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An Invitation to Listen Beyond the Comfort Zone

Enrico Chapela Barba premieres *Antiphaser* tomorrow in Mexico, his concerto for electric violin and orchestra. *La Jornada Newspaper* – Thursday, December 4, 2025

In music, as in food, taste is born from trying something different, argues composer Enrico Chapela Barba regarding the Mexican premiere of *Antiphaser*. This concerto for electric violin and orchestra—a work that breaks academic canons due to the nature of its solo instrument—will take place tomorrow at the sixth Urtext Festival.

“For music to be appreciated,” he affirms, “there is a shared responsibility. Composers, performers, and programmers must propose sounds and instruments that lie outside the public's comfort zone. If the same thing is always offered, tastes will never change.”

Furthermore, he continues, the audience has a responsibility to be open to these proposals and “not be finicky,” like children who reject a dish simply because they have never tried it. “It’s about taking a risk; the worst that can happen is that you don’t like it.”

Considered a leading figure in Mexican contemporary music, the author (Mexico City, 1974) expressed in an interview his conviction that “most people are attracted to distinct and novel proposals.”

As an example, he mentions his work *Magnetar*, a concerto for electric cello and orchestra premiered in 2011 by the Los Angeles Philharmonic, which includes heavy metal references. “When the third movement arrives, where I use distortion as a tribute to Metallica, some older people decide to leave. They are within their rights; the important thing is that they took the risk of listening to something different, and they didn’t like it. Aside from that, the work usually ends with standing ovations.”

After noting that a similar situation occurred during the world premiere of *Antiphaser* two years ago in Seattle, Chapela believes the composer must ensure their works are emotionally fascinating to draw audiences toward these types of projects.

“There is no way I would offer something that I don’t like first,” he says, making another food analogy by stating that what he seeks to share with his music is an appetizing dish, not a spoonful of a well-known cod liver oil multivitamin.

“In childhood, we were forced to take it because it was good for our health, but it tasted dreadful. There are works in contemporary music that somehow resemble that concoction, as some colleagues value the composition process more than the result,” he points out.

“Just as that supplement tastes horrible, there is contemporary music that sounds horrible, but the authors bring out a blackboard and give a lecture on why their music should be

valued—whether it's the tritone, the Fibonacci sequence, or other theories. It doesn't matter how the concerto was made if it sounds dreadful.”

According to the composer, who wanted to be a scientist and played in a heavy metal band before dedicating himself to sound art, the primary goal in music is that the sound “must be attractive and generate pleasure in the listener’s brain.”

“If not, it doesn’t work. I make music that, of course, I find attractive, in the hope that others will like it. Fortunately, beyond those who leave during the third movement, there are those who stay and applaud at the end.”

Phases of the Moon

Regarding *Antiphaser*, he shares that it was a commission made before the pandemic by the BBC Scotland and the Seattle Symphony. In this piece, the composer once again shows his fascination with the universe and astronomy, as he has in previous scores: *Magnetar* (2011), which recreates magnetic star explosions; *Antikythera* (2016), inspired by an ancient device used to calculate the position of celestial bodies; and *Lunática* (2016), based on the moons of the solar system.

In this concerto for electric violin and orchestra, he studies the ever-changing and complementary relationship between the Earth and the Moon: “when one waxes, the other wanes; if one is new, the other is full; when the Earth casts a shadow on the Moon, we witness a lunar eclipse while the Moon experiences a solar eclipse. The work's four movements represent different planetary phases from the complementary perspectives of our planet and its satellite.”

Chapela clarifies that this is not “cosmic music,” meaning it does not attempt to imagine what the sounds of the universe are like. The purpose, he says, is to explain the phases of the moon through a thought experiment: standing on the lunar equator—the point closest to Earth—and looking toward our planet.

Composed for a full symphony orchestra, this concerto showcases the vast possibilities an electric instrument offers over an acoustic one, such as changes in timbre and unlimited sound effects.

While in *Magnetar* Chapela included a metal riff in the third movement, in this new concerto he sets heavy metal aside to reference progressive rock, “more in the style of Pink Floyd. In fact, it also serves as a tribute to *Dark Side of the Moon* and *The Wall*.”

The work is part of a program that also includes pieces by Mexican composers Arturo Márquez, Samuel Zyman, and Gabriela Ortiz. The concert, with free admission, will be tomorrow at 7:00 PM at the Kaluz Museum (Avenida Hidalgo 85, Centro, Mexico City).