

You are here: [Home](#) > [UFRGS](#) > [News and Information](#) > Music is memory: research rescues the musical production of Maestro Tasso Bangel and his band, Conjunto Farroupilha

Music is memory: research rescues the musical production of Maestro Tasso Bangel

More than 600 pictures, interviews, discographies, scores, videos, audio recordings, newspaper clippings, and scientific articles were part of the research. The data is available for online and physical consultation in the archive of UFRGS' Instituto de Artes.

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By Nicole Trevisol

When I heard the first song by Conjunto Farroupilha, all the sensations, smells, and tastes of Sunday mornings at my grandparents' place were brought back. A sunny day, a bath in the river, a walk with my cousins through the 'carreiros' made by the oxen. So much joy and laughter resurfacing from the musicality reminiscent of childhood. In the south of Santa Catarina, all the traditional Gaucho songs we listened to came from a battery radio. Years later, now a resident of the capital of Rio Grande do Sul, Porto Alegre, I come across the wonders that the research group coordinated by Professor [Luciana Prass](#), from the [Musical Studies Group \(Grupo de Estudos Musicais - GEM / UFRGS\)](#) has been discovering since 2013, about the trajectory of [Maestro Tasso Bangel](#), founding member of Conjunto Farroupilha.

The recovery of the work done by maestro Tasso Bangel is the main research object of the group. More than 600 pictures, interviews, discographies, scores, videos, audio recordings, newspaper clippings, and scientific articles make up the [website dedicated to the study](#). "Music and humankind have an ancestral relationship, connecting us beyond the limiting boundaries of our families. Songs have an emotional value, allowing us to recall experiences from years ago, from another time, recalling milestones in our life. Music is memory," says Luciana.

Developed by GEM/UFRGS, a project line which was created in the 1990s by professor [Maria Elizabeth Lucas](#), the research on Tasso Bangel started in 2013 when the Maestro, composer and arranger himself met the professor with the documents that are currently under the custody of UFRGS in the Instituto de Artes' Archive. "The research group came to be without any planning. One day, maestro Tasso arrived at the UFRGS' Instituto de Artes with a suitcase in which he carried pictures and documents. He then told me: 'Professor Luciana, I was told that maybe you'd be interested in this. I'm Tasso Bangel, from the Conjunto Farroupilha, and I know that you work with popular music. I wanted to see if you'd want this, and I would like to help here. I work with musical arrangements'. The fact is, I didn't know him," says Luciana.

The teacher's trained eyes darted over the scores within the suitcase the Maestro had brought, and right away she realized that that man had a lot of knowledge in his hands. "As we talked, I began to understand who he was, a very special person. So I registered the research project, did several interviews with him, and started to understand his musical knowledge," says the researcher.

The project with Maestro Tasso Bangel resides within the ethnomusicology field of study, which aims to study music from the cultural and social perspectives of the people who experience it. This scientific area started to be explored at UFRGS in the 1990s by professor Maria Elizabeth Lucas, after returning from her doctorate in Texas, under the supervision of professor and researcher Gerard Béhague (1937/2005). "Today, ethnomusicology, in general, is focused on returning musical knowledge to the communities and sharing the authorship of projects developed with people and social groups. For that reason, maestro Tasso integrates this research, allowing us to spend time with him while he is being studied. In the process of interacting with him, we have the possibility to gain knowledge on musicality, its fundamentals, and the diversity that music is, in addition to knowing the reasons behind his musical impulse," explains Luciana.

By working with ethnomusicology, UFRGS has been building a space that goes beyond classical music, allowing the academic universe to know more about other musical genres. In this case, the research project is gathering in-depth information about the work of maestro Tasso both in the musical scenario of Rio Grande do Sul and Brazil, and also in broader scenarios of international music, since he formed and integrated countless groups during more than 70 years of his career, such as Conjunto Farroupilha, the Tom da Terra group, and the Camerata Pampeana group. Everything has been gradually made available on the [website of the project "Tasso Bangel e o eterno aprender"](#).

Conjunto Farroupilha and the Gaucho tradition

It all started in 1948 with the idea of Inah Vital – soloist of the orchestra of Rádio Farroupilha, from Porto Alegre – of setting up a vocal group that mixed female and male voices. Tasso José Bangel, 17 at the time, studied instruments and conducting at the Instituto de Bellas Artes, now known as UFRGS' Instituto de Artes. They were joined by Danilo Vidal de Castro, Alfeu de Azevedo (later replaced by Sidney Moraes), and Estrela d'Alva.

"Inah was an incredible singer." According to maestro Tasso, she wanted a vocal ensemble, and these five members formed the Conjunto Farroupilha," the researcher explains. The success was immediate. The novelty of being the first Brazilian vocal group to mix male and female voices is linked to the spread of the traditionalist movement in Rio Grande do Sul. "By including women, the group started in a revolutionary way – if seen under the gender perspective – and also became a voice for the traditionalist culture, which was just starting, initiated by Paixão Cortes and Barbosa Lessa," comments Luciana.

Flying VARIG (Viação Aérea Rio-Grandense), the Conjunto Farroupilha took the nascent traditionalist music from Rio Grande do Sul to other Brazilian states, and later to the rest of the world, reaching the United States, Europe, China, and Russia. "The first record by the group was called "Gaucho", with compositions by Paixão Cortes and Barbosa Lessa, based on regional folklore, and it has songs like *Gauchinha Bem Querida* and *Boi Barroso*. The album was very successful, and the group was called to do a broadcast on Rádio Tupi. They became a major attraction on the live stage and were invited to the first TV broadcast in Brazil (September 1950) in São Paulo," recalls the teacher.

From that moment on, Conjunto Farroupilha decided to move to southeastern Brazil and make musical programs on TV in São Paulo (Tupi TV Stations) and Rio de Janeiro (Excelsior TV Station). In the 1960s, the group had two TV shows a week, gaining the status of a popular group. The musicians began flying VARIG around the world and spreading their music, which today we call *gauchesca*. Dressed as traditional gauchos, they used the sound of the accordion and the acoustic guitar to express themes linked to the countryside, the farms, and local concepts such as *chimarrão* and *prenda*. "Today there is a criticism linked to the place of women in these traditionalist songs, but back in the days of the group formation, it had a very strong relevance, which was to spread the music from Rio Grande do Sul to the center of the country and abroad, and that is what they did. People were delighted and identified with the songs, the group was very special and, besides, they were very good at marketing," says Luciana.

The versatility of Conjunto Farroupilha allowed their interpretations to go beyond traditionalist music, ranging from Bossa Nova to regional music from all over Brazil (*baião*, *moda de viola*, etc). They did not fit on a label and this whole discovery has been raised, analyzed, documented, and made available, free of charge, by the research group formed by professor Prass and by a group of research students, many of whom worked voluntarily. In addition to Tasso Bangel, the Musical Studies Group has interviewed other active musicians who revealed that they have been influenced by Conjunto Farroupilha and see this group as an icon, a goal, an inspiration, and a reference.

Open data available at UFRGS

The data gathered by the research project "[Tasso Bangel e o eterno aprender](#)" is available in an online format at www.ufrgs.br/tassobangel, where it is constantly updated with new information. The physical documentation can be found in the Instituto de Artes' Archive, located at Campus Centro, meaning that soon other researchers will have free access to the material as well. This is the main result of the research: returning to society, in a public and liberal way, data about Tasso Bangel and the musical groups of which he was a member. All of this following the rigorous scientific method of the field of Ethnomusicology: interviews, veracity assessment, and investigation aided by the scientific literature.

To Luciana, this material being in Porto Alegre, in Rio Grande do Sul, inside a public and tuition free federal university is fundamental to the community, because it allows easy and open access to data for those who need it. "This data is our memory, and these arrangements by Maestro Tasso are works of art. Universities are the forums that will say that such works are important for society," she says.

The Bangel research nourishes contemporary studies, bringing to light critical discussions, such as those of the Feminist Movement, which questions, for example, the profusely spread 'macho sounding' lyrics present in the traditionalist songbook. It is essential that such academic debate happens together with the recovery of a memory, in this case that of Conjunto Farroupilha. "These realities from different times speak to each other, and it is important that the University has this space for research on all the subjects that we perceive to be relevant," concludes Luciana.

The Tasso Bangel Research Group and Media Playlist

We selected some songs performed by Conjunto Farroupilha for you to listen to. The complete albums, as well as songs by Conjunto Tom da Terra, are available on the project's website. You can also search for Conjunto Farroupilha on Spotify.

1. Prenda minha (public domain)
2. Negrinho do pastoreio (Barbosa Lessa)
3. Balaio (Paixão Cortes / Barbosa Lessa)
4. Piaquito Carreiteiro (Luis Menezes)
5. Insensatez (Tom Jobim / Vinícius de Moraes)
6. Por causa de você, menina (Jorge Benjor)
7. Cana Verde (A Chula) (folklore, adapted by. Barbosa Lessa-Paixão Cortes)
8. Água de Março (Tom da Terra)

You can find the complete discography at: <https://www.ufrgs.br/tassobangel/discografia/>.

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Music moves us

