

EXCELSIOR

Juan Carlos Talavera

03/11/2025

Enrico Chapela's Symphonic Eclipse Shines

The world premiere of *Antiphaser* takes place today at Seattle's Benaroya Hall, showcasing the author's fascination with the universe. Composer Enrico Chapela (Mexico City, 1974) will debut his work *Antiphaser* today, exploring the sonority of the electric violin alongside Finnish violinist Pekka Kuusisto and the Seattle Symphony, under the baton of American conductor Andrew Litton.

In an interview with *Excelsior*, Chapela explained that the piece—which will have additional performances on November 5th and 6th at Benaroya Hall—is inspired by the idea of how Selenites (imaginary inhabitants of the Moon) would observe a terrestrial eclipse from the lunar equator.

This work reflects Chapela's ongoing fascination with themes such as the cosmos, previously explored in *Magnetar* (2011), his concerto for electric cello premiered by cellist Johannes Moser; his orchestral work *Antikythera* (2016), based on an ancient astronomical calculator; and *Lunática* (2016), inspired by the moons of the solar system.

The composer admits that his chosen themes stem from interests he could not pursue professionally, such as perfumery, astronomy, poetry, and gastronomy.

“I find a way to connect with these subjects through this work; it requires research and reading books. From that process, I derive the program notes and the materials for composing.”

Furthermore, he noted that *Antiphaser* is “a continuation of my electric cello concerto, *Magnetar*. I was looking for another astronomical theme because I plan to record an album containing both works in the future. I thought of an eclipse, although calling it that seemed unappealing, so I arrived at the idea of imagining an eclipse observed from the Moon.”

The interesting aspect of this type of eclipse, Chapela noted, is that the Moon lacks an atmosphere. Therefore, when looking at the eclipse, the sun's light is diffracted by the Earth's atmosphere, causing witnesses (Selenites) to see a reddish ring around the Earth.

This reddish ring corresponds to light diffracting through the Earth, projecting all its horizons, sunsets, and sunrises through the atmosphere. This is the core theme and the reason for the title *Antiphaser*: an imaginary act of sitting on the lunar equator at the moment a lunar eclipse occurs on Earth.

Why choose the electric violin for this piece? “It was the idea of those who commissioned the work (the Seattle Symphony and the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra). I am well-versed in the use of the electric guitar and its effects, and I have training as an orchestral composer—two skills that are rare to find together, which made me a candidate to write this concerto.”

Does he plan to bring the piece to Mexico? “This work was originally scheduled to premiere in 2020, then in 2021 in the United States, but it was postponed due to the pandemic. It is finally seeing the light of day and will be streamed live on the orchestra’s portal (pay-per-view), and a documentary recording will be made. However, there are no plans yet to perform it in Mexico; I will make inquiries to see if anyone is interested.”

Is he working on any other pieces? “I am working on a concerto for drums and wind ensemble, which will be performed at the Sala Nezahualcóyotl in UNAM's Centro Cultural Universitario on March 23, 2023. It is a commission from the Dartmouth College Wind Ensemble (USA) and will be performed by Luis Miguel Costero, the drummer for Banda Elástica and numerous jazz ensembles.”

“Additionally, the guitar duo *Dinamo*, featuring Jaime Márquez and Oman Kaminsky, will premiere on December 1st at the Urtext Festival. Also, I was recently awarded the National System of Art Creators (SNCA) fellowship, which guarantees three years to create the pieces I proposed,” he concluded.

Chapela studied guitar and composition at the CIEM in Mexico and specialized at the University of Paris VIII. His music has been conducted by Esa-Pekka Salonen, Gustavo Dudamel, Marin Alsop, Joana Carneiro, and Krzysztof Urbanski, among others. He has also scored five Mexican feature films, including *We Are What We Are* (Somos lo que hay) and *Amar no es querer*. He currently directs the Integral Composition Nucleus (NICO) and the CIEM.