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# La représentation thématique des compositrices de musique classique sur les plateformes de streaming musical

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#### Article abstract

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# The Thematic Representation of Female Composers in Classical Music on Streaming Platforms

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Women have been increasingly fighting for their rights and equality in Society. Historically, in the 18th century, women's musical education was considered a distraction and participation in family events, but professional engagement was not deemed acceptable. Given this context, questions arose about the existence of female classical music composers and whether their works are present on current music streaming platforms. Based on this, the study aimed to investigate how these composers are thematically represented on these platforms. Methodologically, the study is qualitative and exploratory, employing case study methods. The search terms used were "woman" and "classical music" along with the composers' names. The criterion for selecting composers was that they belonged to the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries, as many male composers achieved enduring success during this period. The selected composers were Maria Anna Mozart, Fanny Mendelssohn, Clara Schumann, Chiquinha Gonzaga, and Alma Mahler-Werfel. The chosen platforms were Spotify, Amazon Music, Deezer, and Apple Music. The research demonstrated a scarcity of historical records about the analyzed composers' lives. They were often compelled to abandon music due to family obligations, which contributed to the limited availability of their music on the platform.

*Keywords:* knowledge organization, thematic representation, indexing, female composers, music streaming platforms

#### Introduction

Feminism is characterized as women becoming aware, as a human collective, of the oppression, domination, and exploration of which they have been and are objects by the collective of men at the heart of patriarchy in its different historical phases (Auad, 2003). By developing this awareness, women have realized their ability to liberate themselves and transform society. Based on this principle, according to the author, feminism is articulated as a political philosophy and, simultaneously, a social movement. History records systematic disrespect for women's rights, such as not being able to vote, unequal pay when compared to men in the same jobs, and other scenarios.

In Antiquity, women were strictly excluded from public life and confined to their homes, only allowed out on special occasions, such as religious festivals. They were hidden from male eyes, including their families, the rest of the time. In the Middle Ages, women began to have some power of action but were still submissive to men. On the one hand, there were peasant women who worked in the fields daily;

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on the other, there were the women of the nobility confined to household chores. Even at that time, women who did not follow the social norms imposed, such as behaving modestly, looking after the home, and obeying their father or husband, were considered insane, associated with demons, and became targets for persecution (Auad, 2003).

From the late Middle Ages to the Modern Age, Europe witnessed the phenomenon known as the Inquisition, a time in history when men and women were accused and executed for practicing witchcraft, making pacts with demons or any relationship with what was considered supernatural. Auad (2003) estimates that around 90% of the people executed during this period were women.

Since then, women have increasingly fought for their rights and equality. However, areas still require further discussion, such as the field of music. Fresca (2016) explains that since the eighteenth century, high-society families have been interested in women's musical education, as it was considered one more element in a woman's education, like crocheting and learning another language. Although it was considered a distraction for them and a way to liven up family celebrations, performing in this area professionally was not considered acceptable. Centuries later, this culture still permeates today from a certain perspective. According to Carneiro, orchestras such as the Berlin and Vienna Philharmonics did not allow women until 48 years ago. Although the situation has changed and the number has increased significantly, women

are still in the minority in orchestras, music composition, and conducting (Fresca, 2016).

Fresca (2016) points out that there are historical cases of women who were talented composers, but whose potential was discouraged by their families and the male composers they were close to. The culture of exclusion of women's rights and citizenship is ingrained in the institutional mentality, so there is almost no social or political strangeness in creating and maintaining Knowledge Organization Systems (KOS) aimed at this domain.

KOS can be referred to as knowledge representations and semantically structured conceptual systems aiming to establish terminological standardizations. These systems are considered to be tools for interpreting structures, assisting in the search for and retrieval of information, building maps, and creating knowledge (Carlan, 2010; Hjørland, 2008; Soergel, 1990; Vickery, 2008).

The promotion of equality between men and women has been recognized by the United Nations (UN) as an important element for the stable development of socio-economic systems. In this respect, the social function of KOS is highlighted by showing its importance for qualified access to issues, as it is an instrument of representation and must be designed to highlight the criteria used for representation.

Against this backdrop of exclusion and oppression, one is naturally compelled to ask whether anyone has ever heard classical music composed by a woman and if her works are included and represented on music streaming platforms. To answer this question, this research aims to investigate the thematic representation of women composers of classical music in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries on music streaming platforms to understand how the process of representation and retrieval of their works occurred. The specific objectives are: 1) to analyze the search and retrieval of musical works and female composers on music streaming platforms and 2) to compare the thematic representation obtained in the analysis results with the male composers on these platforms.

The research's justification stems from the contextualization carried out above, the theme's impact, and the fundamental role that instruments play in the thematic representation and retrieval of information. In this sense, developing this research is essential, as it can reach users by searching and retrieving songs on streaming platforms.

### The Thematic Representation of Women

#### The History of Women Composers in Musical Education

With the creation and development of feminist movements and the dissemination of women's studies, Wolff (1982, p. 53-54) introduces that "there has been an articulated and continuing objection to the way in which women have been 'eliminated' from the history of the arts, which seems to consist almost exclusively of men". In this scenario, in the 17th,

18th, and 19th centuries, women suffered social restrictions and obstacles, such as the ban on drawing live models in the French and English academies and attending cafés in London, where literature was discussed. As a result, many women writers and poets were forced to adopt male pseudonyms (Andrade, 1991).

When studying the role played by women in the history of classical music in Germany, Rieger (1986) observed the existence of barriers created from the Middle Ages onwards, specifically in the production and composition of music. For centuries, women were forbidden to sing in church choirs, however, after the 17th century, they were allowed to play the harp and piano, for leisure and business purposes, such as entertaining guests and family and a good investment for advantageous weddings, respectively (Andrade, 1991). In the 19th century, musical academies were created to provide musical education for girls, even though the initial aim was to train boys to compose orchestras. They received in-depth, professional training, while the girls received the basics, such as singing and piano lessons. Until the beginning of the 20th century, women were not allowed to play in orchestras (Andrade, 1991).

#### The Brazilian Scenario

In the Brazilian scenario, Freire and Portela (2013) explain that women's social participation was very restricted in the colonial period due to patriarchy, in which women lived in a situation of subservience, as men had materialistic, political, and all-around power over them.

The arrival of the Portuguese Royal family in Brazil led to the development and practice of music and the arts, which opened up space for women to perform. Even so, these practices continued and persisted throughout the 19th century. Even during this period, women could participate in religious festivals, which were rare moments for their socialization (Quintaneiro, 1996). As the nineteenth century wore on, they gained space for other festivities, such as social gatherings and balls, which allowed women to perform musical entertainment. Despite these achievements, Del Priore (2007) explains that there was still a barrier supported by the country's laws, culturally rooted customs, and science itself. According to scientists of the time, women should stay at home and avoid physical and mental exertion, as they were considered inferior to men. An education could jeopardize their duties as wives and mothers.

According to D'Incao (2000), when they had more space, many women took the risk of writing and composing songs. Information on the dates of the first compositions written by women is not specific. Even so, it is possible to see some publication dates of compositions that were supposedly among the first in Table 1 (Freira & Portela, 2013; Portela, 2005).

Table 1 shows the supposed dates of the first recorded compositions, based on studies by Portela (2005). The years

Table 1

Date of composition publications. Adapted from Portela (2005).

Composers	Titles	Date of publications
Tekla Badarzewsa	La Piére dune Vierge	Mid-1850s
Francisca Pinheiro de Aguiar	A flor da Esperança	16/01/1853
Maria Teixeira	Umbelina (waltz)	1861
Rafaela Roswadowska	Dois amores (opera)	1861
Maria Guilhermina de Noronha e Castro	Passagem de Humaitá	1868

of publication vary from the earliest, "La Piére dune vierge", by Telça Badarzewa, in 1850, to the most recent, "Passagem de Humaitá", by Maria Guilhermina de Noronha e Castro, in 1868. The variation is almost 20 years.

Murgel (2016) also points out that the book "Nós, as mulheres" by Nilcéia Baroncelli mentions 174 female classical music composers. When publishing the book, the author also reports that it was too difficult to carry out the survey, in which many women were left without biographies, relating them only to the information of a score found or mentioned by an author occasionally. There is no information about the composers, only their names and the records of their scores.

Most of Brazil's female composers of the 19th and early 20th centuries came from wealthier regions, such as the states of Recife, Bahia and Amazonas (Murgel, 2016). Some cases can be used as examples, such as Marília Batista, who came from a wealthier social class and recorded her first composition at 15, without caring what the society she lived in would think. Murgel (2016) explains that more compositions were signed anonymously than were registered in the name of female authors due to various factors, such as the appropriation of compositions by male composers and the use of male pseudonyms due to the lack of recognition and freedom to carry out the publication process.

In the 20th century, the professionalization of women musicians, especially composers, grew considerably, even expanding to an international level. Some of these composers from this period became known as Helza Cameu, Ernestina Índia do Brazil, Ilza Nogueira, Alda de Oliveira, Marisa Rezende, and Babi de Oliveira (Freira & Portela, 2013).

The need to address the Brazilian scene, in particular, stems from the country's connections with Europe. When a European country colonized Brazil, part of its culture, such as classical music, was transferred to Brazilians. As a result, many talented but little-known female composers of European descent have been born, which makes this a promising area of research to analyze.

# The Thematic Representation in the Information Environment

Thematic representation is characterized by the abbreviated description of a specific topic. Its process stems from the analysis of the subject and the assignment of concepts by information professionals qualified to condense the topic and represent it consistently (Novellino, 1996). An indexing process is employed using KOS tools to ensure the thematic representation is adequate.

The indexing process is characterized by different stages, which vary according to the objectives of the information environment. In general, it is characterized by three phases: (i) analysis of the content of the document, in which documentary reading is applied to identify and select concepts; (ii) identification and selection of concepts, resulting from the analysis, through documentary reading; and (iii) translation of the concepts in terms of indexing languages, at which point KOS tools are used to translate the concepts, so that they are organized, represented using a controlled vocabulary and made available for user access (Associação Brasileira de Normas Técnicas - ABNT, 1992; Fujita, 2003; Lancaster, 2003).

In this sense, Hjørland (2018) considers that the quality of indexing is decisive for obtaining a consistent representation and effective information retrieval. Using KOS tools, such as subject heading lists, thesauruses, ontologies, etc., can guarantee the standardization of the terms that will be selected when performing the representation.

There is a difference between performing concept representation in subject analysis during the concept identification and selection process and at the stage of translating concepts into indexing language terms. The first procedure takes place during the analysis of document content, in which it is available in its entirety, and concepts are used to identify the intrinsic thematicity of the document. In the second process, the representation is based on the terms extracted from the analyzed document, and for this, the indexing language characterized by KOS tools will be used (Fujita, 2003).

In the digital environment, the same indexing procedure occurs, the thematic representation done by filling in subject metadata. In the system interface, this metadata will be characterized by descriptors and keywords to be retrieved in the search bar. Lima and Alvares (2012) add to this by explaining that thematic representation takes place from a perspective in which the user searches for information using descriptors,

indexes, keywords, or summaries to meet their needs. The aim is to represent the information by filling in the metadata and making it available so the user can search for a topic of interest.

#### Methodology

The research is qualitative, analytical, and exploratory; the method used was the case study. This method is characterized as an exhaustive description of a particular phenomenon related to an individual, family, group, or community to specifically know the total or partial social reality of this universe (Gaio; Carvalho & Simões, 2008).

The research was divided into three parts: (i) selection of female composers from the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries; (ii) search and analysis of female composers on music streaming platforms; and (iii) search for the musical genre "classical music."

# Selection of Female Composers from the 18th, 19th, and 20th Centuries

To select the women composers, the following criteria were established: (i) to be a woman composer of classical music; (ii) to have lived in one of the selected centuries (18th, 19th, and 20th); (iii) to have been forced to give up her career at some point in her life.

A total of five female composers were selected: Maria Anna/Marianne Mozart (1751-1829); Fanny Mendelssohn (1805-1847); Alma Mahler-Werfel (1879-1964); Clara Schumann (1819-1896); and Chiquinha Gonzaga (1847-1935).

## Figure 1

Brief description of the selected female composers. Adapted from Caldas (1985), Fresca (2016), Hilmes (2015), Sadie (1994), Schulte (2019), and Solomon (1995).



They all suffered some oppression from their families and the society in which they lived, forced to give up music and carry on with domestic life without having much choice.

### Search and Analysis of Female Composers on Music Streaming Platforms

To analyze the searches, the following platforms were selected: Spotify, a music, podcast and video streaming service launched on October 7, 2008; Amazon Music, also a streaming platform and music store operated by Amazon, launched on September 25, 2007; Apple Music, with a music and video streaming service, launched by Apple on June 30, 2015, for IOS systems; and Deezer, also developed in 2007, is an audio streaming service.

The terms used to perform the searches were the composers' names: Maria Anna Mozart; Fanny Mendelssohn; Alma Mahler-Werfel; Clara Schumann; and Chiquinha Gonzaga. The aim is to see if the platforms have these composers in their catalogues.

## Search for the Musical Genre "Classical Music" on Music Streaming Platforms

It was also necessary to look at the bigger picture in addition to carrying out the searches specifically. For this reason, the following terms were chosen: "classical musical" and "women." The aim is to visualize how the platforms work with the musical genre and whether there is any redirected space for women composers.

### **Results and Discussion**

The first analysis took place on the Spotify, Amazon Music, Apple Music, and Deezer platforms, using the composers' names as terms: Maria Anna Mozart, Fanny Mendelssohn, Alma Mahler-Werfel, Clara Schumann, and Chiquinha Gonzaga. Streaming platforms subdivide the analysis.

**Spotify**: You can search for female composers in two ways: through the search bar and through pre-defined musical genres.

Searching the search bar for composer Maria Anna Mozart on Spotify yielded results that cannot be considered satisfactory since the platform only retrieved one podcast episode about the composer's life. All the songs retrieved are by her brother, Wolfgang A. Mozart, or profiles of different or unrelated artists. The search for Fanny Mendelssohn showed results that can be considered more pertinent by presenting the artist's profile with information about the composer and her compositions, many performed by different artists.

The search for the composer Alma Mahler showed results such as her profile, with information about the composer and her songs performed by different artists. The same happened with the composer Clara Schumann, who showed her profile and compositions, which different artists also performed. The results that can be considered the most complete in terms of retrieval are in searching for the composer Chiquinha Gonzaga, with her profile and compositions, which are interpreted by other artists and by herself.

Spotify's platform does not clarify how the indexing process is carried out or the criteria for inserting a composition into a particular musical genre. As a result, users can be frustrated by not finding what they are looking for. It presents the main results as the following: the top result, which usually contains an artist profile; next to it are the four songs considered the main ones; and below are the main artists or playlists, which should be related to the songwriters searched for.

Figure 2



How the platform portrays this gender difference in the search for and retrieval of female composers was made very clear in Figure 2 when searching for the term "musical classic", whose retrieval showed only songs and profiles of male artists, which raises questions about how the procedure has been carried out. However, retrieval is only truly effective when you search for the terms "classical music" AND "women".

The search carried out directly in the musical genre categories shows yet another perspective. No playlist created for women composers of classical music is available or highlighted on the main page. Even so, it can be assumed that there may be playlists with women musicians because of their titles and covers. There is no information on whether they are composers or performers unless the music is accessed.

**Amazon music**: On this platform, the search takes place via the search bar.

When searching for the composer Maria Anna Mozart, the platform retrieved music by her brother, Wolfgang, in the same way as the search on Spotify. The results obtained from the search for Fanny Mendelssohn showed profiles of the artist and two of her albums. While the search for Alma Mahler showed her profile and one song. Despite claiming to be her profile, her photo is of an orchestra. One can assume that perhaps this orchestra constantly performs her songs. The same happened with the search for the composer Clara Schumann, which retrieved her profile and a song. However, the profile, with the composer's name, has a photo of a man, written "Benjamin Grosvenor Schumann & Brahms". The search and recovery for the composer Chiquinha Gonzaga

obtained the same panorama as on the Spotify platform, with a profile, compositions, and album.

When you search for "classical music," you can see something peculiar: in addition to retrieving male artists, playlists with songs aimed at studies and babies, such as lullabies and white noise. The same occurred when searching for "classical music AND women". It is unclear why this playlist was retrieved or the indexing process. In any case, it opens the possibility of questioning the platform's intention in assigning this type of composition. The only place with music by female composers is in playlists developed by users and made publicly available for access. It is also not explicit how the platform carries out the indexing process.

**Apple Music**: On this platform, the search takes place via the search bar and through the categories assigned in the browser

The search for the composer Maria Anna Mozart yielded slightly different results from the previous platforms. Although there are no compositions or a profile of the composer, there is a song in video format, which is supposed to have been made in her honour. This platform also features songs in video format. The search for Fanny Mendelssohn brought up playlists, her profile, and songs unrelated to the composer. The same happened with the composer Alma Mahler, who only had her profile and compositions by different artists.

On the other hand, the platform presented Clara Schumann's profile and compositions as results. The same happened when searching for Chiquinha Gonzaga. An important point is that, despite the searches and retrieval carried out using the composers' names, the platform still brings up songs and profiles that have no relation to the searched terms.

When searching for the term "classical music", the category and some more general classical music albums were retrieved. Unlike the "classical music AND women" search in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Search for the term "musical classic" AND "women" (Apple Music, 2024)



Figure 3 shows that the platform has retrieved artists and albums that don't match the terms searched, establishing a lack of consistency in the indexing process for combined terms and Boolean operators.

Deezer: On this platform, the search occurs via the search

bar and the categories assigned in the browser.

As with all the previous platforms, the search results for the composer Maria Anna Mozart only brought up compositions by her brother. Fanny Mendelssohn brought up her music and songs based on her compositions but performed by other artists. The results obtained for the term Alma Mahler only brought up songs by other artists and profiles of the composer.

The search for the composer Clara Schumann showed her pieces with different interpreters, just as it did on the Spotify platform, as well as her profile and profiles dedicated to her. The songs retrieved from the search for Chiquinha Gonzaga showed the composer's best-known profile: carnival marchinhas. Although she became famous for them, she also composed classical music.

Searching for the term "classical music" showed different albums and songs from this musical genre, unlike the search for the combined terms "classical music" AND "women," which brought up folksongs and rags, as can be seen in Figure 4

Figure 4

Search for the term "musical classic" AND "women" (Deezer, 2024)

acks Viewall							
UCK			ARTIST	ALBUM	0	POP.	
The Woman Of The House / Tr	ne Limestone Rock / Lady Anne	$\heartsuit$	··· O'Malley's Folk	Music Players Irish & Celtic P	Folk Classics 03:45	111	
Pickles and Peppers		$\heartsuit$	Nancy Fierro	Riches and Ra	gs: Classical a 02:04	1111	
Mazurka No. 2 in F Major		$\heartsuit$	Nancy Fierro	Riches and Ra	gs: Classical a 00:40	III	
Mazurka No. 20 in F Major		$\odot$	Nancy Fierro	Riches and Ra	gs: Classical a 00:48	1111	
A Totally Different Rag		$\heartsuit$	Nancy Fierro	Riches and Ra	gs: Classical a 03:08	1111	
Quatre Pieces Fugitives, Op. 1	5: No. 1 in F Major	$\heartsuit$	Nancy Fierro	Riches and Ra	gs: Classical a 02:45	111	
SUMS View all STREMANCY ST	Riches and Rags Nancy Herro Plano Cussical and Ragime Plano Music Britisme	Y	Women Fitness McGMc Soft Meexour	GREA WOMEN COMPOSES NICLASSICAL MISIC FANNY MENDELSSOHM	Class	EGNANCY ical Mu for Child B	150
Hough for the Womb	Riches and Rags: Classical and	Women Fitness	BEOT EVERCISES MUSIC	Great Women Composers In C	lassical Pregnancy Clar	ssinal Music	for La

Just as it happened on Amazon's platform when performing the same search, it happened when searching on Deezer. The results retrieved albums involving classical music for pregnant women or for exercising.

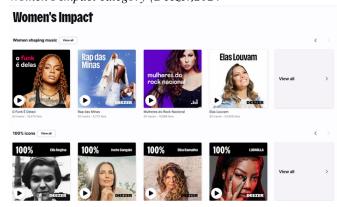
An interesting point is that Deezer has a playlist entitled Women's Impact, with playlists only by women, as seen in Figure 5.

This playlist is entirely dedicated to female artists, but none of the classical music genre is available. You have to dig deep to find it.

There is no information available on how the process of assigning representative terms takes place, i.e., how the subject metadata is filled in, to achieve consistent retrieval. The use of keywords, for example, is considered an important strategy both for users to find what they are looking for and for systems to perform retrieval (Lima & Alvares, 2012).

Figure 5

Women's Impact category (Deezer, 2024



When analyzing the platforms, it can be seen that the selected composers have been erased, especially Maria Anna Mozart, whose visibility is entirely focused on her brother, and little has been retrieved about the composer. More recent composers have gained greater visibility, with profiles and songs on the platforms. Even so, it is clear that finding these songwriters requires a lot of exploration of the platforms, which users often do not do, either due to a lack of skills or ignorance of their existence. These streaming platforms need to give them greater visibility, placing them in prominent places, creating playlists, and promoting them.

#### **Final Considerations**

Historical records have shown that the female composers analyzed were talented and had promising careers. However, at that time, women had no rights whatsoever, especially to choose what they wanted to do. Roles such as working or getting married, depending on your social class, were mandatory, regardless of what you wanted. As a result, they were almost forgotten in history, with a few historical records and interpretations of some songs remaining.

Of the composers, Maria Anna Mozart has had the least visibility, due to the lack of records of her compositions and her erasure by her brother. When searching the platforms, all the results are directed at him; what little is retrieved are podcast episodes or songs in his honour. While Chiquinha Gonzaga was the one who got the most results in the searches, with all her compositions, which she even performed. It was observed that the older the composer's date of birth and death, the less visibility she has due to the lack of historical records and the consequent erasure of her stories, while the more recent her existence, the greater her visibility, with all the historical data recorded. It is assumed that technology has been essential in preserving these stories.

The analysis showed that, although the platforms do not make available how the indexing process takes place or their metadata, there is no consistency in the indexing, a process that was evidenced when observing the existence of inconsistencies when searching for the selected terms. The lack of consistency hampers the thematic representation and retrieval of the songs. If, on the one hand, there is an attribution of inappropriate terms that do not represent the essentiality of the songs, they, in turn, will be lost in the platforms' catalogues, which directly affects their retrieval.

Even if they make pre-selected playlists available or use recommendation algorithms to shape the recommendations, which did not happen on the platforms selected during the analysis, the user still needs the skills to find them. The analysis showed that it is more complex to find playlists that are not so popular because the platforms do not push them to reach users. In this way, planning and establishing guidelines helps with the indexing process, which can improve the availability of these playlists.

Still, considering the results presented, the platforms have contributed to the erasure of the songwriters analyzed by not obtaining consistent indexing and not recovering their musical records or songs. Just as happened when they lived, today, they have been moved to the margins of the internet and almost forgotten with time and lack of knowledge.

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