil and now teaches at the *Escola Portátil de Música*, goes back to Japan every year to give workshops. Sometimes she takes Brazilian *chorões* with her, like Mauricio Carrilho, Luciana Rabello or Celsinho Silva. She also published the first book of *choro* sheet music in Japan. Apart from Kumamoto and *Choro Club*, the Japanese trio *Ko-Ko-Ya* and the singer Yoshimi Katamaya deserve to be mentioned. According to Kumamoto there are *choro* activities in China, Korea and Taiwan. On the western side of Asia, you can hear *choro* in Tel Aviv, which has a *choro* club hosting *rodas*. Of the *choro* formations in Israel, the quartet *Chorolê* stands out, while when it comes to individual musicians, it is pianist and composer Roee Ben-Sira, as well as clarinetist Anat Cohen. The latter plays with a Brazilian trio called *Choro Aventuroso* (Adventurous Choro).

The *choro* scene in Europe, particularly in the western and central part of the continent, is so big by now, it could easily fill an article of its own. Indeed, Roee Ben-Sira is preparing a PhD thesis about *rodas* in Europe for the Hebrew University in Jerusalem entitled "Recrossing the Atlantic – The Case of Brazilian *Choro*". Enumerating activities in Europe is made difficult by the fact that sometimes terms are used in a non-standard way. For instance, in the United Kingdom, there is a *Clube do Choro Liverpool*, which is actually an ensemble, and a *Clube do Choro UK*, which is a participatory project combined with *rodas*. In France, on the other hand, there is a duo called *La Roda*, founded in 2007. Apart from these, there are *choro* clubs in Lisbon, Porto, Paris (including tuition), Lille, Toulouse (called *Casa do Choro*), Brussels, Amsterdam and Vienna, plus a club called *Chorinho* in Nuremberg, which promotes all kinds of Brazilian music. Most, if not all of these clubs host *rodas*. We found additional *rodas* in Bordeaux, Paris (several), Strasbourg, Bologna, Torino, Milan, Madrid, Barcelona, Lisbon, Kopenhagen, Zurich, The Hague, Nuremberg, Cologne, Dresden, Weimar, Kassel, Leipzig (possibly defunct after 2018), Saarbrücken (possibly a one-off in 2017), Stuttgart (probably defunct, definitely active between 2011 and 2013), Augsburg (called *Choro* Club), Münster (possibly a one-off on January 5th, 2020), Munich, Berlin, and Hamburg.

The way *rodas* are organized differs to some extent. During the monthly *rodas* in Hamburg, organized by Rémy Tabary and Stella Varveri (from France and Greece, respectively), and most often hosted in a café called *Brückenstern* or in *Café Olé* since 2016, all musicians sit around a table (see photo 1) and are allowed to play right from the start, with the audience sitting around other tables. The monthly *rodas* in Berlin, hosted since 2016 by the Brazilian *cavaquinho* player Eudinho Soares and until recently taking place in the bookshop *A Livraria* (The Bookshop), however, are divided into two parts: During the first part the *choro* ensemble of *Musikschule City West* (Music School City West; see photo 2) plays a set of 6 to 10 pieces to an audience sitting in rows facing the musicians, and during the second part anyone who wants to join in is welcome to come to the front and play. Sometimes the line-up becomes so big that musicians end up with their backs to the audience. Thirdly, there is the *grande roda* format: *chorões* who know each other play a concert like a *roda*, with no preconceived arrangements, but with a prearranged setlist and a fixed number of participants, as seen in the Brazilian Embassy in Berlin on November 26th, 2019.

Photo 1. *Roda de choro* in Hamburg with the *chorões* sitting around a table (photo: Vikas Narula)

Photo 2. *Roda de choro* in Berlin with the choro ensemble of *Musikschule City West* playing the first set in concert formation (photo: Christoph Kühn)

Among the European *choro* groups, France's *Bécots da Lappa*, *Maria Inês Guimarães Quartet*, *Pingo de Choro* and *Que isso*, Italy's *Choro da Rua*, Switzerland's *Odeon Chôro Quintett* and *Deu Choro*, Sweden's *Stockholm Choro Ensemble*, Finland's *Nordic Choro*, Britain's *Alvorada,* and Germany's *Tropical Samba Choro*, *Bavachoro*, *Choro dos Três,* and *Choro de Saideira* stand out. *Choro* festivals are held in Brussels, Rotterdam, Lille, and Paris, with Paris being the oldest. There is a branch of the *Escola Portátil de Música* in Rotterdam, founded by Marijn van der Linden in 2012 with 10 teachers and over 60 students. In Weimar, the *Institut für Musikwissenschaft* (Musicologist Institute) offers a seminar on *choro*. Workshops and masterclasses are held in various places all over Europe.

Choro outside Brazil is mainly played in countries, in which classical music is a well-established genre. Many people playing *choro* outside Brazil are not from Brazil. They generally have a solid knowledge of their respective instruments and of music theory (up to having a degree from a conservatory). They read or even sight-read music, while the most appreciated *chorões* are still those who have a big repertoire and know it by heart.

Most *chorões* today seem to like the genre because it is close to other genres they play (classical music, bossa nova etc.), and at the same time, musically challenging and connected with an above-average amount of social interaction with one's fellow musicians: You can have intense experiences of community, without these being too intimate. Additionally, *choro* somehow seems to lift everybody's spirits. As Saskia Dittgen, *pandeiro* player at the *rodas* in Berlin, and member of the ensemble of *Musikschule City West*, told us: "*Choro* macht glücklich" (*Choro* makes you happy).

Choro has, at various points in its history, been used as a propaganda tool, but it is fairly unpolitical right now. We have rarely come across political statements in *choro* circles in the last few years, except for protest against the politics of Brazil's current president, Jair Bolsonaro. The hosts of the *roda* in Hamburg, for instance, have posted a photo on Facebook, showing the musicians holding up banners against Bolsonaro's politics.

While Irish music lovers profit enormously from www.thesession.org, which shows places to go to for sessions and concerts worldwide, and provides scores that are easy to read and download, the *choro* scene has not yet established anything quite like this. As of now, there are various web pages, many Facebook pages of individual clubs, *rodas* and bands, a Facebook page *Choro Europa*, and mapadochoro.wordpress.com, each of which have started to compile parts of this type of information, but the *choro* community – like many special interest groups – still has not made full use of today's technical possibilities.

Conclusions

Choro offers an interesting case for those who want to study how a genre can turn from a very local to an international phenomenon, and from music played by members of a particular class to musicians of all classes. Many factors have contributed to this success, among them a quest for national identity, political ambitions, the individual freedom this genre offers to the musicians, the necessary high command of an instrument which can

proudly be presented when playing, the enormous amount of interaction during sessions, publications, and technical advancements, like the Internet. While we clarified some points about claims made about *choro*, and drew attention to some of the lesser-considered details, it remains to be seen how *choro* will surive the corona lock-downs and restrictions, which have been enforced in recent months in many countries. This will present another interesting aspect to study, since *choro* depends more on spontaneity and interaction – and therefore on the presence of other musicians– than many other musical genres.

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