

Chiquinha Gonzaga: Musician and Activist in the Brazilian Society at the 20th- Century Turn

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Introduction

This study is about a Brazilian pianist and composer, Chiquinha Gonzaga. Chiquinha is considered the first female professional musician in Brazil, as well as the first woman to conduct an orchestra. She also joined the anti-slavery and suffragist movements and was the first woman in Brazil to get a perpetual divorce. The main research question of this study is whether Chiquinha's acts and music contributed to significant changes in Brazilian society towards women's rights. I based the study on historical and biographical facts about Chiquinha's life, to examine the extent of her influence in the political and social Brazilian arenas of the late 1800s and beginnings of the 1900s. My theoretical framework includes works by musicologists and feminists including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan McClary, Ellen Koskoff, Ruth Solie, among others. Brazilian authors also contributed to this framework: Marisa Lira, Ricardo Cravo Albin, José Ramos Tinhorão, among others, provided biographical and critical data.

Chiquinha is a very famous musician in Brazil, but not in the rest of the world. This study tries to highlight her significance and clarify the relationship between Chiquinha's actions in Brazil, and the feminist movement that was developing and affecting women in other parts of the world. The connection seems clear, once one notes that the Movement for Women's vote in Brazil based their theory on the Seneca Falls Declaration, written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton in 1848.

Francisca Edwiges becomes Chica

Francisca Edwiges das Neves Gonzaga lived from 1847 to 1935. She was a very popular composer in her time and had a very polemical lifestyle. Chiquinha is not so well known out of Brazilian circles, so a little explanation about her life is necessary.

Chiquinha Gonzaga's father was a high-ranking military officer called José Basileu Neves Gonzaga and her mother was a free slave named Rosa, i.e., Chiquinha was of mixed race. Her father acknowledged her as a legitimate daughter, and to raise her as a *sinhazinha*.¹ That decision made a great difference in Chiquinha's life. As an illegitimate offspring of a white man and a black woman she would have little or no chances in life to receive an education. Slavery was still legal in Brazil at that time, and Chiquinha would have ended cooking and cleaning for a low (or no) wage. Luckily, she was raised among the bosses and educated to become a lady.

By the 1850s, Brazilian society looked up to France as the ultimate cultural role model, and ladies from good families should have an education that followed the French

¹ Francisca Edwiges das Neves Gonzaga. Rio de Janeiro, b. 10/17/1847, d. 02/28/1935. *Sinhazinha*: a lady boss, a female slave owner, raised to be a housewife and a society lady.

model. They should learn how to read, to write, to speak French, study some history and geography and, of course, it was mandatory for a lady to learn to play the piano. It didn't matter if the young lady liked it or not. Having a piano at home indicated wealth and status, and it was a young lady's duty to learn how to play it and to entertain the guests with music.² Chiquinha's family followed the same model:

When she was still in her parents' house, she had learned the piano as an *ornament*, at a time when studying Music was a part of ladies' education. The piano, for her family, was only a mark of social status. Her piano learning was offered to her as an embellishment to her 'sinhazinha' education. The fact that her father gave her a piano as a wedding gift shows that, until that moment, he didn't see any downsides to his daughter's playing. However, we know that his attitude changed later.³

It was not the intention of the high society families that their daughters became professional musicians, or to have any careers:

In both Civil Codes, matrimony was considered indissoluble. In the marital contract, the wife was considered 'highly incapable to perform certain acts and should be kept in a position of dependency and inferiority to her husband'. It was a man's role to represent the family, administer all the common goods, including those brought by the wife to the marriage, and to build a home for the couple. It was also prescribed that the wife couldn't work without her husband's permission and he was authorized by law to use force and masculine violence against any 'feminine excess'. It was a woman's premise to belong in the domestic sphere, as her husband should belong to the public sphere of life, and to be the provider for the Family.⁴

Chiquinha composed her first waltz when she was 11, but since she would play the piano in a domestic environment, it presented no problem. At the age of 16, she married Jacinto Ribeiro do Amaral, a businessman that also worked for the Navy. He was jealous of her piano-playing and their relationship was conflictive. She fled from her husband two years later, when he boarded on a ship to go fight in the Paraguayan War, then she joined her lover, João Batista de Carvalho in Rio de Janeiro. Chiquinha's

² Solie, Ruth. 'Girling' at the Parlor Piano (2004).

³Free translation from the Portuguese original. "Ainda na casa dos pais, havia aprendido piano como ornamento, numa época em que o estudo de música fazia parte da educação das moças de sua classe. O piano, para a sua família, era apenas marca de status social. O seu aprendizado fora-lhe oferecido como adorno para sua educação de sinhazinha. O fato de o pai ter-lhe dado um piano de presente de casamento mostra que, até aquele momento, ele não via nada de negativo no fato de a filha cultivar a prática musical." (Verzoni, M, 2011).

⁴ Free translation from the Portuguese original: "Em ambos os Códigos Civis, os laços matrimoniais eram tidos como indissolúveis. No contrato conjugal, a mulher era "considerada altamente incapaz para exercer certos atos e se mantinha em posição de dependência e inferioridade perante o marido". Ao homem cabia representar a família, administrar os bens comuns, inclusive os trazidos pela esposa, e fixar o domicílio do casal. Prescrevia-se, ainda, que a mulher não podia trabalhar sem a permissão do marido e autorizava-se que ele recorresse à força e violência masculina contra os "excessos femininos". Enfim, à mulher cabia a identidade doméstica; ao marido, a pública, para desempenhar o papel de provedor da família." (Galletti, Similli, 2011).

attitude shocked society.⁵ Divorce was not allowed by Brazilian law so her family cursed and abandoned her for leaving her husband. Even so, Chiquinha did not give up her beliefs. She relied on the abilities she learned from her 'sinhazinha' education to provide for herself and to survive. She made money teaching piano lessons and composing waltzes and other kinds of 'parlor music' for ladies. Francisca Edwiges became known as Chiquinha Gonzaga.⁶

Rio de Janeiro Belle Époque

By the time Chiquinha decided to rebel against marriage (1877), Rio de Janeiro was the Capital of Brazil. High society consumed a lot of European music and other popular genres such as waltzes, polkas, tangos and modinhas.⁷ Engineers were brought from Europe to reurbanize the city, creating a Parisian-like Rio de Janeiro. This period is called the Rio de Janeiro *Belle Époque*. The Municipal Theatre (inspired in the Paris Opera Garnier) and the Botanical Garden were built at that time.

In order to create the modern city, though, city officials decided to reallocate poor people. The government bought their land for cheap and pushed them to the hills, where the first *favela* appeared in 1865, in the Providence Hill (Morro da Providência).⁸ Former slaves, mixed-race people with low wage jobs, and low class white public officials (such as postmen and clerks, for example) constituted the favela. In this mixed environment, new musical genres began to develop, such as the maxixe, samba and choro. The Tias Bahianas (Bahiana Aunties), had great influence in the creation of those genres, because musicians had reunions in their homes to play.⁹ The Choro descended from a Portuguese tradition of playing (specially the mandolin), and was considered a more refined genre, so it was played in the living room. The Samba, with its African percussion, was kept in the yard. Even in mixed-race communities, there seemed to exist this preference for a musical genre that resembled European models.

Pianiera

Chiquinha moved to São Gonçalo, one of those poor neighborhoods. She met Joaquim Callado, a flutist and chorão, who invited her to play in his group.¹⁰ It made

⁵ Paraguayan War or Triple Alliance war: war for territory between Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay against Paraguay. <http://www.sohistoria.com.br/ef2/guerraparaguai/>, accessed September 15, 2015.

⁶ 'Chiquinha' is a diminutive from Francisca. It's a familiar way to call someone in Brazil, but it can also be seen as a derogatory word, as if 'Chiquinha' would mean less than 'Francisca', or a less respectful woman.

⁷ Musical genre created in Brazil in the 17th century and exported to Portugal, where it suffered changes and migrated to Brazil again. Relates to the Portuguese fado, with a very sentimental atmosphere. For quick reference, go to: <http://www.dicionariompb.com.br/>. Accessed September 07, 2015.

⁸ Favela: Poor community, usually with no assistance from the government at all.

⁹ Tias Bahianas: black ladies who came from the state of Bahia, were considered to be counselors for younger people, natural and magical healers, religious authorities and community leaders.

¹⁰ Joaquim Antonio da Silva Callado Jr. Rio de Janeiro, b. 07/11/1848, d. 03/20/1880. Usually called the Father of the Chorões, Callado was one of the creators of this urban musical genre. Callado is considered to be the composer of the first choro, 'Flor Amorosa (1867)'. The traditional 'Choro' group consisted of acoustic guitars, flute, mandolin and cavaquinho (a very tiny Brazilian guitar). It is traditionally a male dominated environment, even in our days. For quick reference, go to <http://www.dicionariompb.com.br/>. Accessed September 07, 2015.

Chorão: a musician who plays 'Choro'. The Choro originated from a more emotional way or style of playing the polkas, waltzes and modinhas. Later, this way of playing originated a new genre with particular characteristics. For quick reference, go to <http://www.dicionariompb.com.br/>. Accessed September 07, 2015.

her the first woman in Brazil to play in a Choro group. The Choro pianists were often called *Pianeiros* (as opposed to *pianists*), a word that implied that those musicians were not educated – they played by ear and were considered to be musical ‘illiterates’. Chiquinha accepted the *Pianeira* title and became famous and admired in musical circles. In 1877 she published the polka *Atraente*. It sold out, and from this moment on, the *Pianeira* began to ascend again in the social scale.

Chica Polca

At that time, operettas and musical theater were a great success in Rio de Janeiro, and Chiquinha started to write music for plays in 1885 (her first play was *Baile na Roça*, Ball in the Country). She always included popular genres, such as the *lundu*, *choro* and *tango brasileiro* in her plays.¹¹ High society began to watch her plays, to listen to that ‘exotic,’ ‘sensual’ music. She was called *Chica Polca* (portuguese for Polka), as to say that she only composed dance music, or lesser music.

At the turn of the 20th Century, the popular carnival, known as *entrudo*, was prohibited by the government, and substituted by the carnival parades. Chiquinha wrote the first carnival march to be recorded in Brazil (1913), *O Abre Alas*, as a homage to the Cordão Rosa de Ouro (Golden Rose Group).

In June 12, 1912, Chiquinha premiered *Forrobodó*, a play that would make her the most famous female brazilian composer of all times. *Forrobodó* (literally, scent of a free slave, but meaning a black people’s ball) was a comedy that told the story of a ball salon in the Cidade Nova, downtown Rio de Janeiro. The lyrics, written by Luís Peixoto and Carlos Bittencourt brought a lot of black people’s slang and the theme song, *Forrobodó* (Forrobodó de massadas), was a *maxixe*.

The maxixe was a musical dance genre, created in Rio de Janeiro as a mixture of the African *Batuque* and Portuguese music, such as the *modinha*.¹² Maxixe is the name of a very cheap vegetable in Brazil. The musical genre received the same name because it was considered cheap, low class, black people’s or poor people’s music.¹³ Bringing that music, language, and theme to the theatre caused a massive scandal. Gonzaga was arrested at the première, but *Forrobodó* had almost 1500 performances in Rio de Janeiro, and later it travelled to Europe. From that moment on, her music overcame the gossip: Chica Polca regained her status and became Chiquinha Gonzaga again.

¹¹ Lundu: brazilian musical genre, derived from african percussion genres. For quick reference go to: <http://www.dicionariompb.com.br/>. Accessed September 07, 2015.

¹¹ Tango brasileiro: another name for the genre ‘maxixe’. It did not originate as a defined genre, but as a name to ‘disguise’ the maxixe, considered to be low class, or ‘a black thing’. In order to sell the music, composers stopped calling their compositions ‘maxixe’ and labeled them as ‘tango brasileiro’, which resembled the argentinian tango and gave the music a more refined status. This is a perfect example of the brazilian way of dealing with difficulties: not directly fighting hypocrisy and prejudice, but going around it.

¹² Batuque: general name for percussion african music.

¹³ The fact is, the maxixe was so intimately bonded to its origins, that the simple fact of mentioning it related it to the kind of people that lived in the Cidade Nova neighborhood, people from black origins, generally chorões, bohemians, or men and women of foul reputation; For that reason, at the beginning the maxixe was danced in clandestine locations. Then, with the passing of time and after the genre became famous, it expanded to other localities and social classes. Free translation from the Portuguese original O fato é que o maxixe estava tão intimamente ligado às suas origens, que ao apenas mencioná-lo, era relacionado ao tipo de pessoas que viviam no Bairro da Cidade Nova, de origem negra, geralmente chorões, boêmios, ou ainda homens e mulheres de reputação duvidosa; por este motivo, no início, o maxixe era dançado em locais clandestinos. Depois, com o passar do tempo e do gênero ficar famoso, é que se expandiu para outras localidades e classe social (Marcílio, C. 2009).

O Abre Alas, que eu quero passar¹⁴

As a public figure, Chiquinha began to manifest her social conscience. She didn't own any slaves since she left her father's house. She engaged actively in the anti-slavery cause, as a member of the *Confederação Libertadora* (Freedom Confederation).¹⁵ In 1887 a decree of Princess Isabel abolished slavery in Brazil. Chiquinha also used her public figure to fight for other causes. She was a member of the Republican movement (in the Women's Feminine Party) where she contributed her money and influence. Brazil turned into a federative republic (following the example of the United States of America) in November 15, 1889.

The Suffrage Movement in the USA began in 1848, with the signing of the Seneca Falls Declaration, written by Elizabeth Cady Stanton. It was also called *Declaration of Sentiments*, and it was written in the same style as the *Declaration of Independence*. The Feminist Movement, though, began a little earlier, in 1840, when Stanton and Lucretia Mott were denied seats in an anti-slavery conference in England. The Declaration stated that women should have their rights secured by law, such as the right to own properties, money, to have a formal education and the opportunity to pursue a professional career. It also claimed the women's right to vote. For that reason, the signers of the Declaration are also known as 'the suffragettes'.

Initially, the suffragist movement had small and slow victories. The first woman to vote in the U.S. was Louisa Ann Swain, in 1869, 21 years after the release of the Declaration of Sentiments. The *Nineteenth Amendment*, that finally allowed women to vote across the country, was approved only in 1920. Still, the suffragists influenced other women around the world, including Brazil. The Proclamation of the Republic was also influenced by the new ideas created in the United States. Brazil increasingly imitated the American model, becoming a Confederate Republic – a central power, but with a relative political independence to each state in the federation.

Chiquinha fought for universal suffrage in Brazil. She was part of the suffrage movement during the 1910s, following the tendency that began with the American suffragists. If we examine Chiquinha's background, always fighting for survival, her music and her rights, it is logical to perceive why she was also fighting for the right to vote. She wanted to have an active political participation in Brazilian society. She didn't accept the social role that was imposed on her – the one of a married woman who stays at home, who is inferior to her husband and has no political rights. The suffrage movement won their victory in Brazil in 1932, when the president Getúlio Vargas signed the law that allowed women to vote. In 1934, Getúlio Vargas was elected presidente through indirect vote (only senators voted in this election). In 1935, state governors were elected through direct vote, so Chiquinha Gonzaga may have used her right to vote at least once before her death, that same year. It is important to note another resemblance between American and Brazilian suffragettes: they were all involved in the anti-slavery cause.

Chiquinha wrote more than 2000 short pieces, as well as the music for 77 theatrical plays. She was the first woman in Brazil to become a professional musician; the first one to write a carnival march, the first one to conduct an orchestra, and the first public figure to survive and support herself without a man, with the money she made from her compositions. She was involved in causes such as the anti-slavery movement, the suffragist movement and the creation of a public department that assured that

¹⁴ Make room, I'm passing through. The first verse of the *O Abre Alas* march.

¹⁵ Chiquinha used part of the money she got from selling her music to buy slaves' liberty. The João da Flauta slave and many others were made free with the help of Chiquinha's music.

composers would receive adequate compensation for their works. She played the piano until 1935, when she passed away at the age of 87.

Conclusion

Chiquinha Gonzaga fought for her life and her rights. Her music fought prejudice and patriarchy. She empowered herself through attitudes and through music, despite all the derogatory names society ascribed to her. Her acts were an example to women of her time. The Feminist Movement of the 1970s in Brazil (analogous to the Second Feminist Wave in the U.S.) turned Gonzaga into an icon. Their manifesto cites facts and dates of Chiquinha's deep social involvement:

Among the events and important dates, there are: the law about education for women (1827-1879), the foundation of the Republican Feminine Party (1910), the alteration of the suffrage law, giving women the right to vote (movement that had Bertha Lutz as its principal leader) and the consequent promulgation of the Electoral Code by Getúlio Vargas (1932), among others.¹⁶

For her involvement in all those feminist causes, Chiquinha is considered to be one of the first Brazilian Feminists. Although she indeed pursued feminist causes, it is not clear that she herself used this label.

Her music overcame prejudice and time. Presently, it is almost impossible to find a Brazilian who had never sung or danced to 'O Abre Alas' at least once in their lives. Her contribution to the recognition of African rhythms as an authentic component of Brazilian music is definitive. Chiquinha has also turned into a role model and a source to female Brazilian composers nowadays, and her work helps to empower these composers.

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¹⁶ Free translation from the Portuguese original: Entre os eventos e datas marcantes estão: a lei sobre educação para as mulheres (1827-1879), a fundação do Partido Republicano Feminino (1910), a alteração da lei eleitoral dando o direito de voto às mulheres (movimento que teve como principal articuladora Bertha Lutz) e consequente promulgação do Código Eleitoral por Getúlio Vargas (1932), entre outros.

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