



"Codex mexicana: passion," the Work to Commemorate the 700th Anniversary of the Founding of Tenochtitlan

MEXICO CITY (apro) – Composed by Mexican Cristóbal Maryán four years ago, the piece “Codex Mexica: passion” premiered in a special concert as part of the commemoration of the 700th anniversary of the founding of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, a date that the National Institute of Historical Studies of the Revolutions of Mexico (INEHRM) has set as March 13, 1325.

Seven centuries later, the young composer reminded *Proceso* that the premiere, which took place last month and was performed by the Mexico City Philharmonic Orchestra (OFCM) in a concert directed by guest conductor Eduardo García Barrios, was a unique recital. The program also included the works “Chinampa y trajinera” by Mexican composer Enrico Chapela, which narrates a stroll through the canals of Xochimilco, and “Pictures at an Exhibition” by Modest Mussorgsky, with the orchestration composed by Maurice Ravel in 1922.

The premiere, which will be repeated at different times throughout the year, featured “Codex Mexica: passion” as its central piece. Maryán recalled that it was a work conceived as a “symphonic codex” for the fall of Tenochtitlan and the construction of Mexico as a contemporary civilization and identity in Latin America. However, since it was never premiered live and addresses different historical episodes, it takes on special relevance this year after its premiere.

Commissioned by the Orchestra of the Americas in 2021, it was the result of a major research project. For its creation, Maryán relied on books such as “Malintzin” by Camila Townsend, “Hernán Cortés” by José Luis Martínez, and “The Broken Spears” by Miguel León Portilla.

He related:

“While reviewing the music in the context of the founding of Mexico-Tenochtitlan, I asked the artist Juan Blanco to create an animation to accompany the music of the piece, a job that I found fantastic. And of course, I was enormously grateful that the OFCM took notice of my project and gave it its world premiere, because it was the first time it was heard live. Four years ago, it was heard online, but it's not the same.

“It's not a piece that follows all the events chronologically; it's more of an artistic project that overlaps certain episodes of the conquest with ‘The Passion of Christ’ as a musical form.”

–Why that duality with “The Passion”?

“When the Orchestra of the Americas commissioned me this work, they wanted to address the theme of ‘the passion’ as an important element in the colonization process, but it should also be noted that ‘the passion’ is a musical form that has had several interpretations over time, including Bach’s ‘St Matthew Passion’. So, the relevance as a musical form and its parallels seemed exciting to me to address.

“Especially because we are still on our own quest, that of identity. The beginning of Tenochtitlan—at least in its myth—is a journey, and I feel that as a people, we are still on that path. So if we are commemorating the founding, it is important to remember the fall (renamed in 2021 by the federal government as ‘Indigenous Resistance’).”

Regarding his favorite part of the musical project, Maryán stated that it is the indigenous rebellion after the massacre of the Templo Mayor, because of the rhythmic and intense music and the violin and cello solos. Regarding this, he was asked if pre-Hispanic instruments were used for the music of “Codex mexica: passion,” to which he commented:

“They were not included because asking for instruments outside of what an orchestra has creates very bureaucratic moments, so I looked for a way for the orchestra's own instruments to recreate the sounds, for the oboes to be played without a ‘reed,’ for the clarinets to be played with a mouthpiece and for the horn to be struck. This creates a pre-Hispanic logic. Almost all pre-Hispanic instruments are percussion or wind, so there was a way to do it, to recreate pre-Hispanic sounds.”

The musician affirmed that there will be other opportunities throughout the year to present the work in venues in Mexico City, although for now, it can be enjoyed on the YouTube channel of the Capital Ministry of Culture. He concluded by saying:

“I enjoyed and learned a lot while making this work. So far, I have received good comments about it, fortunately. It seems to me a moment, a year of deep reflection on our history and culture, and I hope it continues this way this year and all the years to come.”

Niza Rivera 13/03/2025 <https://www.proceso.com.mx/cultura/2025/3/13/codex-mexica-passion-la-obra-con-la-que-se-recordaran-los-700-anos-de-la-fundacion-de-tenochtitlan-347362.html>