

# CHORO

## BRAZIL'S JOYOUS LAMENT

BY CHERIE YURCO

■ Listeners to Brazilian choro music might be surprised to learn that the name choro means “a cry or lament.” It is an ironic name because the music actually sounds joyous and celebratory. Nobody is positive where the name came from, but one idea is that it refers to the “weeping” quality of the solo flute, clarinet, or saxophone.



Choro was the first instrumental music to grow out of Rio De Janeiro, more than 130 years ago, as the African-influenced music of the city blended with newly arrived European styles, such as polka. Choro is the basis for the development of later genres in Brazil, including samba and bossa nova.

Traditionally, Brazilian choro does not rely on written scores, but is passed from one musician to another aurally. Choro musicians, called *chorões* or weepers, memorize the pieces they hear in a choro jam session or recording, then play them or write them down later from memory. They are encouraged to come up with their own interpretations of the music, with changes in rhythm and/or ornamentation. This type of learning means that a choro tune is rarely played the same way twice.

According to Daniel Dalarossa, founder of the website [www.ChoroMusic.com](http://www.ChoroMusic.com), which is dedicated to the genre, as a general rule, *chorões* should always try to show the theme of the choro as it was originally written “and introduce interpretations and improvisations so as not to tire the listener.”

Dalarossa has had a passion for choro, since his childhood in Sao Paulo, Brazil, performing choro first on recorder and then flute. Dalarossa played professionally until age 22, when he completed his degree and went to work as a computer analyst. “The flute and choro have always been a part of my life,” he says.

In 2006, Dalarossa decided to work full-time teaching others about choro music through his website and publishing play-along books. “The goal of Global Choro Music is to globalize choro,” he says.

A typical choro ensemble consists of the solo instrument, a six-string guitar, a seven-string guitar, the *cavaquinho*, and the *pandeiro*. The seven-string guitar is a variation of the traditional six-string, with a seventh string tuned to B or C. It was developed in Brazil to play the lowest part of the harmony and provide melodic counterpoint for higher-pitched instruments.

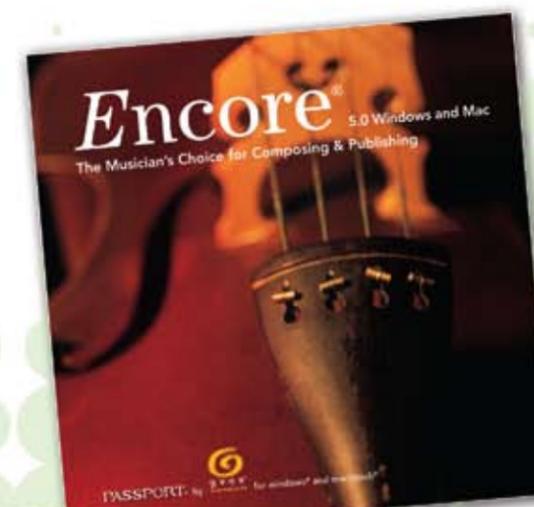
The *cavaquinho* is a small four-string guitar played with a plectrum. It was brought to Brazil by Portuguese and is similar to the ukulele, but tuned D-G-B-D, like a banjo. The *pandeiro* is a small, shallow drum with skin stretched over one end and double pairs of metal disks (called *soalhas* or *platinelas*) are fit along the wooden frame sides, similar to the disks on a tambourine. Also a popular instrument throughout Mediterranean Europe, in choro music the *pandeiro* is played with the hands or fingertips.

Thanks to Brazilian mandolin player Jacob do Bandolim, also famous for his many choro compositions, the Brazilian mandolin is widely used as a choro solo instrument today. Banjo, electric bass guitar, or a second six-string guitar sometimes play harmony in a modern choro group. There may also be different combinations of percussion instruments like a small, round, frame drum called a *tamborim* or various rattles.



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