



## The Orpheonic Singing in the Brazilian republican school and its European influences (1890 - 1931)<sup>1</sup>

O Canto Orfeônico na escola republicana brasileira e suas influências europeias  
(1890 – 1931)

El Canto Orpheonic en la escuela republicana brasileña y sus influencias europeas  
(1890 - 1931)

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### Abstract

This article aims to discuss the teaching of Orpheonic Singing in Brazilian legislation between 1890 and 1931 and its relation to the teaching of Orpheonic Singing that emerged in Europe in the 18th century. School legislations such as the educational reforms of Benjamin Constant (1890) and Francisco Campos (1931) are used as sources, as well as articles published by educators like Veríssimo de Souza (1907; 1910) and Chasteau (1899). Researches of authors such as Contier (1998), Souza (2000), Jardim (2003; 2006; 2009), and Gilioli (2008) are also used. The article is divided into two parts. The first part investigates the relationship between Brazilian and European Orpheonic practices. The second investigates the characteristics of Orpheonic Singing. The influence of the Orpheonic Singing practiced in Europe became definitive for Brazilian culture.

**Keywords:** History of education. Music education. Artistic education.

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## Resumo

Este artigo tem por objetivo discorrer sobre o ensino do Canto Orfeônico na legislação brasileira entre 1890 e 1931 e sua relação com o ensino de Canto Orfeônico surgido na Europa ainda no século XVIII. Utiliza-se como fontes, as legislações escolares como as reformas de ensino de Benjamin Constant (1890) e de Francisco Campos (1931), assim como alguns artigos publicados por educadores como Veríssimo de Souza (1907; 1910) e Chasteau (1899). Somam-se às fontes, pesquisas de autores como Contier (1998), Souza (2000), Jardim (2003; 2006; 2009) e Gilioli (2008). O artigo está dividido em duas partes. A primeira parte investiga as relações entre a prática orfeônica brasileira e a europeia. A segunda aborda as características do Canto Orfeônico. A influência do orfeonismo praticado na Europa tornou-se definitiva para a realidade brasileira.

**Palavras-chave:** História da educação. Educação musical. Arte educação.

## Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo discutir la enseñanza del Canto Orpheonic en el derecho brasileño entre 1890 y 1931 y su relación con la enseñanza del Canto Orpheonic surgido en Europa todavía en el siglo XVIII. Se utiliza como fuentes, la legislación escolar como Benjamin Constant reformas de la educación (1890) y Francisco Campos (1931), así como algunos artículos publicados por educadores como Veríssimo de Souza (1907; 1910) y Chasteau (1899). Añadido a las fuentes, los autores de la investigación como Contier (1998), Souza (2000), Jardim (2003; 2006; 2009) y Gilioli (2008). El artículo se divide en dos partes. La primera parte investiga la relación entre la práctica orfeónica brasileña y europea. El segundo aborda las características del Canto Orpheonic. La influencia del Canto Orpheonic practicado en Europa se convirtió en definitiva a la realidad brasileña.

**Palabras clave:** Historia de la educación. Educación musical. Educación artística.

## Introduction

The teaching of music, and Orpheonic Singing in particular, has been present in Brazilian educational legislation since the beginning of its republican period. However, musical development in the schools occurred mainly after the 1930s, when conductor, musician, and composer Heitor Villa-Lobos proposed a project to president Getúlio Vargas that involved teaching Orpheonic singing in Brazilian schools.

The purpose of this article is to discuss the teaching of singing in Brazilian law between 1890 and 1931 and its relationship to Orpheonic Singing in Europe. School legislation such as the Benjamin Constant Reformation (1890) and Francisco Campos Reformation (1931) are used as sources, as well as articles published by educators such as Veríssimo de Souza (1907; 1910) and Chasteau (1899). Researches of authors such as Contier (1998), Souza<sup>2</sup> (2000), Jardim (2003; 2006; 2009), and Gilioli (2008) are also used. The article is divided into two parts. The first part investigates the relationship between Brazilian and European Orpheonic practices. The second investigates the characteristics of Orpheonic Singing.

## The Orpheonic Singing at the Brazilian Republican School

It was in 1854 that the teaching of music was officially instituted in Brazilian public schools. By 1890, through Decree n.º 981 of 8/11/1890, known as Reform of Benjamin Constant, specific training was required for music teachers. The legislation allowed musicians who had attended conservatories to teach because there were no specific courses for the training of music teachers.

Benjamin Constant's Reform was formulated on the ideals of the newly-formed Republic. The term “modern teaching” first appeared in Brazilian educational legislation (JARDIM, 2003). The inclusion of music education at all levels of education has also emerged. The relationship between the republican period and music education was not a coincidence, because Brazil imported some ideas from the teaching of Orpheonic Singing, which was already well-developed in several European countries since the beginning of the 19th century. The idea of creating Orpheonic groups had originated in France during the French Revolution. According to Teo (2014, p.185):

Inspired by Rousseau - for which music, the language of passions, was a symbol of a utopian collective order established by collective emotion - the men of the French Revolution made hymns and collective songs as essential elements of republican celebrations.

Although the Canto Orfeônico has been present since the French revolution, the term Orphéon did not appear until 1831, when Louis Bocquillon-Wilhem created a choral group with no instrumental accompaniment in Paris. After its institutional appearance in the 1830s, Orpheonic Singing showed a continuous trend of expansion in France during the following decades. In the 1840s, didactic methods of singing gained importance in the educational field. After the 1851 coup d'état, and as a consequence of the beginning of Napoleon III's reign, there was an expansion of Orpheonic groups marked by a political-monumental character. The political and propagandistic character of music and singing had been common since the French Revolution (GILIOLI, 2008).

Orpheonic groups appeared under other names in almost all of Europe and the USA. In Germany, the first Liedertafel was created in Berlin in 1809 by a German correspondent of

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<sup>2</sup> For having some quotes referring to Veríssimo de Souza and others referring to Rosa Fátima de Souza, was used as a standard, to mark the quotes of Veríssimo de Souza as V. SOUZA, keeping those of Rosa Fátima de Souza as SOUZA.

French Orpheonic groups. In the year 1815, groups appeared in Leipzig and Frankfurt. In Spain, the first Orpheonic group formed by operators was created in 1851 by the Catalan musician José Anselmo Clavé (1824-1874). In England, the Glee was formed. In the United States, Apollo Clubs were created in the 1870s. There were Orpheonic groups in Prussia, Hungary, Portugal, and Canada, among others (GILIOLI, 2008).

After the Proclamation of the Republic, the Brazilian government sought to approach methods of other European republican countries. Therefore, music education was included in the country's first post-republic educational reform. However, although the reform provided for the teaching of music at all levels of education, the first investments in music education were related to elementary school. The teaching of music was defended, supported by the imported practice of collective singing. The nature of collective singing was considered to be a socializing and civilizing element by nature, because the result of the execution depended on the act of the collective that maintained a relationship with the republican nation's ideals. The inclusion of music in elementary school was found effective in the state of São Paulo after the promulgation of Decree n.º 27 of 12/3/1890 (the Caetano de Campos Reform), which made the state one of the pioneers in music education in Brazil:

The republican elementary school established rites, shows, celebrations. At no other time, the elementary school, in Brazil, had shown itself so frankly as an expression of a political regime. In fact, it started to celebrate the political liturgy of the Republic; in addition to publicizing republican action, it embodied its own symbols, values and moral and civic pedagogy. Parties, school exhibitions, children's battalions parades, exams and civic celebrations were special moments in the life of the school [...] (SOUZA, 1998, p. 241).

Inspired by national legislation and schools in São Paulo, a defense was found in Paraná for the inclusion of music education in elementary schools through a text published in 1907 in the magazine *The school* written by history professor Veríssimo de Souza. The educator emphasized that the inclusion of music would bring an advantage to elementary education: “[...] soften the hardships of the mental work to which children daily engage for five hours, an effort that weakens their energies, still embryonic” (V. SOUZA, 1907).

For Veríssimo de Souza, singing's playful character made a counterbalance to intellectual work. Veríssimo de Souza introduced the defense of music education as a form of “rest” in elementary schools in Paraná. This was not new for the time, as reported by Rosa Fátima de Souza in her study on the implementation of the São Paulo graduated elementary school from 1890 to 1910:

To maintain a balance between the activity and the attention that children must maintain, the exercises were generally interspersed with marches between benches, singing or gymnastics, which constitute real periods of recreation, in which the children rest their spirit, predisposing themselves to new exercises (SOUZA, 1998, p. 58).

The relationship of music education with the function of “rest of the spirit” shows how the school was thought of as an important vehicle of harmonic formation between the intellectual and the physical. However, there was a moral function related to the teaching of music. This is seen in the 1899 work, “Pedagogy Lessons” by French pedagogue Chasteau (1899, p.370):

from a moral point of view, music presents, for the youth, a powerful armor against the dangers of other pleasures, and this because of the pure and elevated feeling that it cultivates. Finally, from a disciplinary point of view, the singing that accompanies the marches, exercises, exits and entrances of the students, prevents disorder and turmoil [...] distracting them, making them happy, powerfully facilitating their your job. That is why even gymnastics teaching is usually accompanied by a rhythmic singing.

The similarity between Chasteau's and Veríssimo de Souza's reports on the issue of rhythmic singing, marches, and gymnastics is not a coincidence. European pedagogues became references. In both Chasteau's and Veríssimo de Souza's texts, music was said to offer spiritual uplift through recreational teaching, capable of distracting students and containing their energy even as it produced joy.

This relationship of singing as a way of controlling behavior also had its origin in the early 19th century on the European continent. According to Gilioli (2008), the famous saying "Those who sing scare their evils" originated from a summary of a text by French composer Halévy, in which he stated that singing was able to scare away evils—that is, behaviors considered inappropriate for society such as idleness, revolt against exploitation, perceived class division, disobedience, criticism of military forces, disbelief in God, and even illness. Halévy advised practicing collective amateur singing as a way of relieving the pressures of the daily social environment of factories, the Armed Forces and religious life (GILIOLI, 2008).

Moreover, it was believed that the practice of singing should be pleasant. For this reason, Veríssimo de Souza defended singing at school with this objective of assisting students' development in the classroom. Souza believed that was necessary for the elementary school to offer subjects that worked with play, in addition to those of a scientific nature:

I am for teaching music in elementary schools, not for the complete teaching of art, and even less for the terrible textbooks I know, that already in the 2nd lesson, the major and minor scale are taught, when an apprentice has no idea what a fa sharp is [...] taught in a recreational way in the intervals of other lessons, it is not only very easy to learn but also attractive. [...] Chants, mainly martial, should be used frequently, as static exercises and as an incentive to civism (V. SOUZA, 1910).

Veríssimo de Souza defended music teaching that focused on this playful aspect, although he did not recommend abandoning musical theory for improvisational approaches. This becomes clear when he criticizes the textbooks by affirming, "[...] that in the 2nd lesson the major and minor ways are taught, when an apprentice has no idea what a Fa sustein is" (V SOUZA, 1910). The criticisms go against the form and speed of the methods contained in textbooks, which did not take into account the age and reality of Brazilian students. The author defended methods appropriate to the reality of public schools. Veríssimo de Souza was familiar with the intuitive method<sup>3</sup> for teaching music developed in São Paulo, which in turn was based

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<sup>3</sup> The intuitive method was adopted in the state of São Paulo at the beginning of the 20th century, based on the systematization of the ideas of Pestalozzi and Fröebel. The adaptation of the method to music brought the idea that

on teaching theories imported from Europe and the United States. For example, according to Jardim (2003), the teaching method developed by João Gomes Junior at the beginning of the 20th century was closely related to the principles applied by Pestalozzi.

Republican ideals were perpetuated also in the position of Veríssimo de Souza, who combined music education with civic ideals, extolling martial songs that also assumed, in the author's opinion, an aesthetic function.

An interesting aspect to highlight is the fact that Veríssimo de Souza was a History teacher; he recognized the importance of music education beyond the musical field. The defense of music education was not exclusive to the area. French authors of the first Orpheonic songs included the following:

Béranger (who wrote the lyrics) and Gallin were not composers or music educators, but teachers of first letters and mathematics, respectively the two main written codes that nineteenth-century public instruction wanted to teach students ('read, write and count'). To this triad was added the 'reading the musical score', closely linked to the others. [...] Among the first french music educators, only Wilhem was a trained musician [...] (GILIOLI, 2008, p. 55).

The interest of teachers in different fields in music education was remarkable. Many of the composers of Orpheonic Singing were not professional musicians; the defense of this teaching was echoed in the defenders of "modern pedagogy." The inclusion of disciplines such as drawing, music, and physical education in Brazilian school curricula made these disciplines symbolize what was most modern in education. According to Kamens & Cha (1992), in Europe, arts education and physical education became part of the "modern curriculum" in 1870.

As a pioneer in Brazil, the state of São Paulo was responsible for publishing didactic works based on the intuitive method of music, beginning in the 20th century, as reported by Jardim (2003, p. 5):

The first attempts to adapt the teaching of music to the intuitive method were identified from 1902/1903 (Theoric and Practical Course of Elementary Music, by J. Gomes Jr. and Miguel Carneiro Jr.) and analyzed in publications, located during the research: Teaching music by the Methodo Analytico (1912, 1914, 1919, João Gomes Jr. e A. Gomes Cardim); Music classes (1921, João Gomes Jr.); Solfège classes (1928, João Gomes Jr.); Solfege hand classes (1929, João Gomes Jr.).

Many of these books were used in Brazilian normal schools. They contained methods considered adequate for the reality of the republican elementary school. Music teacher training took place specifically in the normal school. Therefore, more space for music education in the elementary school meant more space for the preparation of these teachers in the Escola Normal.

João Gomes Júnior and Fabiano Lozano carried out successful experiments with Orpheonic groups. Fabiano Lozano, for example, organized a choral group with the Escola

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singing, for being natural of the human, was the simplest to be taught. Choral singing came to be considered the most appropriate musical practice, due to its collective character, without individualizing teaching (JARDIM, 2003).

Normal de Piracicaba where he was a teacher, formed of four voices without instrumental accompaniment in 1915. He formed an Orpheon group composed of 48 singers. In the 1920s, he founded Orfeão Piracicabano, which performed at Teatro Municipal in 1928 and in Rio de Janeiro in 1929, enthusiastically reviewed by Mário de Andrade. Lázaro Rodrigues Lozano, professor at the Complementary and Normal School of Piracicaba and João Baptista Julião, collaborator of João Gomes Junior, were also dedicated to the theme (CONTIER, 1998).

Until 1930, music education was foreseen in the educational legislation, but it was difficult to expand at the national level. After the 1930s, Orpheonic Singing proved to be a powerful educational tool used by the government of Getúlio Vargas:

Music, in the form of collective singing, of a collective, civic and moralizing character, practiced in public schools in São Paulo, and already presenting a civic-nationalist content, proved to be a possible instrument for promoting social order for the purposes of political changes of the moment (JARDIM, 2009, p. 19).

In the early 1930s, Orpheonic Singing began to be included in federal laws and decrees for secondary education. After the educational reform of Francisco Campos in 1931, the federal government chaired by Getúlio Vargas sought to expand by and making the teaching of Orpheonic Singing mandatory for the secondary school. However, the most emblematic figure in the defense of the teaching of Orpheonic Singing between the 1930s and 1950s was Heitor Villa-Lobos. Despite his success as a musician, instrumentalist, and composer, the conductor maintained a strong interest in education. He was a decisive factor in the implementation and dissemination of Orpheonic Singing in Brazilian schools after the 1930s.

Since the 1920s, Villa-Lobos had the idea of creating national popular choirs. The teaching of elements of folklore, in the rescue of a national identity, was shown as a main concern. After the Modern Art Week (1922), the conductor Villa-Lobos obtained receptivity from the public and critics of São Paulo, which earned him a scholarship to study in France. When he returned to Brazil in 1930, the composer was faced with a musical reality very different from what he had experienced in Europe. If, on the one hand, he noticed a large audience for music, on the other, he realized that this audience was not interested in classical music. This led Villa-Lobos to present in writing to the São Paulo State Department of Education, a musical education plan similar to the one presented and ignored previously to Júlio Prestes, president of the state of São Paulo and candidate for the presidency of the Republic.

After Getúlio Vargas' support for the project, the teaching of Orpheonic Singing took effect in the reforms of Francisco Campos and Gustavo Capanema. Francisco Campos' Reform, through the Decree 19.890, of April 18, 1931 (BRAZIL, 1931), formalized the emphasis on the nationalist function of this teaching. The implemented Music and Singing program contained in its purposes an emphasis on the organization of Orpheonic groups in schools, “who participate in art recitals and school parties” and who interpret patriotic hymns and songs. In the program, there was an emphasis on the importance of using patriotic songs, which should “inspire the love and pride for Brazil, strong and peaceful, and inculcate the desire for energetic and constant action in favor of national aggrandizement” (BRASIL, 1931). It is noted, in this passage of the program, one of the stated purposes of teaching Orpheonic Singing at school: stimulating the national feeling in students.

Orpheonic Singing was extinguished in Brazil, in part, due to criticisms made during the 1940s and 1950s that associated this teaching with totalitarian governments, because the Orpheonic practice was adopted in Adolf Hitler's Nazi Germany and in Mussolini's fascist Italy. In Brazil, Orpheonic Singing served as a propaganda tool for the Getúlio Vargas government, especially during the Estado Novo period (1937-1945). Therefore, the LDB 4.024/1961 excluded Orpheonic Singing as a mandatory discipline, presenting music as one of the optional disciplines. With the promulgation of the Law 5692/1971, artistic disciplines are replaced by Artistic Education of a polyvalent nature, that should contemplate the different artistic languages: music, plastic arts, performing arts, and drawing.

### **Characteristics of Orpheonic Singing**

To deepen the interpretation of the characteristics of Canto Orfeônico, Gilioli (2008, p.41), noted:

Orphonic singing is characterized by being a musical practice performed by amateurs from different social sectors, performing a repertoire that is less technically difficult than that intended for professional musicians (hence the tradition of making arrangements and adaptations) and making regular public presentations of a civic and moral nature.

The Orpheonic Singing had its nomenclature inspired by Orpheus, mythological personage of the greeks. About this relationship, Gilioli (2008, p. 47) reports that:

While Orpheus was considered the character associated with the mythical origin of music, the orpheonic singing aimed to introduce its participants - especially children - into the musical language, which refers to the idea that orphonic singing should be the 'origin' and beginning of music in childhood, as opposed to informal learning. The French mentors of the choral movement imagined themselves responsible for cultivating music in broad sectors of society, the school being one of the most important institutions to carry out this 'civilizing' project (GILIOLI, 2008, 47).

Orpheus symbolized the union between poetry and music. This meant the intention of inserting the students in the classical written code of Western music. To correctly sing a melody, it would be necessary to simultaneously read the score, be tuned, correctly impose the voice and have some command of the language. For this reason, the teaching of singing and that of written language were linked. On the relationship between Orpheonic Singing and the myth of Orpheus, Gilioli (2008, p.49) adds that:

Legend also says that Orpheus was responsible for leading the Thracians from savagery to civilization. It is not surprising that orpheonic singing was understood as an instrument of 'civilization' of the people. The reference suggests that the orpheonic societies would have the function, metaphorically, of 'descending into hell', reaching the popular classes and through the practice of singing, to rescue them to an idealized state of social harmony.

In relation to the theoretical and methodological differences between the traditional choral and Orpheonic singing, what stands out is the musical deepening in each of the practices: “[...] the choral singing is of an erudite character, its components must be musicians, so the number of singers is more or less reduced; Orpheonic singing is popular in nature, its members do not need to know music, so it’s represented by immense masses of voices [...]” (VALLE, 1936, p. 164).

The Orpheonic Singing adjusts to the idea of crowds, with no need for its members to have deep knowledge of technique and musical theory. It was based on this premise, that Orpheonic Singing was adopted as a plausible possibility for the Brazilian schools. This idea was common in the teaching of music in Europe, Brazil, and Japan between the 1930s and 1950s. Freitas and Teitel, in 1941, in the textbook “Notions of music and orphonic singing” presented some questions about the term “Orpheonic” in the presentation of the work:

We can give ORPHEONIC GROUPS two names: Popular or Coral. They are popular when, formed by white voices, that is, without special study of singing, but that well controlled can, in perfect discipline, one of the most important characteristics of POPULAR ORPHEONIC GROUPS, to sing popular songs and patriotic hymns. - SCHOOL ORPHEONIC GROUPS belong to this group. They are choirs that when formed by more or less educated voices, who play classic music (ARTISTICS ORPHEONIC GROUPS) (FREITAS and TEITEL, 1941, p. 15).

This concern demonstrated an intention to bring Orpheonic groups to school a reality, because it would be impossible to perform certain exercises and musical techniques in such large and heterogeneous classes. The Orpheonic groups maintained the objective of establishing a connection between popular art and art considered “elevated.”

## **Final considerations**

After the Proclamation of the Republic, the Brazilian government approached the reality of other republican countries. With that, the teaching of music prospered, included in the first post-republic educational reform carried out in the country, the Benjamin Constant Reform. However, despite the reform adopting music teaching at all levels of education, the practice prospered in elementary schools and consequently in the Normal School. The practice of collective singing was defended, considered as a socializing and civilizing element in accordance with the ideals of the republican nation.

After Getúlio Vargas supported the project of Villa-Lobos in the early 1930s, the teaching of Canto Orfeônico came into force in the reforms of Francisco Campos and Gustavo Capanema. Francisco Campos' Reformation emphasized the nationalist function of this teaching, promoting the interpretation of hymns and patriotic songs in order to stimulate the national feeling in students.

In the post-war period, the Orpheonic Singing created in the middle of the republican movement received numerous criticisms due to its relationship with totalitarian governments such those as in Nazi Germany, in fascist Italy and also in Brazil, that during the Getulist government, used Canto Orfeônico as a propaganda tool, mainly during the Estado Novo period (1937-1945). In 1961, through of LDB 4.024/1961, Orpheonic Singing was excluded from the list of mandatory disciplines, and with the promulgation of Law 5692/1971, artistic education with a polyvalent character emerged, combining four different artistic languages (music, fine arts, performing arts and drawing) into a single discipline.

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