



Cayambis Institute for Latin American Studies in Music
Latin American Classical Notes — Hosted by John L. Walker
Program 041, April 17, 2022

Carlos Chávez (MEX, 1919): Sextet for Piano and Strings, II, Allegro con brio. In 1921, Chávez organized the first public performance of his music. On the program were pieces for piano, a few art songs, and his sextet for piano and strings. Manuel Ponce was there, who wrote that “the most outstanding characteristic of this music is Chávez’s aspiration of modernism and originality.” He went on to say that the young composer, though he “finds himself under the influence of romanticism of the Schubert or Chopin type,” is attracted to modernism because of its “novelty and exoticism.” We’ll be listening to the second movement, *Allegro con brio*.

- Southwest Chamber Music. “Complete Chamber Works of Carlos Chávez, vol. 4,” Cambria.

Carlos Chávez (MEX, 1927): H. P., III, “El trópico.” This ballet received its premiere performance on March 31, 1932 at Philadelphia’s Metropolitan Opera House. Its essential premise, that is, the tremendous difference—as it was expressed at that time—between the lazy tropical atmosphere of the South and the machine-mad confusion of the North, provoked a great deal of controversy in the days that followed, not only because of the music, but also, because of the scenery, costumery and choreography. Indeed, it has never been produced since first heard in that city.

- Orquesta Simón Bolívar / Eduardo Mata. “Music of Latin American Masters,” Dorian.

Carlos Chávez (MEX, 1932): *Tierra mojada*. This work is scored for SATB chorus, oboe, and English horn. Dan Malmström says that in this work there is “a lightly distinct nationalism,” and that in spite of the fact that its text is by a nationalist poet, the metric flow is “totally unusual,” in that there are 52 changes of meter in only one hundred measures.

- Solistas del Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes / R. Montero. “Carlos Chávez : Obras Corales,” Quindecim.

Carlos Chávez (MEX, 1933): *Sinfonía de antígona*. Based on music previously composed by Chávez for the theater, this work, according to Béhague, features archaic modal flavor, sobriety, austere character, thematic polyphony and a wind-dominated orchestration that is reminiscent of Stravinsky’s neo-Classic style. Though its title contains the word symphony, it’s actually a single-movement tone poem that is divided into several sections. But getting back to Béhague, he considers this to be one of Chávez’s orchestral masterpieces.

- Orquesta Filarmónica de la Ciudad de México / Enrique Bátiz. “Carlos Chávez : Three Symphonies,” ASV.

Carlos Chávez (MEX, 1940): *Xochipilli*. This 1940 work, named for the Aztec god of music, dance, flowers and love, features the use of authentic-sounding instruments, such as the trombone, which is directed to produce a conch shell like sound. But more than anything else, this work represents a subjective evocation of indigenous culture.

- La Camerata, Tambuco / Eduardo Mata. “Carlos Chávez,” Dorian.

Carlos Chávez (MEX, 1953): *Symphony No. 5, III, Allegro con brio*. Chávez’s production during the late 1950s and early 1960s was dominated by his four symphonies. Written for string orchestra, the fifth symphony reveals the composer’s predilection for neo-classicism, and features polyphonic textures and harmonies. The third movement presents six interrelated motifs.

- London Symphony Orchestra / Eduardo Mata. “The Six Symphonies of Carlos Chávez,” Peerless.

Alberto Ginastera (ARG, 1934-37), *Panambí*, “Claro de luna sobre el Paraná” and “Danza de los guerreros.” *Panambí* was one of two works that Ginastera composed while still a conservatory student and that established his reputation as a nationalist composer. First written as a ballet, Ginastera also created an orchestral suite that was performed to great acclaim.

- London Symphony Orchestra / Gisèle Ben-dor. “Panambí / Estancia,” Naxos.

Alberto Ginastera (ARG, 1938): *Cantos del Tucumán*. Composed while Ginastera was still a student at the conservatory in Buenos Aires, these four songs are set for voice, violin, harp and two indigenous drums. They are based on folkloric characteristics as contributions to the prevailing nationalistic movement.

- Olivia Blackburn, soprano; various instrumentalists. “Ginastera Chamber Music,” ASV.

Alberto Ginastera (ARG, 1943), “Las horas de una estancia, III, “El mediodía. By the early 1940s, Ginastera had established himself as the leader of the nationalist movement in Argentina. His subsequent works during that decade, for example, the work that we are about to listen to, further consolidated his position of leadership. The composer himself described this style as “objective nationalism,” in which an interest in *gauchesco* traditions prevailed. But even though he rarely quotes folk materials, his music is strongly influenced by indigenous themes within a tonal idiom.

- Jessica Rivera, Mark Carver. “Spanish-American Songs,” Naxos.

Alberto Ginastera (ARG, 1945): Duo for flute and oboe (complete). Ginastera composed this three-movement duet for flutist Carelton Sprague Smith and oboist Lois Wann while visiting the US in 1945. Two years later, the two musicians premiered the work at the New York Public Library. Writing about the performance in the *New York Herald*, Virgil Thomson said, “this is the kind of music that makes one believe in the New World. Certainly no such sweetness is coming out of Europe these days, as you may well imagine.” The subtitles of its three movements are Sonata, Pastoral and Fuga.

- Anna Noakes / John Anderson. “Ginastera Chamber Music,” ASV.

Alberto Ginastera (ARG, 1960): *Cantata para América mágica, I, “Preludio y canto a la aurora.”* In this work for dramatic soprano and 53 percussion instruments, Ginastera blends folkloric elements with the thematic and structural traits commonly associated with serialism. In its six movements, the composer creates a narrative arc that moves from invocation to apocalyptic prophecy.

- Cologne West German Radio Symphony Orchestra / Stefan Asbury. “Alberto Ginastera,” Neos.

Alberto Ginastera (ARG, 1967): *Bomarzo, Prelude / Act 1, Scene 1, “Song of the Shepherd Boy.”* The Spanish libretto is based on a 1962 novel about the 16th century Italian eccentric, Pier Francisco Orsini, Duke of Bomarzo. The opera makes use of twelve-tone technique, quarter tones and controlled stochastic textures of non-synchronous repetitions of motifs and cells. Its two acts encompass a prelude and 15 scenes.

The story begins with the Duke, who drinks a magic potion that his astrologer Silvio de Narni claims will make him immortal. Instead, it is a fatal poison. As he dies, the stunted hunchback Bomarzo relives his tortured existence through a series of flashbacks. His father drags him into a haunted room where a large skeleton dances and menaces him. Later, his father is mortally wounded in battle. The young man, still a virgin, is sent to the courtesan Pantasilea in Florence, but the reflection of his horrid image in her room of mirrors disturbs him. His brother Girolamo falls from a cliff and dies. The new Duke meets Julia Farnese, but is angered when she prefers his brother Maerbale. In a macabre dance festival, erotic and terrifying dreams pass before the Duke. Still courting Julia, he spills a glass of red wine on her dress and interprets it as a premonition of death. After their marriage, Bomarzo finds himself impotent. As years go by, he becomes convinced that Julia is unfaithful with Maerbale. He orders his slave Abul to kill his brother. Silvio mixes the magic potion while Bomarzo’s nephew Nicolas watches. The boy poisons the drink. Bomarzo drinks it and dies.

The opera was premiered in Washington, DC, on May 19, 1967. Vice President Hubert H. Humphrey was but one of the many distinguished members of the audience. But it was Allen Hughes of the *New York Times* who probably set the tone for the work’s success. Commenting on its theatricality, he made sure to mention the opera’s most sensualistic elements. So, the work had been scheduled to be performed in Argentina, but the de facto president of that country banned the production, objecting to the sexual content of the story.

- The Opera Society of Washington / Julius Rudel. “Bomarzo,” Sony.