

SOCIAL JUSTICE

In The Piano Studio

Inspiring Advanced Students With Music
By Brazil's First Female Professional Pianist

By Garrett Snedeker, NCTM

In 1867, a young 20-year-old woman walked the streets of Rio de Janeiro. She had just divorced her husband, an officer in the Brazilian navy. Angry that she had snuck a guitar on his ship, he made her choose between him and her music, and...she chose music. Outraged, her father declared her dead to the family. Now a divorced woman living alone in the big city with her first-born son, she had no way to make a living.

Unless...she could be a musician.

But that would be ridiculous! The only respectable job for a woman was domestic work. She had thrown away any hope of that, along with her social status. She would be ridiculed by all of Brazil if she pursued a musical career.

Little did she know she would make history as Brazil's first female professional pianist.

Music and Social Justice

As private piano teachers in the 21st century, we have a unique opportunity to impact the lives of young individuals. We take part in the socialization of children, shaping the minds of future voters, politicians, leaders and activists.

Music plays an important role in society. It has the power to provoke conversations, discussions and even revolutions. As social and political tensions rise in the United States, it is critical for us to ignite our students' excitement for music as a key proponent to social change.

Introducing contemporary social issues in the piano studio gives our students opportunities to make a difference in their communities. An effective place to start is with the music of Chiquinha Gonzaga, Brazil's first female professional pianist. In 19th-century Brazil, people of color and women in general were

SOCIAL JUSTICE

In The Piano Studio

regarded as inferior. Despite this, Gonzaga defied female stereotypes by writing popular music that bridged barriers between social classes. By teaching Gonzaga's music and applying her compositional techniques of mixing genres in our piano studios, we mold the next generation of musicians and leaders for social causes.

Chiquinha Gonzaga

Chiquinha Gonzaga (1847–1935) was the first person ever commissioned to write music for the *Carnaval* celebration, first female theatrical composer and first female Brazilian conductor. A new Portuguese word was even invented for her title as female conductor: *Maestrina*. She was an activist for the Brazilian abolitionist movement, selling her music door-to-door to buy freedom for slaves. She also helped co-found the first copyright organization for theatrical authors in Brazil.

Francisca “Chiquinha” Edwiges Neves Gonzaga was born in Rio de Janeiro to an upper-class family. Her father was a wealthy general in the Brazilian Army, and her mother was the daughter of an African slave.¹ Gonzaga's father invested in her education, including piano lessons, to prepare her for marriage. Marriage was the only way for upper-class women to gain any social standing in Catholic 19th-century Brazil. She was married at age 16 to a man of her father's choice, Jacinto Ribeiro do Amaral (born 1839), a high-ranking officer in the navy. They had three children together, João, Maria and Hilario.²

Early in their marriage, Amaral thought Gonzaga was paying more attention to her piano practice than him. Frustrated, he bought a large merchant ship to be used in the Paraguay War (1864–1870) and forced Gonzaga to accompany him on the ship. Without his knowledge, she snuck a guitar onboard. When Amaral discovered the guitar on the ship, he demanded she choose between him and music. According to historical accounts, Gonzaga responded to Amaral, “Well sir, my husband, I do not understand life without harmony.”³ She proclaimed her love for music and left Amaral.⁴

Divorce broke the holy sacrament of marriage and brought much embarrassment to the family name. After her divorce, Gonzaga's father

disowned her, declaring her dead to the family. She was not even allowed to attend her father's funeral.⁵ Gonzaga was forced out of her home and allowed to raise only her first-born son. Desperately in need of money to survive, she relied on her early musical training to work as a piano teacher, school teacher, composer and performer in downtown Rio de Janeiro.⁶

Gonzaga wrote many musical works while living in Rio. The following are two of her most famous works, which provide the foundation to teach music for social change in the piano studio. These two works, along with more than 130 works for solo piano, can be found for free at chiquinhagonzaga.com/wp/.

Atraente

Translated from Portuguese as “attractive” or “captivating,” *Atraente* (pronounced ah-tdee-EN-chee) is a polka, and was Gonzaga's first published work. It was written in 1877 for *choro* (SHOW-doo) ensemble. *Choro* is one of the first distinctly Brazilian genres of music. It is one of the predecessors of ragtime, with stride-like basslines and syncopated rhythms. A *choro* group traditionally consists of a flute, cavaquinho (small guitar) and two regular-sized guitars. *Choro* musicians were expected to improvise over melodies using chord changes, similar to jazz.

When Gonzaga lived in Rio, she befriended the virtuoso flutist Joaquim Antonio da Silva Callado, Jr. (1848–1880). He founded the first professional *choro* group *Choro Carioca*, highly popular in the salons and bars of Rio. Callado invited Gonzaga to join his group in 1875. *Choro Carioca* could now perform in middle- and upper-class venues with pianos.⁷

Atraente was immensely popular after its premiere by *Choro Carioca*, with more than 15 editions published in the first year. Unfortunately, Gonzaga's early fame was negatively directed to her unmarried status. She was perceived as a seductive figure by the public. Critics ridiculed the association of the title “Attractive” with Gonzaga, due to her mixed race. Despite this blatant racism, she continued to publish music titled *Não Insistas, Rapariga!* (Stop insisting, Woman!) and *La Sedutora* (The Seducer). She fought against critics by writing compositions to provoke her audience further.⁸

Atraente is in rondo form (ABACA). The first section (A) is in the style of a polka, a genre associated with upper classes. Notice how Gonzaga uses downbeat-oriented rhythms in the left hand to define the polka.

5 **A** Polca
Com gosto

Atraente Section A: Polka, measures 5–9

The second section (B) is in the style of a *maxixe* (mah-SHEE-shuh), an African dance considered scandalous by the church and upper classes. Gonzaga changes the left-hand rhythm to the syncopated rhythm of a *maxixe*, similar to the tango.

23 Gracioso

Atraente Section B: *Maxixe*, measures 23–27

The third section (C) is in the style of a march, traditionally played by brass bands in the streets. Notice that in bars 44 and 46, Gonzaga inserts the left-hand *maxixe* rhythm from Section B, mixing the two genres.

43

Atraente Section C: March with *maxixe* rhythm inserted, measures 43–46

Accents and different rhythmic groupings make this a great piece for advancing pianists who have already played pieces such as *Maple Leaf Rag* or other pieces with jumping left-hand gestures and right-hand arpeggios.

Since the entire work was subtitled “polka,” it was attractive to those in the upper classes. But as elites listened to the piece, they were also hearing two other genres. Gonzaga cleverly exposed elites to music they either hadn’t heard before or genres they had previously determined to be “inferior” music.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

In The Piano Studio

If you were to listen to this piece without knowing the distinction of each of the genres, you might not be able to tell the differences between them. This is not surprising! Each section has similar rhythms, melodies and textures. *Atraente's* popularity arose because it brought different social classes together and could be performed in different social contexts.

Corta-Jaca

Translated as “Cut the Fruit,” *Corta-Jaca* (pronounced kor-tah ZHA-kah) was written in 1897 in the style of a *maxixe* dance, considered inappropriate by upper classes. On October 26, 1914, this piece was performed for the Brazilian president’s retirement celebration in the Catete Palace. The president’s wife invited a guitarist to entertain high-ranking diplomats attending the reception. As a surprise, the guitarist performed *Corta-Jaca*. Disgusted, the diplomats had many disapproving words for the *maxixe* at the reception. The newspaper highly criticized *Corta-Jaca*, saying it was a poor musical selection among elites.⁹

Corta-Jaca is ABA structure, with the first section (A) in the style of a *maxixe*. Gonzaga uses a similar syncopation to the *maxixe* section in *Atraente*.



Corta-Jaca Section A: *Maxixe*, measures 5–8

The B section is marked as a polka, but in bars 24 and 26, Gonzaga inserts the *maxixe* syncopated rhythm between the polka measures 23 and 25. The polka and *maxixe* rhythms alternate seamlessly.



Corta-Jaca Section B: Polka with *maxixe* inserted, measures 23–26

Gonzaga included *Corta-Jaca* at the end of her operetta *Cá e lá* (translated “Here and There”). In addition to her instrumental works, Gonzaga also wrote music and libretti for operettas. She used plots with lower-class characters, which exposed lower-class lifestyles to elite audiences. For *Corta-Jaca* to be more palatable to the upper classes, it was subtitled as *tango brasileira* instead of *maxixe*. Elites were comfortable listening to the piece because they thought it was a tango, even though they were hearing a *maxixe*.¹⁰ Her genre choice and placement of this piece broke down barriers between social classes.

Gonzaga’s Legacy

Today, Chiquinha Gonzaga is celebrated as a cultural icon in Brazil. There is a bust of her in the famous *Passico Publico* park, and her refurbished upright piano lives in the foyer of the grand Theatro Municipal. Gonzaga helped found the first copyright organization for theatrical composers, the *Sociedade Brasileira de Autores Teatrais*. If you visit this office in Rio de Janeiro today, you can

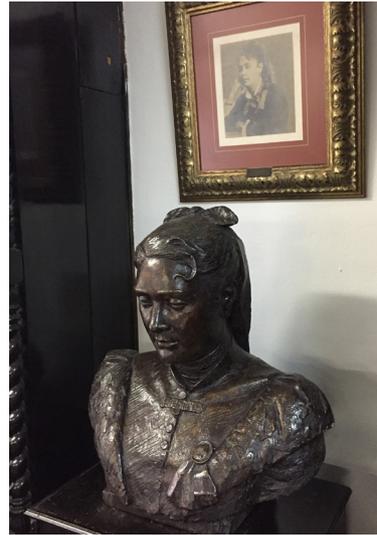
see the Chiquinha Gonzaga Library, with an original table and cabinets showcasing her bust and photograph. Contemporary artists have recorded CDs of her music, authors have written children's books and biographies about her in Portuguese and companies have published collections of sheet music.¹¹ On chiquinhagonzaga.com/wp/, you can find more than 250 compositions for piano, voice, theater and mixed ensemble (Click Acervo Digital to access scores). There is even a soap opera about Gonzaga's life!¹² It is six seasons long, and still popular in Brazil today.

Teaching Gonzaga's music in the piano studio may inspire students to write their own music for social justice. But what exactly does this look like?

Social Justice in the Piano Studio

Gonzaga follows certain trends when mixing genres:

- As Gonzaga mixes genres within a piece, the identity of each individual genre is defined by left-hand rhythms.
- Each right-hand melody is compatible within the context of multiple genres.
- Overall, Gonzaga showcases the unique components of each genre, while combining similar aspects to produce a coherent, unified musical work.



We can apply Gonzaga's compositional strategies in the private studio with five steps:

1. Ask your students their favorite genres outside of Classical music (hip-hop, rap, country, reggae, electronic and the like), and to bring one song recording into a lesson.
2. Listen to the song together, identifying key melodic, harmonic and rhythmic components. Can you tap the rhythm of the bassline? Is the melody complicated or simple, moving by steps or skips? Do the harmonies use simple triads, or are there extensions?
3. Explain to your student the cultural history of the chosen genre. From what culture did this genre originate? Are there any social messages within the lyrics, or are the musicians also activists in their communities?
4. Now pick a classical work in your students' repertoire, also identifying the rhythmic, melodic and harmonic components. Identify similarities between the components of the two works. Do they share similar rhythms? Simple melodies? Do the harmonies change at the same rate?
5. After outlining musical components and historical context, the student can mix the components of the pieces while integrating an informed social message. This helps the student see musical aspects as stylistic decisions communicating broader social meanings. When mixing the genres, consider overlapping the similarities and retaining the differences of each genre.

To illustrate this process, let's explore a favorite genre of mine. I enjoy listening to R&B, and one of my favorite songs is "Cherish the Day" by the Robert Glasper Experiment, an R&B/jazz group. In the song, the bassline rhythm moves by half notes, its simple melody moves by step, and the extended harmonies change every half note. For example, let's mix R&B with W.A. Mozart's Sonata in C Major, K. 545.



Sonata in C Major, K. 545, measures 1–4

Mozart uses eighth notes for the bassline rhythm, a melody moving by skips and simple harmonies that change every two beats.

To mix these pieces, I chose to mix R&B rhythms and suspended harmonies with the classical melody. I preserved Mozart's melody and rate of harmonic change, while highlighting R&B harmonic extensions. For this four-bar phrase, the first and last chords are the same.

SOCIAL JUSTICE

In The Piano Studio

Sonata in C Major with R&B, measures 1–4

In the development section of the sonata, I chose to use suspended and major seventh chords underneath the right-hand melody, with a few altered notes to match the chords. In bars 31–32 of the following example, I kept the original scales by Mozart.

Sonata in C Major with R&B, measures 29–32

R&B is an African-American genre originally from the 1940s, often reflecting injustices faced by African Americans in the United States today. My blend of classical and R&B music uses classical music as a vehicle to share the social message of R&B music. Teaching students to mix and share various genres encourages them to explore different perspectives in our world today, and to cross cultures.

Integrating these practices into studio teaching lays the groundwork for potential student recitals and charity events supporting social causes. Students may choose to explain the social context of their genre before the performance, or let the music speak for itself. We have the power to equip our students to be catalysts for social change, just like Chiquinha Gonzaga in the 1800s. As musicians and leaders in our own communities, let's mobilize music to play a part in contributing to greater change in our society. ♪

Author note: Thank you to the Washington State University College of Arts and Sciences for helping fund my research.

Notes

1. Edinha Deniz, *Chiquinha Gonzaga: Uma Historia da Vida* (Rio de Janeiro, BR: Jorge Zahar Ed., 2009), 23–24.
2. Lisa Maria Pereira, “Chiquinha Gonzaga and the Creation of a National Brazilian Music” (Master of Arts in Humanities, San Francisco University, 2005), 26–28.

3. E. Deniz, 67.
4. E. Deniz, 67.
5. E. Deniz, 69–70.
6. Pereira, 28–29.
7. Andre Deniz, *Joaquim Callado: O Pai do Choro* (Rio de Janeiro, BR: Jorge Zahar Editor Ltda., 2008), 18–47.
8. E. Deniz, 115–116.
9. E. Deniz, 230–234.
10. Pereira, 43.
11. CDs of Gonzaga's music and her sheet music are available online. (visit www.mtna.org/MTNA/Stay_Informed/American_Music_Teacher/Gonzaga.aspx)
12. *Chiquinha Gonzaga*, directed by Jayme Monjardim. Written by Lauro César Muniz and Marcílio Moraes, featuring Regina Duarte, Carlos Alberto Riccelli, and Gabriela Duarte. TV GLOBO, 1999–2008.

AMT

Garrett Snedeker, NCTM, is a 2019 graduate from Washington State University, with a bachelor of music degree in piano performance/pedagogy. He is currently a Fulbright Scholar in London, pursuing a master of music degree in piano performance at Trinity Laban Conservatoire.

