

Music History and Cosmopolitanism / abstracts & bios

Alonso Minutti, Ana R. (University of New Mexico, US) & Bauer, Amy (University of California, Irvine, US) & Hammel, Stephan (University of Pennsylvania, US) & Saavedra, Leonora (University of California, Riverside, US)

Commentator: Clara Petrozzi

Panel 3 / Thursday June 2, 4–6:30 pm

Beyond the Nation, Before the Cosmopolis: Latin American Musicians Confront the Global

Latin American composers in the last century faced a characteristic dilemma. Embracing a decidedly European modernism ostensibly involved abandoning the specificity of their place in a politically, economically and culturally divided modern world. Localism, on the other hand, appeared indistinguishable from marginality. This panel focuses on how specific theorists and composers interpreted and responded to this challenge. Through three case studies, two Mexican and one Cuban, we seek to draw in outlines the forms of differential embrace and active resistance embodied by key figures of the region's modernism.

1. Alejo Carpentier's Internationalist Theory of Musical Form (Stephan Hammel, University of Pennsylvania)

Alejo Carpentier (1904–1980) has long been considered one of the earliest and most important writers on Cuban musical modernism. During a long voluntary political exile in Paris between 1928 and 1939 he came in close contact with European modernisms. The rest of his career would be devoted to elaborating a Latin Americanist response to its cosmopolitan tendencies. That response was centered on the figure and legacy of the African slave in the Americas. For the Cuban musicologist, slavery and the (modern) culture that grew in its wake was a paradigm of the limits of modernity's global vision.

In articulating this response to European modernism, Carpentier elaborated what amounts to a theory of the musical in the Latin American post-/neo-colonial world. His positions, however, have never received systematic reconstruction. This paper does just this for Carpentier's theory of musical form. It focuses on his two long essays of Latin Americanist composition and in the final chapters of his 1946 *La música en Cuba*. I work up the argument with enough perspicuity so that one might decide on its validity. Evaluating Carpentier's usefulness for thinking through cosmopolitanism/internationalism in the region must begin with a clear statement of what his theory states and how it might be defended.

2. When was cosmopolitanism? The case of Mexico (Leonora Saavedra, University of California, Riverside)

Is cosmopolitanism an identity? A musical style? Merely politically correct, Western, and liberal –in both the economic and social sense- wishful thinking? A utopia? These questions have been and continue to be debated in the social sciences and critical theory. A particularly pertinent question for music scholars, already raised by social scientists, is whether cosmopolitanism is an *analytical category* we can employ to understand the

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present and imagine an immediate future. Most important for some of us, is it an analytical category that can help us write history? If the social and political circumstances that give rise to cosmopolitanism are those of the post-national, in other words, if cosmopolitanism is defined in opposition to the nation-state and its much announced demise, can it help us understand the nation when it was at its strongest, transcending the establishment of a mere binary opposition? And vice versa, can the nation help us define cosmopolitanism in a more profitable way?

As a historical agent, Mexican composer Carlos Chávez (1899–1978) played a determinant role in the creation of the Mexican nation and its construction through and in culture, and in the development of the nation-state's cultural infrastructure. At the same time, Chávez's unwavering commitment to the aesthetics of modernism, his role in the shaping of discourses on and pedagogies of modernist composition, his stylistic innovations and his binational (Mexico-U.S.) imaginary and lifestyle would seem to place him under the sign of cosmopolitanism. Taking Chávez's agency and identity as a site of inquiry, this paper aims to probe the viability of cosmopolitanism as a historical analytical category, to test the existence of a cosmopolitan identity in historical agents with nationalist agendas, to explore the interaction between ideologies of nationalism and cosmopolitanism in the construction of the nation, and conversely, to examine the historical roots of cosmopolitan artistic agendas in the strength of the nation state.

3. Chávez in the 1960s: late modernism and the cosmopolitan ideal

(Amy Bauer, University of California, Irvine)

Despite its polysemic style and contradictory musical allegiances, the music of Carlos Chávez was always, as Leonora Saavedra reminds us, “unremittingly modernist.” Modernist musical traits—a certain asceticism, rich contrapuntal textures, and an ever-shifting rhythmic drive—are found throughout his oeuvre. Critical constructions of Chávez's music—which vary from a patronizing appreciation tinged with racial essentialism to the valorization of its universal, pan-American essence—rarely convey this modernist essence. This may explain why, just as Chávez's fame as a composer and conductor peaked in the 1950s and '60s, his compositional output split into two distinct tracks: traditional works intended for large ensembles and familiar venues, and experimental compositions primarily written for solo instrument or small ensembles. The late *Solis* for chamber ensembles and the *Inventions* for piano, string trio and harp occupy a singular position within Chávez's late output. In their abstract language and denial of any form of pitch or rhythmic repetition—be that serial or motivic structure—the *Solis* and *Inventions* in particular share in a spirit of “eternal development” that foreshadows the music of the New Complexity.

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In this paper I position these works as Chavez's bid to be finally accepted as a contemporary, cosmopolitan modernist, rather than one beholden to constructions of Mexican, indigenous or European neoclassical ideals. The intricate structure of these works reveals a mature composer at the height of his powers, with a view towards his personal legacy. But the works' reception history reflects on the perception of new Latin American music as a whole, defined within a fraught historiography of musical modernism informed by competing social imaginaries: a continental tradition informed by social theory and Frankfurt school aesthetics versus a positivist, Anglo-American ideal.

4. Cosmopolitan Imaginaries and Modernist Localities in Mario Lavista's Music (Ana R. Alonso Minutti, University of New Mexico)

When asked about his international presence as a "Mexican" composer, Mario Lavista (b. 1943) replied: "Being Mexican, for me, is being part of the world.... If everything is local, then it would be only understood locally." Mexican essence, in his view, as well as in the view of those who conformed to the predominant aesthetic panorama of the avant-garde of the second half of twentieth-century Mexico, is cosmopolitan. Lavista has been a key figure in the formation of a cosmopolitan imaginary prevalent among the musical circles of the country. This imaginary is characterized by a disdain for any overt allusion to musical material coming from popular and/or folk music traditions.

While early in his career Lavista used graphic notation, collective improvisation, and certain levels of indeterminacy, from the late 1970s until the 2000s he abandoned those and focused instead on fully written scores that showed non-developmental musical approaches—particularly medieval and Renaissance contrapuntal techniques—and a conservative position regarding the role of the composer as creator of an autonomous work. An unexpected return occurred in 2011, when Lavista came back to envisioning music with a certain degree of indeterminacy and collective improvisation.

In this study I focus on two pieces that explore this return, both commissioned for art exhibitions. I argue that, while *Música para un árbol* (2011), and *Kailash* (2012), still embrace a cosmopolitan ideal, these pieces show a reconfiguration of modernist localities by positioning the composer as performer, and the 'work' as a collectively created soundspace. An investigation of the performance context—both pieces were premiered at elite art galleries in Mexico City—illuminates the ways in which Lavista facilitates a renewed aesthetic and sensorial arrangement where selected audiences (that of the middle-upper class of the city) experience a degree of artistic freedom rooted in a shared cosmopolitanism.

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Stephan Hammel recently received his PhD in Historical Musicology from the University of Pennsylvania, where he has also taught. He writes on topics in Latin American modernism and Marxist aesthetic theory. His current project is a history of musical thought in Cuba in the decades leading up to the Revolution of 1959.

Leonora Saavedra is Associate Professor of Music at the University of California Riverside. Her work focuses on 20th-century Mexico and the United States. In 2015 she was Scholar in Residence at the Bard Music Festival and editor of the book *Carlos Chávez and His World* (Princeton UP, 2015). Recent publications include “Carlos Chávez’s Polysemic Style: Constructing the National, Seeking the Cosmopolitan,” (*Journal of the American Musicological Society* 2015), “Spanish Moors and Turkish Captives in fin de siècle Mexico: Exoticism as Strategy,” (*Journal of Musicological Research* 2012), and “El nuevo pasado mexicano: estrategias de representación en *Atzimba* de Ricardo Castro” (*Resonancias* 2014).

Amy Bauer is Associate Professor of Music at the University of California, Irvine. She has published the monograph *Ligeti’s Laments: Nostalgia, Exoticism and the Absolute* (Ashgate, 2011), as well as articles and book chapters on the music of György Ligeti, Olivier Messiaen, Carlos Chávez, David Lang, the television musical, and issues in the philosophy and reception of modernist music. She is currently co-editing the volume *Ligeti’s Cultural Identities* (Ashgate, forthcoming) and preparing monographs on Ligeti’s keyboard music and contemporary opera and language.

Ana R. Alonso Minutti is Assistant Professor of Musicology and faculty affiliate of the Latin American and Iberian Institute at the University of New Mexico. Her main interests are experimental and avant-garde expressions across the U.S.-Mexico border, interdisciplinary artistic intersections, intellectual elites, and cosmopolitanism. She has published in *Latin American Music Review*, *Revista Argentina de Musicología*, *Pauta*, and elsewhere, and is currently writing a book entitled *Mario Lavista and Musical Cosmopolitanism in Late Twentieth-Century Mexico*, under contract by Oxford University Press.