

THE RACE FOR INCLUSIVITY: CARLOS CHÁVEZ AND THE ISSUES OF
DIVERSITY IN MUSIC

by

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Abstract

Diversity and inclusion are topics of discussion in many fields today, and music is no exception. The demand for concert programs filled with a variety of composers is high, almost to a point where it is seen as a requirement. While programming compositions created by composers of different ethnicities and backgrounds is important for representation, it should not be an obligatory activity. Music should be performed based on its integrity and value. The Mexican composer Carlos Chávez is an example of this. His second symphony, the “*Sinfonía india*,” is frequently programmed by orchestras and concert bands. While this work is of great musical virtue, musicians ignore other music of the same level of righteousness of his and other composers oeuvre. Through researching the beginning of his career, his influences, his writing style, who he has influenced, and the value of his works, this study will highlight his significance and would provide a resource to those entities who program repertoire for music ensembles to study more of the works of Chávez and other diverse composers.

The Race for Inclusivity: Carlos Chávez and the Issues of Diversity in Music

Chapter One: The Beginning and The Influences of Carlos Chávez

The Modern Era of music (1890-1945) is characterized as a break from the traditions of the compositional forms and styles of the Romantic Era, a rejection of older Era ideas, and a continuation of experimentation with new sounds and harmonies. Significant historical events during this time, including two world wars, a major economic depression, mass genocide, and political extremities plagued the world. However, people were still full of hope, with new technological advancements and a strong urge for change and equality resonated with millions of people, especially with the opposition of the Axis Powers. All of these events greatly influenced music as well. A revolution against German romanticism ignited unique methods of composition. No more were musicians following the trends of major composers like Wagner, whose harmonies and chromaticism are cited as a great influence of Romantic Era composers and their writing. New forms, styles, harmonies, and textures were being written by a wide variety of new composers, like Arnold Schoenberg, Julián Carrillo, Igor Stravinsky, Charles Ives, and Claude Debussy.

Multiple scholars have cited the aforementioned composers as exemplary of the Modern Era. Their compositions are considered cornerstones of the symphonic repertoire and music history, and are consistently programmed by professional and amateur orchestras, taught in music schools and conservatories, and researched by myriad scholars. However, there are significant composers who have long careers of composition with only a small number of their works being performed today, seemingly only as a mark of completion off a list of forced representation.

In today's era, the conversation of diversity and inclusion is on the table for many areas and topics, including music. Music by composers of diverse backgrounds and ethnicities are now more frequently performed than ever before. Professional performance groups like orchestras and bands are choosing repertoire by these composers for their programs and concerts. While there are ensembles who do choose music on the basis of their musical integrity, there are some whose programs seem forced in their efforts to have diverse concerts. As it seems as these entities choose to select music with this in mind, it dissolves the meaning behind the compositions created by these people. An example of a composer who is programmed in this fashion is Mexican composer Carlos Chávez.

Carlos Chávez (1899-1978) is regarded as one of the most influential Mexican composers of the Modern era by scholars and music historians. In the early years of his musical career, he studied composition and piano with Manuel Ponce. His earliest works, which he started composing at just eleven years old, are primarily piano works, highlighting the influences of his teachers and the trends of the Romantic Era. In 1915, he began experimenting and wrote for other mediums, like chorus and orchestra. As his musical style and knowledge matured, Chávez was greatly influenced by leading composers of the Modern Era, with Stravinsky and Schoenberg being the most influential. He studied with, and was influenced by composers Henry Cowell, Edgard Varèse, and Aaron Copland in New York City in the mid 1920's, with Chávez viewing Copland as an ally in the revolution against German romanticism. Copland is frequently cited as a major influence and collaborator of Chávez, with Copland's *Appalachian Spring* frequently being programmed along with Chávez's second symphony, the *Sinfonía india*, by

orchestras including the New York Philharmonic, the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela. Scholars have studied this relationship between their music. Their use of music native to their geographical regions is the main reason why conductors and music directors pair these pieces together, with the melodies of Shaker tunes being an influence for Copland and the rhythms of indigenous Mexican tribes being a major influence for Chávez.

During his youth, Chávez was surrounded by the music of native tribes, as his family would take him to hear this music played on native instruments during the early 1900s. This was greatly influential to his writing. Sudip Bose of *The American Scholar* writes that, “the extensive research Chávez conducted into the lives of the Huichol Indians of Nayarit state, and the Yaquis and Seris from Sonora, all based in the northern part of Mexico, along the Pacific coast. ‘The Indian music best preserving its purity,’ Chávez wrote in 1940, ‘is not what remains of Aztec culture, but that of more or less primitive or nomad tribes which never, properly speaking, achieved a culture. Such are the Yaquis, the Seris, and the Huicholes.’” (Bose, 2019). This statement by Chávez answers the question as to why he decided to write in this unique style, as his desire to shed light on the importance of these tribes and give them a sense of dignity and respect through their music.

Carlos Chávez is a composer whose music is deserving of the respect and study of great composers like Stravinsky, Copland, and even Beethoven. While some musicians have stressed the significance of his works, there are still many others who appear to not view Chávez’s music with that same level of value. The most frequently performed work of his, according to numerous scholarly studies, is his *Sinfonía india*. Although most

orchestras around the world view that piece as Chávez's best composition, they seem to be completely ignoring his other works. While this is not the case with every single orchestra, that feeling reverberates with many of them. Chávez is not the only composer that musicians feel is being treated without dignity.

In today's times, orchestras wish to be more diverse and select music by Chávez and other non-white composers. While it is imperative to perform works by varied composers, it should be based on their musical merit, not because of the fact that they come from various backgrounds and ethnicities. In Chávez's case, his music should be performed for his intent of preservation of the culture of native tribes from Mexico, and because his music is just good music, to speak colloquially. Another reason to perform his repertoire is because of the uniqueness of his writing style, his creative instrumentation, and his significant contributions to music as a whole.

Part Two: Carlos Chávez's Writing Style and his Influence on Music

When Carlos Chávez began writing music as a child, his compositions were primarily written for piano, with the exception of a symphony he composed when he was sixteen years old. As previously mentioned, his piano works are influenced by his teacher, Manuel Ponce, and are characteristic of the compositional style of the Romantic period, with song-like melodies and harmonies full of chromaticism. For example, his 1919 *Valses Intimos*, which translates to “intimate waltzes,” is a piano work written in a valse style. Valses are dance music written with a strong downbeat and in a triple time, as seen in this example. There is no indication of any musical motif that can be identified as

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Valses Intimos

CARLOS CHÁVEZ [1919]

I

Lento ♩ = 66

f

sobresaliendo

7 **Stringendo**

p *cresc.*

13 *rall.* **Tempo rubato** ♩ = 126

f poco a poco dim. **mp**

having a “native” element to it. It is a simple work exposing his early compositional style.

Another example of his Romantic era influences is his 1921 *Madrigal*, written for cello and piano. In this piece, it has the same techniques used for Romantic period works, as he creates a change in harmony through the use of chromaticism. Still, there are no musical elements of native influences. While there is no evidence as to what made Chávez begin to write with native elements, it is best to believe that it was an abrupt change in his compositional style. Something motivated the composer to experiment with his composition technique, which would first be showcased in his first ballet.

2

Madrigal

for Cello (or Viola) and Piano

CARLOS CHÁVEZ [1921]

Lento

Cello

Piano

p sempre

p legato

(p)

poco cresc.

(m.d.)

(m.s.)

poco a poco stringendo

cresc.

cresc.

By listening to his earliest works, the influence of the native music he heard from his youth are not apparent until his early twenties (reverse this). While the previous examples provided show Chávez's early composition style, his first ballet, *Toxiumolpia: El Fuego Nuevo* (1921), provides the first work of his to employ native Mexican elements. While there is no score that is easily available to the public, there is a video performance available provided by Juan Gabriel Hernández and the Inner Pulse Ensemble. Having not been able to acquire the score, and with no scholarly articles that exist on this work, the video provided an audial example of some of the interesting characteristics written in the piece

The use of percussion is very important in distinguishing the difference between Chávez's early works and the works he composed in his early twenties and onward. The music of the previously mentioned tribes, utilizes a lot of interesting percussion instruments, which are used to traditionally indicate a celebration or dance, or a more formal occasion with religion. In listening to the symphonic reduction of the ballet, you can hear a lot of indigenous percussion being utilized to create a dance-like texture. Once he began writing elements of native music into his compositions, the titles of these works started to represent whatever tribe or style he was trying to portray. In his *Toxiumolpia: El Fuego Nuevo*, the title itself is a mixture of Aztec and Spanish words, with *el fuego nuevo* meaning "the new fire." However, while I believe this to be the start of this style of composition for Chávez, it wasn't an abrupt change to write music only with these elements and for only these mediums, as he was still writing in different areas of composition. He wrote music for other ensemble types and in other styles. For

example, only two years after he released *Toxiumolpia*, he released his *Three Pieces for Guitar* in 1923, which reflects modern Mexican and Spanish techniques for guitar.

When Chávez music shows the influences of native music, it includes two characteristics: rhythm and percussion. His use of percussion portrays the dances used in these cultures and are unique to the sound of Chávez's music. For example, in Chávez's 1940 *Xochipilli*, he calls for a *teponaztli*, which is a carved and slit wooden drum, and a *huéhuetl*, another type of carved drum which stands upright. In his *Cantos de Mexico* (1933), Chávez calls for *teponaztli*, *marimba*, an *ayotl* (a native instrument created by hollowing out the shell of a turtle and beating it with mallets or deer horns), *tambor indio* (a small drum beaten with sticks), *tenor drum*, *huéhuetl*, a *sonaja* (an instrument made of wood with numerous jingles attached to it), *reco-reco*, *guiro*, *chajchas* (a shaker or rattle-type instrument worn on the wrist with the hooves of deer or goats attached to it), *gong*, and a Yaqui gourd water drum (the bottom of a large gourd placed in a large pot of water to be beaten with mallets). These instruments are very unique to the native tribes Chávez observed in his youth. The purpose for including these instruments in his works is to stay as close to the intent of the native tribes as possible and provide authenticity to the music. In his program about *Xochipilli* he writes, "There is no certainty of the style or aesthetic nature of the music of pre-Columbian civilizations. We deal with hypotheses, though these can be based on somewhat sensible considerations. At least two main genres can be distinguished: music for sacred festivities and that which accompanied poetical expressions of a deep lyrical or religious character," (Chávez, 1940). Chávez knew that this music was not notated, so he used the knowledge he gained from studying these people and their music as a means of preservation.



Yaqui Water Gourd Drum



Chajchas



Ayotl

In terms of rhythm, his *Sinfonía india* is a great example of rhythms that are not just created by the use of native percussion. The dances and rituals that are characteristic of these tribes are re-created through rhythms he gives to wind instruments. They are created by the use of complex meters and accents that stress syncopation.



As mentioned before, the *Sinfonía india* is Chávez's most famous and performed work. It is a single-movement symphony and is the second symphony in his oeuvre. This piece is a great example of his compositional style. It was commissioned in 1935 by the president of NBC and premiered in 1936 with Chávez himself conducting. Three native tribal melodies are heard, one of each being attached to one of the three "movements" of

the symphony, which are separated by tempo markings. He imitates bird calls in the flute and piccolo and uses extensive percussion, much like other native works of his. This is one of his most characteristic works of native Mexican music. Numerous scholarly studies have been done on this symphony and it is frequently programmed by many orchestras. In his program note, he writes, “The indigenous music of Mexico is a reality of contemporary life. It is not, as might be thought, a relic to satisfy mere curiosity on the part of intellectuals, or to supply more or less important data for ethnography. The indigenous art of Mexico is, in our day, the only living manifestations of the race which makes up approximately four-fifths of the country's racial stock,” (Chávez, 1935).

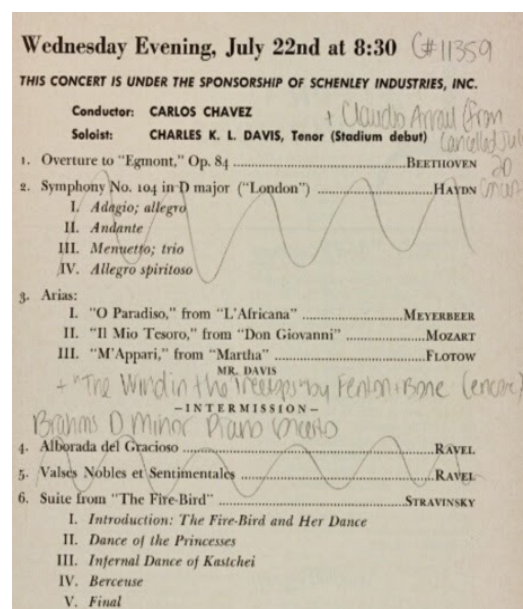
Aside from the pieces I have previously mentioned, there are dozens of great compositions by Chávez, like *Chapultepec* (1926), *Sinfonía de Antígona* “*Symphony No. 1*” (1933), *Concerto for Piano with Orchestra* (1938), *Violin Concerto* (1951), *Symphony No. 6* (1964), and *Paisajes Mexicanos* (1973). It is important to note that none of the pieces I have listed have any elements of native influences. While Chávez thought it was important for these cultures to be preserved through their music, he did not want to be viewed as a Mexican composer to write solely in those styles. Like any composer, he wanted all of his music to be appreciated. There were those who understood that and worked to preserve Chávez’s legacy.

Throughout Chávez’s life, he had numerous ventures in music and out. Besides being an influential composer, he was an author, with one of his more prominent books being *Toward a New Music* (1937), which discusses electronics in music. He was also a lecturer at Harvard University, and served as music director for multiple music festivals and orchestras, like the Mexican Symphony Orchestra, of which he founded in 1928.

Throughout his career, he worked with many big name musicians and artists, like Paul Dukas, Leonard Bernstein, Arturo Toscanini, Frida Kahlo, Diego Rivera, Leopold Stokowski, and Heitor Villa-Lobos. He also had many notable students who studied composition with him at the Conservatorio Nacional de Música in Mexico City like Blas Galindo, José Pablo Moncayo, Daniel Ayala Pérez, Salvador Contreras, Silvestre Revueltas, and Eduardo Mata.

Mata is very important in the preservation of Carlos Chávez due to his recordings of his teacher's works. He released records with multiple symphony orchestras, conducting works by Chavez. In 1994, he released *Chavez, C.: Xochipilli - La Hija de Colquide Suite - Tambuco - Energía - Toccata* with La Camerata and Tambuco. He also released *Chavez: The Complete Symphonies* in 1992 with the London Symphony Orchestra, which contains recordings of all six symphonies composed by Chávez.

Another important part of Chávez's legacy are the programs that are archived in the many orchestras that he worked with and conducted. He conducted numerous orchestras throughout his career, and those programs are available to the public. In



studying some of these programs, I've noticed something quite interesting when it comes to Carlos Chávez as a conductor. If he was conducting the orchestra, he would premiere a work of his or showcase music by other Mexican composers. If he was a guest conductor, he conducted his most prominent work at the time, which was mostly his second symphony. In studying programs from orchestras from today or recent years, orchestras mostly program his second symphony. For example, in 2019 Gustavo Dudamel led the Los Angeles Philharmonic in a concert of music from the Americas, performing Chávez's second symphony and programming works by Copland to complement it. From reviewing these programs and comparing them from the time when Chávez was alive to the legacy he left after he died, it seems as if his other music, those besides his second symphony, have become "lost," in a sense. There are still orchestras led by conductors of color who program different works of his, but if a prominent orchestra performs a concert of Mexican or non-western European music, the *Sinfonía india* is frequently performed. While this piece has strong musical integrity, orchestras seem to completely ignore the other impressive pieces of equal integrity as his second symphony that he composed. This brings us to an issue of diversity in music, where orchestras wish to play music by more varied composers, but only program the most popular works by those composers.

Part Three: The Issues of Diversity in Music Today

Diversity in music can be defined in a variety of different ways. It can be performing, teaching, writing, and learning about music created by people of different ethnicities, gender, sexual orientation, and backgrounds. This is important for many reasons. The most important one, being representation, is crucial for people and their culture to feel appreciated and respected. There are a number of symphony orchestras who have special concerts showcasing music by women, Latino composers, black composers, Asian composers, and various people from different countries and ethnic groups. For example, the San Francisco Symphony had a weeklong Día de Los Muertos celebration concert and art series to celebrate the Mexican holiday. It premiered art by many famous and novice Mexican artists and featured music by Mexican composers. Many people, Mexican and not, traveled to San Francisco to celebrate their heritage and the culture surrounding that occasion. Events like that are important in showcasing music that is not part of the standard repertoire, giving the spotlight to a varied group of newer and lesser known composers.

Another reason for having diverse music is for inclusion. Inclusion is performing that kind of repertoire for the sake of its value, not for the cause of a specific celebration or concert theme. It also includes musicians and composers from non-Western European backgrounds in all aspects of music. Throughout the history of music, Western European men have dominated composition, conducting, and performing, with Antonio Vivaldi, Ludwig von Beethoven, Herbert von Karajan, and Paul Hindemith as examples of this. If you look at the table of contents inside any music history textbook, you'll notice those names along with other musicians who have dominated music for centuries, and you will

also notice that they are mostly white men. In recent times, people who are not explicitly white European men have started to be accepted into the music world, with their music being performed, being allowed to conduct, and allowed to be a part of major performing ensembles. People like Nadia Boulanger, Florence Price, William Grant Still, and Amy Beach, and more recently, Viet Cuong, Jennifer Higdon, and Omar Thomas are in the conversation of music today and their music is now consistently performed by music ensembles, and taught and analyzed in many music schools and conservatories. People like Alondra de la Parra, Rafael Payare, and Gustavo Dudamel are more famous names when it comes to conducting today, along with greats like Arturo Toscanini, Riccardo Muti, and Sir Simon Rattle. Musicians like Anthony McGill, Sarah Willis, and Elmer Churampi are now more frequently seen performing in orchestras than in the past, with orchestras only consisting of white men from the early to mid 20th century. The first fully integrated orchestra, Symphony of the New World, was formed in 1965. This was only just over fifty years ago, which illuminates how recently institutionalized racism and seclusiveness in music were eradicated. It is now more acceptable to be diverse in these realms of music today than in the past.

In conversations with professors and colleagues within the Texas State School of Music, this issue is highlighted further with many of them concurring with this observation. Ensembles within the school perform high quality repertoire every year. Music by people of different ethnicities and backgrounds is not common knowledge unless you research it on your own or if you are lucky to learn and perform repertoire by these people.

While it is great to play music in respect to diversity and inclusion, there are issues in regards to programming works by these composers. Some orchestras only perform the composer's most popular works if they are not widely known, while performing a wide variety of repertoire by composers like Beethoven, Mozart, Tchaikovsky, and Shostakovich. While this is important for getting their names into the conversation, it shows disregard for the composer's other works, much like Carlos Chávez. In studying and reviewing recent orchestral and band concert programs, I've noticed that trend to be true, with some of those entities programming *Sinfonía india* in their Latin-themed concerts. Most recently, the Lawrence University Symphonic Band did a Latin-themed concert and programmed that work, including other well known "Latin" works like Arturo Márquez's *Conga del Fuego Nuevo* and George Gershwin's *Cuban Overture*. Another example is the 2018 Collegiate Band Directors National Association performance of Kent State University, where they also did a Latin themed concert and programmed Chávez's second symphony.

In highlighting the issue of the singularity of programming works by lesser respected composers, there is no blame to cast on any single individual or ensemble for the decision of programming more popular works by composers like Chávez. This study is only an explanation of that issue. These pieces are great repertoire, but it is important to program their other works as well to resolve this issue. It is important to do so out of respect for those composers, especially newer composers who could possibly gain the acclaim to become the next Beethoven, or Mozart, or Tchaikovsky.

In Carlos Chávez's case, I have found him to be a composer of such merit whose oeuvre is not widely respected. To my understanding, ensembles who program *Sinfonía*

india are trying to stay true to their theme and want to be as authentic as possible. However, I have previously listed other works of his that are as equal to that interpretation as that work that have the possibility to fit their desired program.

To provide further resources within this study, I have created two programs, one for wind ensemble and one for orchestra, that contain one work by Carlos Chávez that is not his second symphony.

Wind Ensemble: Fiery Festivities

<i>Celebration Overture, Op. 61</i> (1954).....	Paul Creston
<i>El Baile de Luis Alonso</i> (1896/2007).....	Gerónimo Giménez
<i>Intermezzo from “La Boda de Luis Alonso”</i> (1897/2007).	Gerónimo Giménez
<i>The Fire of Eternal Glory</i> (1960/2011).....	Dmitri Shostakovich
<i>Chapultepec</i> (1935/1963).....	Carlos Chávez
<i>The Firebird Suite</i> (1919).....	Igor Stravinsky

In this program, I have included Carlos Chávez’s 1935 work *Chapultepec*. It is a national work that incorporates the *Zacatecas March*, which is a famous march from Mexico. I have also included two works from Gerónimo Giménez’s Luis Alonso ballets. While these are three Latin pieces, the program is not necessarily “Latin” themed. The program contains vibrant pieces of original wind repertoire and orchestral transcriptions that create an exuberant and celebratory atmosphere. Each work has a different character to it creating a variety of emotions and sounds to the program. This is only an example of how Chávez’s works can be included with respect to his artistry, and also adding flair to the concert. It is not too long either, with a performance of this lasting about 45 minutes.

Orchestra: Myths & Stories

Overture to “La Forza del Destino” (1862).....Giuseppe Verdi

Symphony No. 1 “Sinfonía de Antígona” (1933).....Carlos Chávez

Adagio from “Spartacus” (1954).....Aram Khachaturian

The Rite of Spring (1913).....Igor Stravinsky

or

Pelleas und Melisande, Op. 5 (1902).....Arnold Schoenberg

In this program, a majority of the repertoire is from the Modern era, with the exception of the Verdi. As mentioned in the first chapter, Chávez was greatly motivated by the new musical techniques created during this era and looked to Shoenberg and Stravinsky as role models. This is why I added a work by these composers, to highlight their influence on Chávez. In regards to the pieces and why I selected them, all of them were created based on stories from mythology, operas, or real-world events with liberal adaptations given to them. Chávez’s first symphony was created to provide music for a new adaptation of the famous story of *Antigone*. After rewriting the music to compose a reduction of the ballet, he titled this piece as his first symphony.

While it may seem that music by diverse composers is difficult to program, anything is possible due to the wide variety of repertoire that is available to us. There are, what seems to be, a vast number of composers throughout our history, some from the past and some from today. By incorporating music that is unconventional, that starts the process for that music to become the next standard repertoire. All composers, like Carlos Chávez and others, deserve all of the respect and dignity that is owed to them.

Closing Remarks

Before the research of these topics began, I wanted to find something in music that best represented my culture. I have enjoyed the wide variety of repertoire that I have studied and performed, but I wanted to find music that could help me learn more about myself and where I come from. In looking for people or pieces that could best satisfy that desire, I came upon the genius and creativity of Carlos Chávez. Through researching him, I have developed a strong sense of pride in where my ancestral roots hail from.

Furthermore, in creating the culmination of this research I came across many issues regarding how this composer and composers like him were being represented. I want to create a conversation with this study to highlight the issues I have mentioned throughout this document. Composers of color, of various nationalities, of different gender, and of different sexual orientation deserve to have their music respected in the same manner that we hold the great musicians like Stravinsky, Beethoven, and Sibelius. By starting these conversations, the issues of diversity in music can be rectified, thus challenging these issues in other places where they exist because music and art are powerful forms of expression.

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