

Characterisation of the *Xote* and the *Baião* danced in the State of São Paulo

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Abstract: Ballroom dancing and *Forró* dancing are part of Brazilian culture, where the *Xote* and the *Baião* are part of *Forró* dancing. The purpose of this study was to draw a diagram of *Xote* and *Baião* steps as they are danced in the State of São Paulo, and to describe their rhythm. Pairs of college students were observed and filmed dancing the *Xote* and the *Baião* in order to carry out the analysis and description of the steps, both discursively and in diagrams. Two basic structures typically performed by dance partners were identified, e.g. the 'Basic Sideways Step' and the 'Basic Forward and Backward Step', and variation steps 'Open Step' and 'Changing Places and Turning'.

Keywords: Dancing. Folklore. Music. Culture. Diagram.

1 INTRODUCTION

The *Xote* and the *Baião* are the two most popular dance rhythms of *Forró* dancing in the State of São Paulo. Both date from the 1850's, when the *Schottisch* round dance was introduced to Brazilian rural regions from European

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ballrooms, and was called the *Xote* (GIFFONI, 2003; LELLIS, 1998b). The *Baião* originated in the nineteenth century in the northeastern region of Brazil; however, there is no precise information about how it was first started, and it only became popular in the 1940's with the music composed and played by Luís Gonzaga (MEDINA, 1998; SILVA, 2003). Despite having the same step framework, the *Xote* and the *Baião* are different in that each has their own musical genre. Both are binary but convey different feelings given their peculiar rhythm and pace.¹

The term '*Forró*' is controversial as it can refer to a party (JACINTO, 2001; LELLIS, 1998a; ROCHA, 2004; TRINDADE, 2004), a musical genre (GIFFONI, 2003; TRINDADE, 2004), a venue (ROCHA, 2004), etc. It is understood that the term *Forró* refers to a party where people dance to typical musical genres of the northeastern region of Brazil (QUADROS JR; VOLP, 1995), socialising and dancing in pairs, which is typical of Ballroom Dancing (BD) (SILVESTER, 1990; VOLP, 1994). These musical genres are the *Xote*, *Baião*, *Xaxado*, *Côco de Roda*, *Marcha de Roda*, to mention but a few (JACINTO, 2001; ROCHA, 2004).

In BD, the pairs synchronise their steps and figures to the sound of music, following social norms of touching each other and the other pairs that are dancing (VOLP, 1994). But there is yet the need for harmonious interaction between each individual of the pair to ensure a satisfactory performance. Simply put, BD is nothing more than walking with a few peculiar features. Following the rhythm is not enough, as they must strive to attain elegance, posture and suaveness.

The importance of studying the different forms of BD and its culture can be read in Rust (1969), where the author affirms that it is society that follows dancing, and not the other way around. At the moment when an actual change occurs (a new dance with a new posture that is

¹ For further details about musical genre, style and rhythm see Quadros Jr; Volp, 2005.

more daring, or the social acceptance of this new dance form) it is the dance that imposes on society its acceptance. Hence the concern to address Brazilian culture and its dance forms. It is necessary to characterise the dance forms that comprise the *Forró*, in this case the *Xote* e o the *Baião*, in order to understand their dynamics and how they exert influence and are influenced. It is worthy of understanding both the framework of the steps of the dances that comprise the *Forró* and the cultural movement by which it is generated and that it generates. According to Betti (1992), the relationship between culture, body and movement is inseparable, which makes it necessary to have a more comprehensive knowledge of the culture of body expression, and in the case of *Forró* dancing, by addressing *Xote* and *Baião* dancing.

The justification for this study is twofold: a) the need to have a better understanding of the Brazilian cultural phenomenon called *Forró*; and b) the diagramming and/or registering of dances, as this gap is yet to be filled.

The purpose of this study was to characterise the *Xote* and the *Baião* danced in the State of São Paulo by verifying the most popular steps and describing them rhythmically, and to make the cultural assessment of *Forró* dancing.

2 MATERIAL AND METHOD

2.1 Subjects

Three samples were studied. In sample one, 50 pairs were observed dancing the *Xote* and the *Baião* in college parties in the cities of Bauru, Rio Claro and São Carlos. These municipalities have large college communities that dance the

Forró, which seems to be a situation conducive to expanding the characterisation to the State of São Paulo. All subjects were ± 22 year-old college students at *Universidade Estadual Paulista* (UNESP), campi Bauru and Rio Claro, and at *Universidade Federal de São Carlos*, both in São Carlos. Students were frequent dancers of the *Xote* and the *Baião*, where five pairs were randomly chosen to be filmed, and later the basic steps of the dance were analysed and described. In sample two, six *Forró* college dancers from UNESP – Rio Claro were interviewed, where four were men and two were women, all 24 years old on average. All dance the *Xote* and the *Baião* frequently and are aficionados of the *Forró* culture. In sample three, at the beginning of the study, six Brazil wide renowned professional musicians were interviewed (musicians and music teachers that have already had professional experience with *Forró*, average 31 years old), where only two actually filled out the questionnaire that was sent to them. The Research Ethics Committee of UNESP – Rio Claro approved the research project and all subjects signed the Informed Consent Form.

2.2 Instrument

Data collection for sample one was composed of *in loco* observation, followed by filming in the Body Communication, Expression and Music Physical Education Department of UNESP – Rio Claro. An interview was held as part of sample two, at a venue chosen at the discretion of the interviewee. The interviewer taped the conversation that followed a brief script about *Forró*. For sample three, questions were written by the author to collect data and the questionnaire was sent to the subjects and answered by e-mail.

2.3 Materials

A JVC GR-AX800U camcorder was used for filming and the soundtrack was played using a AIWA NSX-S305

stereo system. The tape was analysed on a Sharp C-2010B TV and a Panasonic NV-SJ405 video player. The interviews were taped on a Panasonic RN-102 micro-recorder and transcribed using a PC. Questionnaires were sent to the subjects from the same computer.

2.4 Procedures

Collection for sample one involved the following stages: a) *in loco* observation; b) filming the selected pairs; and c) analysis of the footage and description of steps. Procedure for collecting sample two was: a) taping the interview; b) transcription of the interview; and c) answer analysis. The procedure for sample three was: a) sending the questionnaire via e-mail; and b) answer analysis.

2.5 Data Analysis

Footage analysis and description of steps were carried out by playing the tape for approximately two seconds, pausing and describing the observed steps. Interview analysis was carried out by reading the tape transcripts and identifying the answers with a common denominator in order to construct a single discourse. The purpose of the questionnaire analysis was similar to the latter, where similar contents were identified. All the analyses under the study were qualitative.

3 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings and discussion will be presented under Material and Methods as a whole, without distinction between samples one, two and three given the comprehensive interaction of results collected from the three samplings.

3.1 Diagrams of the Steps

The legend for the diagrams (Table 1) is presented below. Description refers to the Gent's steps; the Lady performs mirrored steps, as shown in the diagrams. It is important to notes that only step 4 of the Basic Sideways Step does not involve the transfer of weight.

	Pé Dama	E	Perna Esquerda
	Pé Cavalheiro	D	Perna Direita
	Posição Inicial	Esq	Direção Esquerda
		Dir	Direção Direita

Figure 1. Legend of the diagrams.

Lady's Foot	E Left Leg
Gent's Foot	D Right Leg
PI Initial Position	Esq Towards the Left
	Dir Towards the Right

The posture to dance the *Xote* and the *Baião* requires alternating the feet (see Figure 1) and that the body and hips of each dancer should be touching, especially at the waist. The hands have a lot of freedom. The Gent's Right Hand (GRH) preferably remains placed on the Lady's back. The Gent's Left Hand (GLH) can be placed at the level of the Lady's eyes or lower, or yet, the arm can be extended alongside the body, the thigh, with GLH holding the Lady's Right Hand (LRH). In relation to the Lady, LRH follows GLH, where her Left Hand preferably rests on the Gent's right shoulder. The BD technique remains, where each dancer still supports their own

body, especially the Lady (RIED, 2003; SILVESTER, 1990; VOLP, 1994).

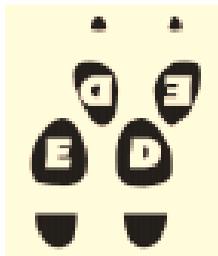


Figure 2. Initial Position.

In terms of body position, the pair does not face each other; there is an “intention” of being parallel to each other, where contact is made from the waist rather than face-to-face. Hence, the right side of the Gent’s body touches the left side of the Lady’s body. Thus, the body of each partner could be considered a straight line, and the left side of the Gent’s body and the left side of the Lady’s body would form the vertex angle, i.e. as the straight lines move away from the vertex, the distance between them becomes wider.

Two basic steps and two variations were observed in relation to the *Xote* and the *Baião*. Under this study, the steps will be named according to what they perform. This is the preferred practice under this study given that there are different names for the same steps.

3.2 Diagram of the Basic Sideways Step (BSS) – Figure 2

This is one of the two basics steps of the *Xote* and the *Baião*, also commonly known as “2x2”, as the pair moves two steps to one side and returns two steps to the other side. In the

Basic Sideways Step (BSS), the pair dances to the beat of the music in eight steps, staying in the same place in principle (i.e. no final movement). BSS uses two beats: two for steps 1 to 4; another for steps 5 to 8. Hence, dancers move to the Right Leg (D) (or to the Left Leg (E)) during the first beat, and move to the Left Leg (E) (or to the Right Leg (D)) during the second beat.

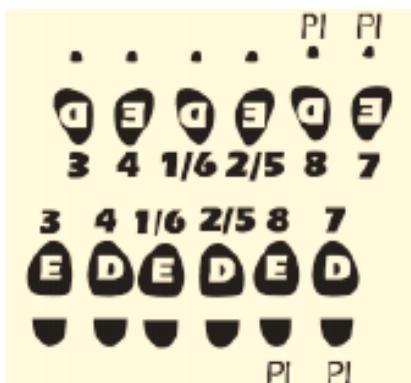


Figure 3. Diagram of the Basic Sideways Step (BSS).

In step 1 E moves to the Left Leg (E) (step 1 performed in count 1 of the first beat); in step 2 D and E come together (between counts 1 and 2 of the first beat); in step 3 E goes to the Left Leg (E) (count 2 of the first beat); in step 4 D and E come together without transferring body weight (between count 2 of the first beat and count 1 of the second beat). In step 5 D moves to the Right Leg (D) (count 1 of the second beat); in step 6 E and D come together (between counts 1 and 2 of the second beat); in step 7 D moves to the Right Leg (D) (count 2 of the second beat); in step 8 E and D come together without transferring the weight (between count 2 of the second beat and count 1 of the third beat).

3.3 Diagram of the Basic Forward and Backward Step (BS F/B) – Figure 3

In the second basic step dancers move forward and backward instead of sideways. It was noted that the feet do not come together in the centre after stepping forward and backward.

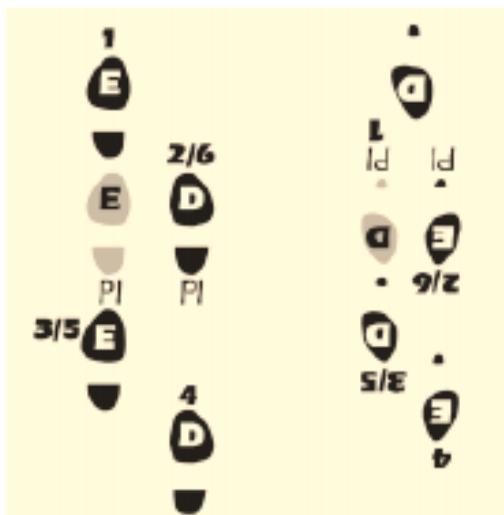


Figure 4. Diagram of the Basic Forward and Backward Step (BS F/B).

In step 1 E moves forward (count 1 of the first beat); in step 2 the weight is put on D (between counts 1 and 2 of the first beat); in step 3 E moves backward (count 2 of the first beat). In step 4 D moves backward (count 1 of the second beat); in step 5 the weight is put on D E (between counts 1 and 2 of the second beat); in step 6 D moves forward (count 2 of the second beat).

Forró steps are largely free-standing, where the basic steps in particular do not have to be danced as described. They

can be performed, for example, by turning on the same spot. The steps described herein are the basic ones that are easier for beginners.

3.4 Diagram of the Open Step – Figure 4

The Open Step is taken when the partners move their body away from each other, as opposed to the “closed” posture of BSS and BS F/B. Contact is made only with the hands: Gent’s D/E hand holding Lady’s E/D hand. Hence, there are two phases to the step: where partners “open” their posture by turning and facing the same side, and then “close” their posture by facing each other again. This step is considered the main variation of the *Xote* and the *Baião* because it is the base for all other variations. Upon observing the structure of the variations below, e.g. Changing Places and Turning, one notices that the pair is doing the Open Step, but instead of “closing” one leg next to the other, the dancer moves his leg forward.

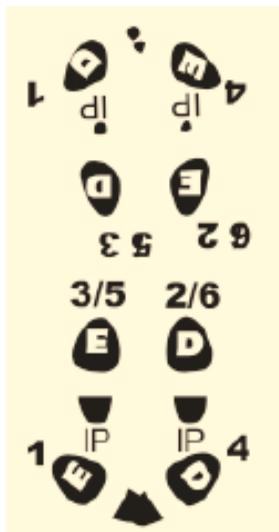


Figure 5. Diagram of the Open Step.

In step 1 E moves backward, turning the body $\frac{1}{4}$ to the Left Leg (E) (count 1 of the first beat); in step 2 the weight goes back to D (between counts 1 and 2 of the first beat); in step 3 E returns to the initial position, parallel and next to D (count 2 of the first beat). In step 4 D moves backward, turning the body $\frac{1}{4}$ to the Right Leg (D) (count 1 of the second beat); in step 5 the weight returns to E (between counts 1 and 2 of the second beat); in step 6 D goes to the initial position, parallel and next to E (count 2 of the second beat).

3.5 Diagram of Changing Places and Turning – Figure 5

This variation was identified as one of the most recurring when dancing the *Xote* and the *Baião*. While the Lady changes place as she turns, the Gent only swaps place with her; sequentially, she only swaps place while he changes places turning. It should be noted that the only the dancer who is doing the Open Step with the Right Foot (PD) will change places turning.

For the Lady to turn, the Gent raises his Left Arm (E) and leads her with the palm of his hand to change places and turn. Four musical counts are required to do this step from beginning to end.

The Gent does the Open Step with the Left Foot (PE) by (1) pivoting with the Right Foot (PD) (2), and puts the Left Foot (PE) forward (3). Then he performs the Open Step with the Right Foot (PD) (4), pivots with the Left Foot (PE) (5), and puts the Right Foot (PD) forward (6).

In step 1 the Open Step is performed with the Left Foot (PE) (count 1 of the first beat); in step 2 the weight goes back to D and the foot does a small pivoting turn (between counts 1 and 2 of the first beat); in step 3 E moves forward, doing a $\frac{1}{4}$ turn to the same initial direction (count 2 of the first beat). In step 4 the Open Step is done with the Right Foot (PD) (count 1

of the second beat); in step 5 the weight goes back to E and the foot does a small pivoting turn, i.e. the turn (between counts 1 and 2 of the second beat); in step 6 D moves forward, doing another $\frac{1}{4}$ turn to complete the variation (count 2 of the second beat).

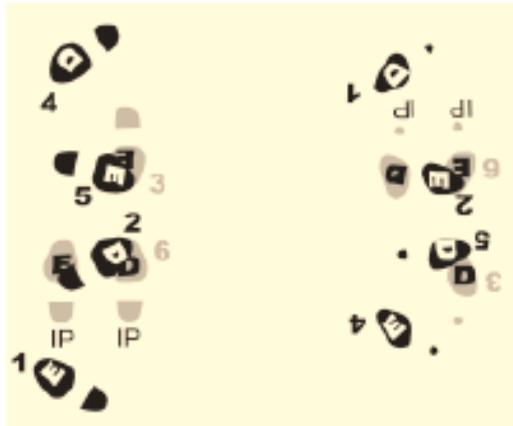


Figure 6. Diagram of Changing Places and Turning.

It is important for the Gent and the Lady to actually change places, even if they do not complete a 180° turn as shown in the diagram. When changing places is not done properly, the dancer who is turning becomes overburdened because he will have to make a wider turn than necessary. When the step is performed correctly, the dancer that is not turning has to “close” behind his partner and face her back.

This variation is the key for practically all the other turning steps. The difference between this type of turn and other turning will be basically in relation to the position of the hands of the Gent and the Lady. In other words, instead of the Gent leading the Lady with his Left Hand (ME) holding her Right Hand (MD), he will, for example, lead her to turn with

his Right Hand (MD) holding her MD or even the Left Hand (ME), although this is uncommon in these dances.

3.6 Analysis of the interviews and questionnaires

Based on the interviews and questionnaires, one notices that the terms “musical genre”, “musical rhythm” and “musical style” are misused according to Quadros Jr. and Volp (2003). Subjects were unanimous in affirming that the three terms are used as synonyms and that generally they have the same meaning as in “musical genre”. The large majority of subjects affirmed that *Forró* parties are where the *Xote*, *Baião*, *Xaxado*, *Côco*, *Quadrilha*, *Embolada* and *Maxixe* rhythms are played, to mention but a few. These rhythms differ in their rhythmic accents.

The answers to the questionnaires revealed that *Forró* dancing gives a great amount of vigor to the dancer and that it can be a means of getting rid of stress and negative feelings. Dancer stated that all musical genres that comprise the *Forró* incite people to dance.

The *Xote* is structurally different and slower than the *Baião*, so the “moves” are suave, seductive and wooing; according to the lingo of the *forrozeiros* (aficionados of *Forró* dancing), the steps are more “grounded” and “dragged”. The *Baião*, on the other hand, is quite the opposite, as the music is faster and the musical structure conveys the intention of “stronger”, more “marked”, “lively” and “bouncy” steps; the “bouncy” beat is conducive to creating “ornaments”, which are the variations.

Subjects were chosen given their status of “*Forró* dancing aficionados” rather than mere “dancers of the *Xote* and the *Baião*”. They enjoy, live the culture and disseminate, so to speak, the simple lifestyle advocated by the *Forró* in the lyrics of songs composed by Luis Gonzaga and Jackson do Pandeiro, to mention but a few. In other words, in their everyday life they do not just dance and/or play *Forró*, but live

the culture by wearing the costumes and externalising the roots of the *Forró* culture. In other words, they are not part of the so-called *Forró Universitário* that is trendy among college students, but rather make an effort to listen/dance/disseminate the musicians that pioneered in this cultural manifestation.

According to the subjects and literature, *Forró* dancing encompasses simplicity and humility (JACINTO, 2001; NÓBREGA, 2004; ROCHA, 2004), which is an interesting aspect, given that the more privileged social strata is so attracted to it. They also reported that *Forró* dancing is becoming more valued nationally, which can be noted by its growing acceptance within the college milieu.

Despite the interviews, questionnaires and references involved in this study it was not possible to identify all the musical genres that comprise the *Forró*, nor if the musical genre called *Forró* actually exists, according to (GIFFONI, 2003). This is due to the fact that consensus is yet to be reached because the matter has not been properly studied and/or because the *Forró* is a broad-reaching phenomenon.

A very large number of musical genres were mentioned as being part of *Forró*. According to Rocha (2004, p. 63) *Forró* comprises “[...] the *Xote*, the *Baião* and the *Xaxado*, as well as other” musical expressions. Jacinto (2001) affirms that there is the *Xaxado*, *Côco de Roda*, *Marcha de Roda*, *Baião* and *Xote*. However, all the lists of musical genres that comprise the *Forró* always include the *Xote* and the *Baião*. According to Jacinto (2001, track 4), “*Forró* is simplicity; it is dust, the accordion, the *zabumba* (a type of bass drum), and the triangle... it is a sequence of rhythms from the northeast of Brazil: *Xaxado*, *Côco de Roda*, *Marcha de Roda*, *Xote* and *Baião*... these rhythms and other ones that now I cannot recall... this is what *Forró* means”.

4 FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Observation tools and data collection, as well as the experience in *Forró* lessons and dancing, and in the college environment led to the conclusion that *Forró* is a party where different musical genres are danced and played. There is a consensus that the *Xote* and the *Baião* comprise the *Forró*, both of which are more popular in the State of São Paulo. The *Xote* is a slower dance rhythm where seduction is the strong suite, where the *Baião* is fast-paced and livelier. The basic steps of both dances were called: Basic Sideways Step, Basic Forward and Backward Step, Open Step and Changing Places and Turning. There is also consensus that in the *Forró* both simplicity and humility should be the norm, which are features lived and disseminated by the main creators and promoters of this musical genre and its current aficionados.

Caracterização do Xote e do Baião dançados no interior do Estado de São Paulo

Resumo: A Dança de Salão e o Forró fazem parte da cultura brasileira, e o Xote e o Baião fazem parte do Forró. O objetivo deste estudo foi diagramar as danças Xote e Baião no interior do Estado de São Paulo e descrever ritmicamente seus movimentos. Foram observados e filmados diversos casais universitários dançando Xote e Baião para análise e descrição discursiva e por meio de diagramas dos movimentos das danças. Identificam-se duas estruturas básicas que denominam-se “Passo Básico Lateral” e “Passo Básico Frente e Trás”, e as variações “Abertura” e “Troca de Lugar com Giro”, muito utilizadas pelos casais.

Palavras-chave: Dança. Folclore. Música. Cultura. Diagramação.

Caracterización del Xote y del Baião bailados dentro del estado de São Paulo

Resumen: Baile de salón y *Forró* hacen parte de la cultura brasileña, y *Xote* y *Baião*, del *Forró*. El propósito de este estudio fue diagramar las danzas *Xote* y *Baião* bailados dentro del estado de São Paulo y describir ritmicamente los movimientos de las mismas. Para el análisis y la descripción de movimientos de *Xote* y *Baião*, de manera discursiva y con

los diagramas, fueron observadas y filmadas varias parejas universitarias bailando dichas danzas. Fueron identificados “paso básico lateral” y “paso básico adelante y atrás”, y las variaciones “abertura” y “cambio de lugar con giro”, muy usadas por las parejas.

Palabras clave: Baile. Folclor. Música. Cultura. Diagrama.

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