

## The connection between music and dance in “Geni e o Zepelim” by Sutaques de Casa

### ARTICLE

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### Abstract

This article focuses on the choreographic representation of the song *Geni e o Zepelim*, from the Brazilian singer Chico Buarque, performed by the dance company Sutaques de Casa in 2024 under the general direction of the choreographer Leandro Matos. The purpose is to point out the political nature of the movement when handle with gender inequality and how dance can be part of an educational and enlightening process about how violence against women is still a social problem, besides recording how the connection between music and dance can maximize the artistic experience for both the artists on stage and the spectators. This is a qualitative research, carried out through interviews with the director and cast of Sutaques de Casa, which shows different perspectives about the *performance* that premiered during the Integrated Arts Concert in celebration of the 56th anniversary of the Sergipe Federal University.

**Keywords:** Art. University. Gender Inequality.

### A conexão entre música e dança em “Geni e o Zepelim” por Sutaques de Casa

### Resumo

Este artigo tem como tema a representação coreográfica da canção *Geni e o Zepelim*, do cantor brasileiro Chico Buarque, interpretada pela companhia de dança Sutaques de Casa, em 2024, sob direção geral do coreógrafo Leandro Matos. O objetivo é apontar o caráter político do movimento ao lidar com a desigualdade de gênero e como a dança pode fazer parte de um processo educativo e esclarecedor sobre como a violência contra a mulher ainda é um problema social, além de registrar como a conexão entre música e dança pode maximizar a experiência artística tanto para os artistas em cena quanto para os espectadores. Trata-se de uma pesquisa qualitativa, realizada por meio de entrevistas com o diretor e o elenco do Sutaques de Casa, que mostram diferentes perspectivas sobre o espetáculo que estreou durante o Concerto de Artes Integradas em comemoração aos 56 anos da Universidade Federal de Sergipe.

**Palavras-chave:** Arte. Universidade. Desigualdade de Gênero.

## 1 Introdução

The research object of this article is the choreographic representation of the musical piece *Geni e o Zepelim*, by the Brazilian singer and songwriter Chico Buarque, performed by the dance company Sutaques de Casa in 2024, under the general direction of dancer, choreographer, and professor Leandro Matos<sup>1</sup>.

The proposal is to reflect on new approaches to body narratives on stage and movement politics as alternative modes of existence in Dance. The objective is to highlight the political nature of movement when addressing gender inequality and to demonstrate how dance can be part of an educational and enlightening process regarding the fact that violence against women remains both a social and gender issue. Furthermore, the article seeks to document the connection between music and dance, and how the latter can maximize the artistic experience for both dancers and spectators.

The research adopted the Research-Action (Pesquisa-Ação) methodology with a qualitative approach, through which interviews were conducted with the director and members of Sutaques de Casa. The study made it possible to capture different perspectives on the performance, which premiered during the Concerto de Artes Integradas (Integrated Arts Concert) in 2024, in celebration of the 56th anniversary of the Federal University of Sergipe (UFS – *Universidade Federal de Sergipe*), when the Sergipe-based company was invited to represent the Department of Dance at UFS.

As a result, it was possible to recognize the relevance of this performance to the history of Sutaques de Casa and the company's contribution to the interpretation of the song *Geni e o Zepelim*. Finally, a descriptive analysis of the performance's scenes was carried out, as well as of the contexts in which it was presented, in order to demonstrate the influence exerted by the audience on the scene.

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## 2 Motivação da pesquisa

1 This research was motivated by the desire to document one of the most remarkable and significant performances in the history of the dance company Sutaques de Casa, under the general direction of the Sergipe-born dancer, choreographer, and professor Leandro Matos.

The choreographic representation of the musical piece *Geni e o Zepelim*, by the Brazilian singer and songwriter Chico Buarque, was developed and premiered in May 2024, featuring the following cast: Vitória Santos<sup>2</sup>, Antonio Ramon<sup>3</sup>, Camyla Vitorino<sup>4</sup>, Elizabeth Franco<sup>5</sup>, Franciele Eloy<sup>6</sup>, Letícia Santana<sup>7</sup>, Leandro Matos and Pérola Juliana<sup>8</sup>.

In addition to its presentation at the Concerto de Artes (Arts Concert), in the same year the choreography was also performed at two other events: the I Formação para as Diferenças: Compartilhando Saberes (First Training for Differences: Sharing Knowledge), held at the Nelson Mandela Center of Excellence in May, and the IX ESEB – Encontro Sergipano da Educação Básica (Sergipe Meeting on Basic Education), at the Colégio de Aplicação of the Federal University of Sergipe (UFS – *Universidade Federal de Sergipe*) in August 2024.

“The idea of registration, whose Latin etymological origin – *regestum* – means the resumption of something that has already happened (*re-gestum*), refers to the transcription and writing of important information” (Ribeiro, 2020, p.3). This research acknowledges the

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importance of writing, of documenting significant events and research inquiries, and of reflecting on different perspectives regarding the same work. “The term ‘recognize’ is directly linked to the imaginary, understanding the imaginary as something concretely created from the imagination of something that is invented” (Moura, 2011, p.4).

1 Through interviews with the director of the company and the entire cast participating in the performance *Geni e o Zepelim*, it was possible to establish connections between the choreography and movement politics that promote alternative modes of existence in Dance.

### 3 Contextualization of the song

The song *Geni e o Zepelim* belongs to the musical style MPB – *Música Popular Brasileira* (Brazilian Popular Music) and was released in 1978 as part of the musical play *Ópera do Malandro*, the 1979 album of the same name, and the 1986 film, all sharing the same title. The song criticizes social hypocrisy and the way society treats the “different” and the marginalized, with the character Geni serving as a metaphor for the “other.”

Emerging during a period of deep oppression and censorship in Brazil, under the Military Dictatorship (1964–1985), the song exemplifies how music became a tool of resistance and expression, using metaphors and irony to circumvent the regime. In the play, Geni is a prostitute constantly oppressed by the people of her town, until a Zeppelin appears in the sky, and its commander threatens to bomb the city if Geni refuses to submit to him. According to one member of the group:

*During Geni I visualize many things, because in the scene we perceive not only the choreography but also the lyrics of the song, written during a very critical period in Brazil. There are several interpretations of the lyrics, but for me, it is about Geni representing those who suffer oppression from society (Eloy, 2024, personal interview).*

Thus, the very people who once humiliated and violated Geni in every possible way suddenly call her a savior, as she is the only one capable of preventing the city from being

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destroyed. Persuaded by the desperate and fervent pleas of the population, the woman agrees to be involved with the commander of the Zeppelin, believing that, in doing so, she would cease to be despised and humiliated by the townspeople. However, this does not happen. On the very next morning after her involvement with the commander, Geni wakes up to the sound of the crowd's screams, now even more violent and aggressive. This fact reflects not only the hypocrisy of social behaviors but also the objectification and surveillance of women's bodies in every sense. In the words of another group member:

*When we premiered at the Integrated Arts Concert (Concerto de Artes Integradas), it was very shocking for the audience, who did not expect this choreography. I believe that many went home reflecting on what they had seen that night. We do not know the reality of others, so perhaps someone in the audience was experiencing a situation of violence and was able to see themselves during the performance (Santos, 2024, personal interview).*

Although the song was released in 1978, its lyrics remain profoundly relevant, especially when we consider the data collected by the National Council of Justice (CNJ – *Conselho Nacional de Justiça*), which recorded just over 380,000 cases of violence against women in the Brazilian judiciary system in only five months of 2024.

#### 4 Geni e o Zepelim by Sutaques de Casa

Sutaques de Casa, a dance company founded in 2022 by Leandro Matos, aims to celebrate the Sergipe identity and the richness of Sergipe's culture and its people. The company's works propose a contemporary reading of popular manifestations from Sergipe, aiming to valorize them and act as a symbol of resistance against the erasure of popular culture today. Professor and coordinator of the Department of Dance at the Federal University of Sergipe (UFS), Daniel Moura, highlighted in an interview with Portal UFS<sup>9</sup>, destacou: "*The group Sutaques de Casa is directed by the student Leandro Matos and is a highly committed group.*"<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup> Official website of the Federal University of Sergipe (UFS).

<sup>10</sup> Full article available at: <https://www.ufs.br/conteudo/74312-concerto-de-artes-integradas-reune-grande-publico-para-comemorar-os-56-anos-da-ufs>.

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The choreographic representation of the song *Geni e o Zepelim* faced the challenge of adapting to the presence of the Coro e Orquestra Sinfônica da UFS (UFS Choir and Symphony Orchestra), since the event aimed to integrate various artistic manifestations. Adjustments were made to align the performances. Conductor Ion Bressan emphasized in an interview: “*The idea was to integrate all the arts of UFS with a national repertoire in a sensational show. It’s a special night and, for me, one of the best performances of all time because all areas are very well integrated*”<sup>11</sup> (Bressan, 2024).

## 5 Analysis of the performance scenes and relation to the lyrics

In a text titled *Corpo em contraste: A Dança-Teatro como Memória*, Ciane Fernandes (2007) reflects that Laban’s dance-theater referred to a dance based on the laws of bodily movement itself, rather than as a tool to communicate predetermined content. Content was understood as something inherent to human movement, without separating movement from form. After all, where does intention end and gesture begin, or vice versa? For Laban, human movement does not represent feeling as a dynamic spatial form—that is, constantly transforming. On the contrary, movement is feeling (Moacyr, 2022, p.23).

For the choreography *Geni e o Zepelim*, the artistic form employed was Dance-Theater (Dança-Teatro), a concept developed by the German dancer Kurt Jooss (1901–1979), which combines dance with theatrical elements such as sounds, spoken words, and dramatic expression. In the choreographic representation of *Geni*, the element most employed throughout the performance was the dramatic intensity of facial and bodily expressions, lifts, and grips. This interpretation of the scenes, together with the song lyrics, helps the audience perceive male characters as personifications of machismo, censorship, and oppression, and female characters as those affected, embodying the figure of Geni.

During an interview conducted via WhatsApp on September 10, 2024, company member and participant in the performance Camyla Vitorino<sup>12</sup> highlighted:

*The song has strong lyrics, so the scenes also needed to carry that strength. The intensity of the movements helped a lot in conveying this intensity from the audience’s perspective. It reached me sincerely, even knowing it was a*

<sup>11</sup> Full article available at: <https://www.ufs.br/conteudo/74312-concerto-de-artes-integradas-reune-grande-publico-para-comemorar-os-56-anos-da-ufs>.

<sup>12</sup> Member of the dance company Sutaques de Casa and participant in the performance *Geni e o Zepelim*.



*performance and none of it was real; the feelings were very realistic. I could feel both the fragility and strength that Geni exhibited during the performance (Vitorino, 2024, personal interview).*

## 5.1 Scene I: *É a rainha dos detentos, das loucas, dos lazarentos*

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The first scene presents the entrance of the female characters, whose presence and movements already outline the atmosphere of the performance. Through choreography and music, issues of power, oppression, and resistance are highlighted, preparing the audience for the unfolding narrative.

Legend:

- Character 1: Leandro Matos
- Geni 1: Pérola Juliana
- Character 2: Antonio Ramon
- Geni 2: Vitória Santos

The song *Geni e o Zepelim* begins with the verses:

De tudo que é nego torto,  
Do mangue, do cais, do porto  
Ela já foi namorada,  
O seu corpo é dos errantes  
Dos cegos, dos retirantes,  
É de quem não tem mais nada  
Dá-se assim desde menina,  
Na garagem, na cantina  
Atrás do tanque, no mato,  
É a rainha dos detentos  
Das loucas, dos lazarentos,  
Dos moleques do internato  
E também vai amiúde,  
Com os velhinhos sem saúde  
E as viúvas sem porvir,  
Ela é um poço de bondade  
(BUARQUE, Chico, 1979).

The entrance of the female characters—Elizabeth Franco, Franciele Eloy, Letícia Santana, Vitória Santos, Pérola Juliana, and Camyla Vitorino—occurs with graceful and sensual movements. These gestures are perceived as provocative by the male characters

(Antonio Ramon and Leandro Matos), who approach and impose themselves aggressively, representing machismo through physical and verbal violence, harassment, and objectification of the female body.

According to dancer Vitória Santos: *“I perceive the tone of abuse in the scene right at the beginning, with the men’s looks trying to diminish us, and also in the nuances of the lifts and the weight of the movements we perform”* (Santos, 2024, personal interview).

In parallel, Leticia Santana recounts her experience during the scene:

*As soon as I start dancing I feel powerful, but the moment the boys start interfering with us, I feel a mixture of anger, nervousness, and anxiety, wanting to leave. I no longer feel the power I felt at the beginning* (Santana, 2024, personal interview).

## 5.2 Scene II: *Joga pedra na Geni*

The first chorus occurs:

Joga pedra na Geni,  
Joga pedra na Geni  
Ela é feita pra apanhar,  
Ela é boa de cuspir  
Ela dá pra qualquer um,  
Maldita Geni  
Um dia surgiu, brilhante,  
Entre as nuvens, flutuante  
Um enorme zepelim  
(BUARQUE, Chico, 1979).

The first explosion of the chorus is marked by Character 1 pulling the hair and forcefully taking one of the female characters, who from that moment embodies the figure of Geni 1. Immediately afterward, Character 1 throws her like an object to Character 2, who throws her back, materializing the issue of women’s objectification in society.

After this, Character 1 performs a sequence of spins while holding Geni 1, followed by the woman being thrown to the floor and desperately trying to escape from the two men, without success. Character 2 grabs one of Geni 1’s feet and drags her across the floor until she can stand.



Supporting herself only on one foot, she attempts to slap Character 2 in the face but is prevented by Character 1, who grabs her hand and carries her away from Character 2. This action symbolically and poetically illustrates the silencing of women when they try to report or react to any form of violence they suffer.

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*I find the lifts and carries very striking because they are really performed with force; there's no way to do them lightly in these moments. I think it's fantastic because the audience can feel the strength executed during the choreography (Franco, 2024, personal interview).*

### 5.3 Scene III: *Essa dama era Geni, mas não pode ser Geni*

The song continues:

Pairou sobre os edifícios,  
Abriu dois mil orifícios  
Com dois mil canhões assim,  
A cidade apavorada  
Se quedou paralisada,  
Pronta pra virar geleia  
Mas do zepelim gigante,  
Desceu o seu comandante  
Dizendo: Mudei de ideia,  
Quando vi nesta cidade  
Tanto horror e iniquidade,  
Resolvi tudo explodir  
Mas posso evitar o drama,  
Se aquela formosa dama  
Esta noite me servir,  
Essa dama era Geni  
Mas não pode ser Geni,  
Ela é feita pra apanhar  
Ela é boa de cuspir,  
Ela dá pra qualquer um  
Maldita Geni  
(BUARQUE, Chico, 1979)

As Geni 1 is carried away, the figure of Geni 2 appears, jumping onto Character 2's back in her defense. However, she is caught by surprise and attacked by him, leaving her on the ground. Character 2 then receives Geni 1 from Character 1's shoulders and begins spinning with her through the air, preventing any attempt at escape.

At this moment, there is a passage in the performance where Character 1 carries Geni 1 alongside Character 2 in a march. During the second explosion of the lyrics, Geni 1 manages to free herself from Character 1's arms, and her dance can be interpreted as an act of liberation, reclaiming her own body. Her gestures, with hands extended toward Geni 2, symbolically represent sorority and solidarity among women.

## 5.4 Scene IV: *Mas de fato, logo ela, tão coitada, tão singela*

The song continues with the verses:

Mas de fato, logo ela,  
Tão coitada, tão singela  
Cativara o forasteiro,  
O guerreiro tão vistoso  
Tão temido e poderoso,  
Era dela prisioneiro  
Acontece que a donzela,  
E isso era segredo dela  
Também tinha seus caprichos,  
E a deitar com homem tão nobre  
Tão cheirando a brilho e a cobre,  
Preferia amar com os bichos  
(BUARQUE, Chico, 1979)

As Geni 1 manages to escape, the male characters seize Geni 2, who experiences the same process of objectification that Geni 1 underwent at the beginning of the performance. She is thrown back and forth by Characters 1 and 2, who frustrate all her attempts to flee, symbolically representing the repetition of these stories throughout human history, showing how different women continue to be victims of oppression and gender-based violence.

## 5.5 Scene V: *Vai com ele, vai Geni, você pode nos salvar*

The song continues with the verses:

Ao ouvir tal heresia,

A cidade em romaria  
Foi beijar a sua mão,  
O prefeito de joelhos  
O bispo de olhos vermelhos,  
E o banqueiro com um milhão  
Vai com ele, vai Geni,  
Vai com ele, vai Geni  
Você pode nos salvar,  
Você vai nos redimir  
Você dá pra qualquer um,  
Bendita Geni  
Foram tantos os pedidos,  
Tão sinceros, tão sentidos  
Que ela dominou seu asco,  
Nessa noite lancinante  
Entregou-se a tal amante,  
Como quem dá-se ao carrasco  
Ele fez tanta sujeira,  
Lambuzou-se a noite inteira  
Até ficar saciado,  
E nem bem amanhecia  
Partiu numa nuvem fria,  
Com seu zepelim prateado  
Num suspiro aliviado,  
Ela se virou de lado  
E tentou até sorrir,  
Mas logo raiou o dia  
E a cidade em cantoria,  
Não deixou ela dormir  
Joga pedra na Geni,  
Joga bosta na Geni  
Ela é feita pra apanhar,  
Ela é boa de cuspir  
Ela dá pra qualquer um,  
Maldita Geni  
(BUARQUE, Chico, 1979)

At this moment in the performance, Geni 1 is grabbed by Character 2, who brings her back to the stage, while Character 1 forcibly holds Geni 2. Side by side, the two figures embodying Geni experience the violence depicted in the lyrics, in a poetic and symbolic representation of the fact that different women, in social contexts, may be subjected to the same forms of oppression and violence.

## 5.6 Scene VI: *Maldita Geni*

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Joga pedra na Geni  
Joga bosta na Geni  
Ela é feita pra apanhar  
Ela é boa de cuspir  
Ela dá pra qualquer um  
Maldita Geni  
(BUARQUE, Chico, 1979)

*“The moment of the final scene, when all the women gather to protect each other, is what touches me the most, as it represents what should always happen in real life: women united to empower themselves and fight against what harms us”* (Santana, 2024, personal interview).

In contrast to the ending of the song lyrics, which concludes negatively, the outcome of the performance is described as a “release” by director and choreographer Leandro Matos:

*For me, the best scene is the final one. And not because they throw us to the floor, but I feel it as a release. I feel it's the possibility I would also like to see, because I am inside the scene, but if I were outside I would be very happy to witness this comeback, due to the reflection on sorority that it presents. Sorority is not only in words, but in practice, and what you do on stage is practice. The final scene is the moment in which you take hold of the power you have, which society tries to take from you. It's not about teaching you to empower yourselves, because you already are. I feel that at that moment you have the opportunity to unleash yourselves. So I want it to be felt that these are women artists performing a scene in which, in the end, the triumph is theirs* (Matos, 2024, personal interview).

When Geni 1, Geni 2, and all the female characters return to the stage to unite and confront the male characters, both men are thrown to the floor.

Matos adds: *“I perceive that Geni re-signifies, and that, for me, is important. I believe that one of the expressions that most symbolizes and speaks about this choreography is re-signifying these cruelties that we know happen in society”* (Matos, 2024, personal interview).

For Antonio Ramon: “the strength that the girls create to protect themselves is very striking. Because the scene as a whole is very heavy, the mood is low, and the ending resolves all of that” (Ramon, 2024, personal interview).

And for Elizabeth Franco:

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*The ending of the choreography goes against the song lyrics, which conclude negatively, but our choreography ends positively. Because we enter the scene already knowing what will happen, I feel very empowered thinking that I have many women with me. I feel very happy to be in this union among women, I feel comfortable. I was anxious waiting for the ending that shows people the true message of this choreography, which is about female empowerment (Franco, 2024, personal interview).*

## 6 Audience influence on the performance

*On the day of the premiere at the theater, I believe that the final scene was a relief for many people, and I must also emphasize how much each person on stage gave of themselves, because since that day people have been commenting extensively on the choreography of Geni (Matos, 2024, personal interview).*

In its first public presentation, the performance included a live orchestra and choir, which enriched the artistic experience for both the dancers on stage and the audience. There was no prior warning to the audience about the works that would be presented at the event, so *Geni e o Zepelim* surprised the audience with the performance.

*The creative process of Geni seemed magical to me because we had nothing pre-arranged, and the choreography emerged from a few experiments. I think we basically created Geni in a single rehearsal, and it's not just any choreography—it's a fantastic creation. Many of the feedbacks we received about the premiere day focused on the choreography of Geni, which reflects how successfully we delivered a competent work. Every time I can, I watch this performance again because I can't get over it—it was truly fantastic and memorable (Franco, 2024, personal interview).*

During the final scene, the choir's protest shouts in response to the representation of violence in the performance began to merge with those of the audience, with someone shouting “Machista!” among other remarks. This moment highlights how affected and immersed the spectators were in the theatrical experience. As Daltro notes: “all bodies

affect and are affected by diverse forces of varying intensities and are constituted in each relation they establish” (Daltro, 2011, p. 9).

Only a few days after its premiere, the performance was presented for the second time at the *I Formação Para as Diferenças: Compartilhando Saberes*, at the Centro de Excelência Nelson Mandela, an event aimed at students and teachers of the institution. At the beginning of the choreography, there was a technical problem with the sound system, resulting in the performance being carried out in complete silence, offering a new perspective on the piece. As Daltro observes: “reinventing the body in the realm of dance and its relation to environments, weaving other modes of bodily organization and imagining possibilities of movement, presence, and existence” (Daltro, 2011, p. 9).

The most recent performance, up to the time of writing this research, took place during the *IX ESEB – Encontro Sergipano da Educação Básica*, at the Colégio de Aplicação (UFS), in August 2024, also aimed at students and teachers. On this occasion, the performance featured a change in the costumes of the company members portraying Geni 1 and Geni 2: previously entirely white, the costumes were changed to a black-and-white combination, transforming the performers into scenic elements themselves and reinforcing the symbolic contrast of the scene. According to Carvalho (2024):

Movement toward the foreground or eccentric plane, and toward the background or concentric plane, is determined by the direction toward light or darkness, toward life or death. Thus, we have a contrast between white and black, expressed in movement or stillness, light or dark, sound or silence (Carvalho, 2024, p.6).

*“What happens on stage are reverberations of what happens in real life; the difference is the poetic, dance-like, and dramaturgical tone, because it is important that art be political. Being an artist is being a political being”* (Matos, 2024, personal interview).

According to Souza (2020):

By calling spectators to the performance through the problem situation it presents, Forsythe assumes that we will be able to think physically about its solution. We do this by moving, dancing, composing, confronting our bodily abilities and limitations (Souza, 2020, p.142)



## 7 Final Considerations

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It can be concluded that the political nature of movement becomes evident when addressing gender inequality and demonstrating how dance can be integrated into an educational and awareness-raising process, revealing that violence against women continues to be a social and gender issue. Therefore, it is increasingly necessary for performances to promote discussions about urgent issues, and art emerges as an important ally, as poetic representation allows for the analysis and reflection on situations that often go unnoticed in everyday life.

It is essential that artistic languages integrate more and more, providing an enriched and immersive experience for both producers and consumers. The reflections developed throughout this research highlight the importance of audience interaction during the performance, showing how all present—on and off stage—affect and are affected by the poetic representation.

Thus, this research can be understood as an extension of the performance *Geni e o Zepelim*, by the dance company Sutaques de Casa, under the general direction of Leandro Matos.

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