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The Sonic Vastness of Xochimilco Inspired Composer Enrico Chapela

When composer Enrico Chapela Barba began his work Chinampa y trajinera shortly before the pandemic, he thought, as he states, "the time had come to write my Danzón no. 2 by Arturo Márquez; my Huapango by Moncayo, or my Sensemayá by Revueltas, and I set out to find some kind of folklore native to Mexico City for that purpose."

However, he realized that "it seems there is no original musical folklore in this capital, at least I didn't find anything in my research. That is, there has been music that comes of age in this city, but was born elsewhere, like mambo, with Pérez Prado."

Rather than discouraging him, this situation prompted him to look for alternatives. He realized that Mexico City, as the nation's capital, is a melting pot of the country's folklore, and he decided to create a kind of sonic portrait of this condition or characteristic.

The next challenge was to find a place where this musical folklore was concentrated, and he remembered Xochimilco, one of the metropolis's main tourist attractions. A boat ride through its canals on *trajineras* offers the visitor, he believes, a vast medley of our nation's traditional and popular music: "When you ride a *trajinera*, another one approaches you that brings either a Chiapanecan marimba, a harp and *soneros* from Veracruz, or mariachis. Xochimilco, then, offers that musical vastness; it's a place where a lot happens in sonic terms."

That is the story of Chinampa y trajinera, one of the most recent works by the composer and teacher, born in the capital in 1974. It is featured in the program with which the Mexico City Philharmonic Orchestra (OFCM) will commemorate the 700th anniversary of the founding of Tenochtitlan. It is the fourth concert of their current season, on February 15 and 16, at 6:00 p.m. and 12:15 p.m., respectively, in the Silvestre Revueltas Hall of the Ollin Yoliztli Cultural Center. The program, under the guest direction of Eduardo García Barrios, also includes Pictures at an Exhibition by Modest Mussorgsky.

That's not all, as the same piece will also be performed by the National Autonomous University of Mexico Philharmonic Orchestra (OFUNAM) on March 1 and 2 at 8:00 p.m. and 12:00 p.m., respectively, as part of its first season of the year. These two concerts by the university group are part of the "Women in Music Days," with the participation of Katharina Wincor as guest conductor.

What's more: Chinampa y trajinera will be performed on May 23 and 24 in Río Negro, Argentina, by the local orchestra, as part of a program of Mexican music, as well as on September 26 and 28 by the Yucatán Symphony in Mérida, within a program made up of Mexican and Argentinian music. This is the result of a grant from the Ibermúsicas program obtained by Enrico Chapela and his Argentinian counterpart, Mauricio Charbonnier.

The Folkloric Element

This is a score with good luck, as has happened with much of the work by the person considered one of the leading figures in contemporary concert music in the country: "It's extraordinary; it's happened to me very few times. I hope it's something that starts to repeat itself. I think it has to do with the fact that Chinampa y trajinera has that Mexican folkloric element that people like so much, just as it happens with Danzón no. 2 by Arturo Márquez; Huapango by Moncayo, and Sensemayá by Revueltas. That was the idea, that's what they asked me for, that's what I tried to do, and I hope it's the case, because then it would have the potential to become one of the most performed pieces in my catalog."

The work in question was commissioned by the Mannheim National Theater Orchestra in Germany shortly before the pandemic, although its world premiere took place during it, in July 2021, in that city. In September 2022, it had its national premiere, performed by the State of Mexico Symphony Orchestra (OSEM) in Toluca, with Rodrigo Macías as conductor.

Although Enrico Chapela's style is based on very rhythmic musical interests, as well as his youthful interests in metal, Arabic music, and Latin jazz, since it was a commission, he says, he had to concentrate on what was requested: "a work with a Mexican sound, which I also like very much, with composers like Revueltas and Márquez."

The author explains that Chinampa y trajinera, which is about 15 minutes long, is organized in the form of a rondo, which is characterized by the repetition of a main theme, alternating with secondary ones. Due to its structure, he says, it is similar to Pictures at an Exhibition, with which, as noted, it shares a program in the OFCM concerts.

"Mussorgsky's work, as its name suggests, is organized as a musical description of an exhibition of paintings, where each one tells a different story, and the passage between the pictures is a theme and variations. It is the same theme that, each time it appears, varies a little, which he calls 'promenade'; that is, the walk, the stroll," Chapela describes.

"My work is similar, which is also why it has its title. *Chinampas*, as we know, are those artificial islands native to Mexico City that were invented in the pre-Hispanic era, and thanks to them, the great Tenochtitlan had its population boom, because it is a very efficient agricultural system. So, the places that are visited in my work are the *chinampas*, and the stroll or the transition between them are the *trajineras*, similar to Mussorgsky's pictures and the walk; when you go from one *chinampa* to another, it's the same theme, but varied."

The author specifies that his work is composed of landscapes or *chinampas* that allude to characteristic or significant aspects of Xochimilco. The first is the *chinampa del ahuejote*, in reference to a tree in the area; the second, the *chinampa del ajolote*, an endemic animal; and the third, the *chinampa de las muñecas*, which is the name of one of these artificial islands, the most striking one on the tour, because it features dismembered remains of those toys.

"The *chinampas* are written in a more contemporary language, my usual language, while the *trajineras* are in a more tonal, Mexican language; the first of these is intended to sound like a Chiapanecan marimba; the second, like a *son jarocho*, with the harp; then, a *son huasteco*, with the violin; and finally, a *son jalisciense*, with the mariachi. It was a great challenge to combine both languages."

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