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## RESEARCH IN CHORAL ACTIVITY: STATE OF KNOWLEDGE IN DISSERTATION ABSTRACTS BETWEEN 1990 AND 2021

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*Rogério de Brito Bergold*

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**Abstract:** Based on the terms “Choir/Choral” in the titles of dissertations defended between 1990 and 2021, in postgraduate programs in Music in Brazil, this study aims to identify the main topics discussed in the abstracts of these dissertations. In the 86 documents researched, the teaching and learning aspect was highlighted, as well as the choir in the child/adolescent age group, vocal and social aspects, repertoire, and the university environment as a *locus of production* and research, especially the University of São Paulo. was also noted. Interest in choral activity, due to the increase in the annual production of dissertations, reaching a peak of 12 in 2018.

## INTRODUCTION

Studies on the State of the Art (SOA) or State of Knowledge (SOK) are related to the survey of scientific production in a given area of knowledge: “SOA” would involve the entire production, while “SOK” would address only one sector of publications (ROMANOWSKI; ENS, 2006, p. 40), as in the case of this study, focusing on the abstracts of dissertations produced by Graduate Programs in the area of Music.

This type of study can lead to numerous possibilities: a better understanding, identifying trends, perspectives, interaction with society, research gaps (DEL-BEN; SOUZA, 2007); also to innovative experiences, theoretical references, development of research analysis prototypes, types of research - qualitative, quantitative -, techniques used - interviews, documentary analysis, observation, questionnaire, etc. (ROMANOWSKI; ENS, 2006).

Miguel et alli (2015; 2016) published two papers related to State of the Art and Choir/Voice/Singing obtained from abstracts dissertation/thesis - similar to our proposal: “Research on vocal technique, voice and singing in Music Education: analysis of dissertation

abstracts in Brazil” (2015); and “Research on vocal technique, voice and singing in the area of music: analysis of thesis abstracts in Brazil” (2016). She also published “Research on choral singing in the ANPPOM annals from 2015 to 2019 in the Music Education sub-area” (2020).

The authors pointed out inconsistencies in the abstracts of the dissertations and theses, as they did not comply with the general rules for constructing academic abstracts, and lacked basic information about the research. The information sought was: What the research is about/Research questions, Hypothesis, Objectives, Methodology, Theoretical foundation, Justifications and Results. In our search for abstracts of dissertations on Choir/Chorale, we found, like Miguel et alli, that there was a discrepancy in length: the longest abstract was 492 words, while the shortest was 63. Certainly, very short abstracts do not comply with the rules for constructing abstracts, but it was not the focus of this study to carry out this type of analysis.

The main data highlighted about the abstracts analyzed by Miguel et alli were: greater production in public universities; a greater number of works produced in the Southeast region of Brazil; greater emphasis on classical singing than popular singing; theoretical basis taken from other areas of knowledge, mainly Anthropology and Social Psychology.

In the text related to ANPPOM publications (Miguel et alli, 2020), there was a predominance of studies that touched on Vocal Pedagogy, Vocal Technique, Vocal Preparation and Vocal Warm-up; and works from public universities. There was a perception on the part of the researchers of the need to diversify the “subjects dealt with in order to deal with the complexity of choral practice in Brazil” (p. 8). To a certain extent, our research verified this diversity of subjects.

The main objective of to map the state of the our work is knowledge ofthe theme “Choir” in the abstracts of dissertations from postgraduate programs in Music in Brazil, identifying “which aspects and dimensions have been highlighted and privileged” (FERREIRA, 2002, p. 258). It should be noted that dissertations from postgraduate programs in other areas of knowledge, such as Education, History, Sociology and others, were not investigated. was not to This research be exhaustive “or to present generalizing conclusions” (DEL-BEN; SOUZA, 2007, p. 2), but rather trends intended.

### METHODOLOGICAL ASPECTS

#### QUANTITATIVE

According to procedures suggested by the for the State of the Art/Knowledge, we Romowski & Ens (2006, p. 43) defined:

#### Searching the databases

The survey of dissertations was based on the 22 postgraduate programs listed on the website of the National Association for Research and Postgraduate Studies in Music (ANPPOM<sup>1</sup> ) at the time of data collection, which took place in July 2022.

We searched each program’s website for the titles of dissertations defended that included the terms “choir” and “chorus”; only one of them included the term “singingcollective “. We selected 86 papers<sup>2</sup> from 1990 to 2021; Table 1 shows the number of dissertations defended per year in this time interval.

YEAR	NUMBER
1990	1
2002	1
2003	2
2005	3
2006	3
2007	2
2009	5
2010	2
2011	5
2012	4
2013	5
2014	8
2015	6
2016	3
2017	10
2018	12
2019	5
2020	5
2021	4

Table 1 - Number of dissertations per year

In the period analyzed, there was an interval of more than a decade between the first (1990) and second (2002) dissertations<sup>3</sup> ; since then, production has remained constant in all years, with the exception of 2004 and 2008. Dividing the total number of dissertations - 86 - by the years of publication - 19 - gives an average of 4.5 dissertations per year. It is noteworthy that in 2017 we reached the number of 10 dissertations defended in Postgraduate Programs in Music in Brazil, related to the choral theme in the title. This shows an increase in interest in researching this musical activity more recently.

1. <https://anppom.org.br/programas-de-pos-graduacao/>  
2. Those that were available for download. It should be noted that some Postgraduate Programs in Music have not yet made available dissertations defended until the early 2000s; I say this because I defended my dissertation in 2004 and to this day it cannot be accessed for download. Once again, I would like to reiterate that I do not intend to exhaust the subject of choirs in music dissertations.  
3. This can be explained, as mentioned in Footnote 2, by the fact that some programs don’t make dissertations defended before 2005 available for download, for example (as in my case).

Fifteen graduate programs in Music published dissertations whose title contained the word Choir or similar: UFRGS<sup>4</sup>, UFG, UNESP, UNICAMP, UFRJ, UNIRIO, USP, UFBA, UFMG, UDESC, UFPA, UFPR, UNB, UFRN and UEMG. The largest number of publications came from USP (20), followed by UDESC (12), UNICAMP (11) and UNESP (11); the sum total of these four universities - 54 - is equivalent to 62% of the total number of dissertations produced (86) collected in this research.

### Identifying recurring terms

By reading the abstracts, various subjects identified related to the exercise of choral activity were. Unlike Fábio et al (2015 and 2016), mentioned in the Introduction, the aim of this study was not to answer predetermined questions, such as Research Questions, Objectives, etc. but, rather to identify recurring terms. Below is a list - Table 2 - in alphabetical order, of 34 recurring terms.

These items cover practically the entire Choral activity and can be divided into six categories; it should be noted that this division into categories is done *roughly*, without further detail, as the categories touch on and interact with each other:

- Regency - Competence, Skill, Profession, Teaching, Technology
- University - Curriculum, Target age group, *Locus* of testing/observation
- Rehearsal/Performance - Tuning, Arrangement, Stage/Body, Communication, Perception, Vocal Preparation, Repertoire, Rhythm, Pedagogical Aspects
- Repertoire - Arrangement, Technology

- Place of work - School, Church, University
- Age target audience - Adult, Elderly, Children/teenagers
- Pedagogical aspects - Learning, Music Education, Teaching, Musicalization, Pedagogy, Marco Ramos, Vocal preparation, Perception, Senior citizens, Children and young people
- Social aspects - Ethnography (Brazil), School, Church, People with special needs

### QUALITATIVE

From a qualitative point of view, a second selection of the 34 terms was made, with the aim of identifying those that were discussed effectively in the abstracts. This second analysis involved two levels: (1) Minimum recurrence of 10%, i.e., rounding off, 9 times out of a total of 86 abstracts; (2) Relevance in the Abstract: the term should be discussed. I cite the terms “Arrangement” and “Musical Education” as examples. Musical: a large part of the choral repertoire in Brazil is in the form of arrangements, mainly for amateur choirs; in this second reading/selection it was found that the discussion related to the elaboration/performance of arrangements did not reach the limit of 9 abstracts. In the case of “Educational Musical”, several authors did not discuss the role of the choir in music education, or vice versa; the term was used as a kind of buzzword/cliché.

This left 8 descriptors, shown in Chart 3. The term “descriptor” is preferably used for the Health Sciences area, and is called DeCS - Descriptors in Health Sciences. Despite a certain similarity between descriptor and keyword<sup>5</sup>, it is understood that the recur-

4. Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul (UFRGS), Universidade Federal de Goiás (UFG), Universidade Estadual Paulista (UNESP), Universidade Estadual de Campinas (UNICAMP), Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro (UFRJ), Universidade Federal do Estado do Rio de Janeiro (UNIRIO), Universidade de São Paulo (USP), Universidade Federal da Bahia (UFBA), Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais (UFMG), Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina (UDESC), Universidade Federal do Pará (UFPA), Universidade Federal do Paraná (UFPR), Universidade de Brasília (UNB), Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Norte (UFRN) and Universidade Estadual de Minas Gerais (UEMG).

5. Romanowski (2006, p. 47) considers that “descriptors [...] are keywords that serve to indicate the essence of the research at the end of the abstracts”.

Tuning	Amateur / Adult	Apprentice (agem, ado)	Arrangement
Brazil	Scenic	Competence	Communication
Body	Resume	Music Education	Essay
Teaching	School	Ethnography, musicology	Skills
Elderly Senior citizens/	Church	Infant(il,o) / Juvenile / Adolesc (ente,ência)	Marco Ramos <sup>1</sup>
Musicalization	Pedagogy/ Pedagogical	Perception	Performance
People with special needs	Prepar (o,ação)	Professional	Regency
Repertoire	Rhythm / Rhythmic	Soci(al,o)	Technology
University	Voice / Vocal		

Table 2 - Recurring terms

1. It is necessary to explain the “Marco themeRamos” : he is a professor at USP and has a methodology aimed at the choir: “Referencial de Análise de Obras Corais” (Choral Works Analysis Reference) (SILVA, 2009). PPGM-USP has the largest number of dissertations theme of “on the Choral” in the period analyzed: 20 publications. With the recurrent use of this methodology by master’s students, “Marco Ramos” ended up becoming a theme.

ce of terms/descriptors is more specific than the recurrence of subjects - keywords. As an example, Tomás (2015) surveyed ANPPOM publications and used descriptors such as ‘Brazilian music’, ‘Brazil’, ‘Brazilian’, ‘national and ‘nationalism’. Although they can be classified as keywords, our research involved quantitative and qualitative aspects, in which the use of descriptors enabled further discussion.

DESCRIP-TOR	RECURRENCE IN RELATION TO THE TOTAL (86)	PERCENTAGE
Teaching	19	22,09
Children/teenagers	18	20,93
Learning	18	20,93
Voice	17	19,77
University	17	19,77
Repertoire	16	18,60
Pedagogy	15	17,44
Social	13	15,12

Table 3 - Frequency of Descriptors

It should be noted that aspects related to teaching, learning and pedagogy accounted for 34 recurrences (39% of all abstracts). It can be deduced that the scientific production of dissertations focuses on often aspects related to teaching, after all, choral activity is a

teaching activity: “Choral rehearsal is a time for learning. It is in the choral rehearsal that musical knowledge is built” (FIGUEIREDO, 1990, p. VI).

Before moving on to the section analyzing results, it is necessary to point out that the publications aimed at choirs take a the adult age group as as found reference, in the books on choral conducting by Zander (1979), Martinez (2000) and Lakschevitz (2006); in other words, the epistemological basis of this activity is the adult choir. On the other hand, proposals related to “children’s/adolescents” or “senior citizens” choirs need special attention, requiring research to specific deal with them. This is why the descriptor “infant...” is used instead of “adult/amateur”.

## ANALYSIS OF DESCRIPTORS

Each descriptor was divided into two levels of analysis: category and subject<sup>6</sup>. The categories emerged from the repetition of terms at least three times; the criterion for choosing this number was the fact that there was repetition of categories among the descriptors. Each category was divided into subjects that also appeared in other descriptors. For example, in

6. In an attempt to differentiate descriptor, category and subject, we opted to capitalize all the letters of the DESCRIPTORS, with the first letter capitalized for Category, and the subject in lower case.

the descriptor “VOICE” there is the category “Teaching method” and the subject “children’s choir preparation”; another category is “Children/adolescents”, in which the subject “teaching method” will appear.

### TEACHING/LEARNING/PEDAGOGY

Seventy authors were mentioned as theoretical references in the 34 abstracts involving TEACHING, LEARNING AND PEDAGOGY. Approximately half are foreigners; the same proportion as those who are musicians. This implies that research involving pedagogical and choral aspects has borrowed significant theoretical references from other areas of knowledge, and from other countries; this was noted by Miguel et alli in the Introduction, when commenting on Anthropology and Social Psychology.

Eight theorists appeared more than once: Marco Ramos (three times); Paulo Costa<sup>7</sup>, Sérgio Figueiredo<sup>8</sup>, Marisa Fonterrada<sup>9</sup>, Knud Illeris<sup>10</sup>, Hans Koellreutter<sup>11</sup>, Lev Vygotsky<sup>12</sup> and Oscar Zander<sup>13</sup>, twice each. It should also be noted that three authors of the dissertations became references: Figueiredo (1990), Gois (2015) and Hauck-Silva (2012).

There was significant correspondence between the TEACHING descriptors and the other five descriptors listed below: of the 34 abstracts, 28 (83%) had a correlation. This is why it was decided not to create categories and subjects in this item, as it would cover all the other descriptors.

### CHILDREN/ADOLESCENTS

There were 18 abstracts for this descriptor; the most frequent categories were:

- Language specificity (7 times / 38%) - playfulness, benefits of musicalization for children, use of body movement for vocal tuning/performance.
- Repertoire (4 / 22%) - differentiated, contemporary music, sociomulticultural of nations.
- Regent (3 / 16%) - skills, competencies, teacher training; social project, market demands.
- School environment (3 / 16%) - teacher training, teenagers taking a leading role in an extracurricular choir, listening to the community, singers creating their own arrangements.

It can be seen that the uniqueness of choral activity for INFANTOJUVENIL/ADOLESCENT is the most recurrent subject in this descriptor: use of playfulness, different repertoire, specific skills and competences of the conductor and the exclusivity of the school environment - there was no mention of teachers’ choirs or choirs for other age groups in this environment.

### VOICE

There were seventeen abstracts in which the descriptor appeared, and the following categories emerged:

- Senior citizens (4 / 23%) - voice physiology, preparation, quality and evaluation.
- Teaching method (4 / 23%) - vocal perception, memory, pitch, harmony, melody, preparation of children’s choirs, use

7. Professor at USP, author of “Diagnosis in choral singing: analysis parameters and tools for evaluation” (RODRIGUES, 2020)

8. Retired professor of Music Education at UDESC.

9. Retired professor of Music Education at UNESP.

10. Danish author of a contemporary theory of learning (SILVA, 2017).

11. Brazilian composer and music educator (1915-2005).

12. Russian educator (1896-1934), author of theory socio-interactionist (REIS, 2012), who “understands that these processes are constructed in relations with the environment, through exchanges between social partners in the process of interaction and mediation” (GÓES, 2017, p. ix).

13. Author of the book **Choral Conducting**.



of the Alexander technique for breathing and emission in vocal technique.

- Body/Scenic (3 / 17%) - increasing vocal performance, rhythm, melody and pulse; use of the Alexander technique, which involves body movements.

- Children and adolescents (3 / 17%) - particularities of choral music for adolescents, method, body movement.

In general, the subjects in the VOICE descriptor prioritized activities that vocally enhance singers through methods, body movement and scenery, reaching not only adults, but also senior citizens and children/adolescents.

## UNIVERSITY

There were 17 abstracts in which the descriptor "Universi..." appeared, with the following categories:

- USP (8 / 47%) - stage choir with improved vocal performance; vocal preparation, conductor training; performance evaluation software; contemporary music; psychoanalysis in the choir; samba performance; profile of an elderly choir; development of the harmonic ear.

- Senior citizens (3 / 17%) - independent aging and choral activity; preparation and vocal quality of the elderly; choral profile.

- Conducting (3 / 17%) - teacher training for children's choir conductors; analysis of two bachelor's degree courses in conducting; conducting software

As a *locus of activity*, the university has significant involvement in the choir through extension projects. It is also understood that the postgraduate programs are located at public universities, which in several cases facilitated observation and data collection for the research. This shows that the largest category was USP, whose postgraduate program offered the largest number of dissertations on choirs; several of the university's choirs were used as a

laboratory for the research, and the scientific production of three professors was tested. Other Brazilian universities were mentioned, but not repeatedly.

## REPERTORY

The 16 repertoire summaries can be divided into the following categories:

- Arrangement (5 / 31%) - MPB, caipira music, urban popular song from 1960 to 1990; comparison between original work and arrangement; conductor-arranger; development of harmonic ear, learning and performance.

- Infanto (4 / 25%) - online catalog; differentiated and multicultural repertoires and their understanding; repertoire analysis.

- Identity (3 / 18%) - Amazonian university choir; country music and repertoire-sociomulticultural.

- Church (3 / 18%) - use of contemporary repertoire; post-Vatican II Catholic repertoire; analysis of evangelical hymnals.

As for the repertoire, the use of arrangements of Brazilian music - MPB, caipira, urban popular song, Amazonian - and the study of sacred music predominated.

## SOCIAL

The thirteen papers whose discussion involved social aspects can be divided into two main categories:

- Ethnicity (6 / 46%) - sociomulticultural activity, intercultural activity on the border between Mato Grosso de Sul and Paraguay, German Catholic descendants, Tyrolean choir from Piracicaba, socio-educational function of a Catholic women's choir and identity in Amazonian repertoire.

- School environment (3 / 23%) - social relations and community of practice in a youth choir; social function of a school choir; social construction of the idea of music among children in the school environment.

In terms of the social aspect, the focus on ethnicity and identity was significant: music from the frontier, German descendants, Catholic music. The social function of music in the school environment was also highlighted.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

Choral activity is one of the most significant in the field of music because, in a very simplistic way, it allows people to make music with their own voice, which can result in a low initial learning cost, unlike instrumental study. For a country that still hasn't found a safe path for learning art at school, let alone music, the choir presents itself as an essential possibility for collective music-making.

The main objective of this work was to indicate the main research trends on choral activity, extracted from abstracts of dissertations published between 1990 and 2021, defended in postgraduate programs in Music in Brazil. Not all dissertations were investigated, as some programs have not yet made publications available before 2004. However, the 86 dissertations consulted were a field of research that revealed the main categories and subjects studied in the period. This dataset revealed a growing number of dissertations defended on choirs, reaching a peak of 12 in 2018.

## REFERENCES

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FERREIRA, Norma Sandra de Almeida. As pesquisas denominadas "Estado da Arte". **Educação & Sociedade**, ano XXIII, nº 79, Agosto/2002.

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GOIS, Micheline Prais. **A dimensão lúdica na regência de coro infantil**. Dissertação. Programa de Pós-Graduação em Música da Universidade Federal do Paraná (UFPR). Curitiba, 2015.

Analyzing aspects related to teaching and learning was the research objective most investigated by the researchers. The use of authors from other areas of knowledge was significant in the formation of the theoretical framework, even though the dissertations were defended in postgraduate programs in Music. The use of foreign authors was also significant.

Children's/adolescents', the use of the voice, repertoire and social aspects were important subjects found. The university also stands out as a choral activity *locus of* research and investigation, especially the University of São Paulo, whose postgraduate program has the largest number of dissertations published on choirs - 20.

Some categories that were not identified could be further researched. As data collection ended in 2021, it was not possible to detect the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic (2020-2022) on the number of defenses (those who left it too late, gave up, etc.). Certainly, new possibilities for remote coral activity must have arisen.

Another possibility for investigation is the use of Information and Communication Technologies in choral activity; in our data collection we only identified one, which is not statistically significant. Furthermore, the impact of social media on activity is a completely open field of research.



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MIGUEL, Fábio; MOUTINHO, Lucas Gonçalves; ANSELM, Luis Guilherme; JANSON, Silvio Fernando; PEDROZO, Willian Gomes. A pesquisa em técnica vocal, voz e canto em Educação Musical: análise dos resumos das dissertações no Brasil. XXV Congresso da Associação Nacional de Pesquisa e Pós-Graduação em Música. **Anais...** Vitória, 2015.

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