



Handout - Ciranda Teacher's Guide

Region of origin: Pernambuco (Northeast of Brazil)

Background: Ciranda is a type of dance and music from Pernambuco, a state in the northeast of Brazil. It became very popular on the Atlantic coast and in particular on the island of Itamaracá. On Itamaracá the wives of fishermen sang and danced while waiting for their husbands to arrive from the sea after the day's catch. The Ciranda also appeared simultaneously in areas of the interior countryside, Zona da Mata Norte.

There are several interpretations for the origin of the word "ciranda" and for its emergence. According to Father Jaime Diniz, one of the pioneers in studying Ciranda, the term comes from the Spanish word "zaranda," which is an instrument for sifting flour. Etymologically it is an evolution of the Arabic word "çarand."

In the beginning, Ciranda participants were mostly rural workers, fishermen, and laborers. Participants would dance where streets ended, in the terraces of rural workers' homes, and then continue on into the night at residences, social clubs, bars, and restaurants. From the 1970s onwards, Ciranda evolved into a consumer product for tourists, slightly modifying the dance that became more of a spectacle.

But there are still keepers of the tradition, composers and singers who are called *cirandeiros* (men) and *cirandieras* (women). They continue to innovate and create ciranda music for all to enjoy. When a Ciranda happens, a *mestre* (master), *contra-mestre* (asst. director), and musicians gather in the center of a circle. Traditionally, participants face the center of the circle, holding hands, and swinging their bodies to the rhythm as they dance in a counter-clockwise movement.

Dance movements are simple: following the beat of the music, four steps are taken to the right, starting with the left foot crossing the right. When dancers hear the strong beat of the bass drum, which occurs every four beats on the pulse (or first downbeat), they swing (lean in) towards the center with their shoulders, accenting the force of the beat. They also follow this movement by raising and lowering their arms hand in hand.

Musical Characteristics: The Ciranda percussion ensemble has three major musical elements: the bombo (similar to a floor tom), ganzá (a shaker made of steel with seeds inside), and the caixa or tarol (snare drum). The bombo is essential for emphasis of the strong beat, or beat 1 (first downbeat). All three are the most common instruments used in traditional ciranda. Wind instruments, such as trombone, saxophone, and trumpet, are very common as well. Historically, instruments like the maraca (a gourd with seeds inside) and caracaxá (a rattle specifically from Pernambuco) were also used.

The *cirandeiro* master is the most important member of the ciranda, being responsible for improvising verses, playing the ganzá, and presiding over the music and dance. A whistle around his neck helps with his duties. Nowadays, it can be said that the ciranda is also characterized by the use of call and response singing: the *cirandeiro* master sings the verse and a vocal group repeats that same verse afterwards. The assistant director can play both the bombo and the caixa and replaces the master when necessary. One of the most famous cirandieras is Lia de Itamaracá, a Brazilian singer and



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composer who is considered a living heritage of the State of Pernambuco. She is a national Ciranda reference and her name is linked to the island, Itamaracá, where she was born and still lives. She is an icon of perseverance and resistance because of her music. Her importance transcends categories, as she is known internationally and in music circles outside of folk, regional, or popular music circuits.



Musical Activity: Students will be able to sing to the Ciranda rhythm in Portuguese, as well as understand the meaning of pulse.

Pulse is immediately associated with the regular beat of our heart. Our pulse is not always the same—when you are resting or not moving, your heart beats more slowly. It beats faster when you are walking and speeds up even more when you are running. In music, you can reproduce the pulse by clapping your hands.

Ciranda main instruments and their musical notation:

$\text{♩} = 90$

Bombo (Bass Drum)	
Caixa (Snare Drum)	
Ganzá (Shaker)	



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“Minha Ciranda” lyrics (Portuguese/ English), sung by Lia de Itamaracá

Minha ciranda não é minha só
Ela é de todos nós
Ela é de todos nós
A melodia principal quem guia
É a primeira voz
É a primeira voz

My ciranda is not only mine
It belongs to all of us
It belongs to all of us
The main melody is sung
By the first voice
By the first voice

Pra se dançar ciranda
Juntamos mão com mão
Formando uma roda
Cantando uma canção

To dance ciranda
We join hand to hand
Forming a circle
Singing a song

Dance Activity: Dance movements of Ciranda are simple. In a circle, holding each other’s hands and following the beat of the music, four steps are taken to the right. Start with the left foot, on the strong beat of the drum and with a slight swing of the shoulders in the direction of the circle. Follow this movement by raising and lowering their arms hand in hand. Imagine that you are a wave, moving your body fluidly with the motion of the sea.

