

Enrico Chapela



Enrico Chapela photo © Bernd Uhlig

The noise of the world – and the silence after

A portrait of the Mexican composer Enrico Chapela
by Jürgen Otten

Like many other words, syncopation has its etymological origins in the Greek language, formed from the words *syn* (together) and *koptein* (beat). While the term defines a temporary period of unconsciousness in medicine and signifies the omission of an unstressed medial vowel between two consonants in linguistics, syncopation in music has come to be used as a very pointed form of rhythmic interleaving. A note that is expected to come next as part of the natural flow is either withheld or anticipated. Either way, we hear a rhythmic dislocation.

Latin-American composers have always made ample use of syncopation. However, it is not the mere effect they are after. It is part of their conception of music. And so it comes as no surprise that syncopation plays an important part in Enrico Chapela's oeuvre. None of his works, different though they may be in terms of music, semantics or their architecture, do without syncopation as a means to define or at least emphasize their style. This points towards a further hallmark of Chapela's music: He is fond of asynchronicity, non-simultaneity; the idea of resistance.

It was not until ten years ago that the artist, who was born in Mexico City in 1974, began composing. Following courses at the Centro de Investigación de la Música in his hometown, he undertook further studies in Paris, where he received significant impulses from Horacio Vaggione and José Manuel López López. A closer look at his extremely rapid development within this fairly short time period reveals two things: firstly, his extraordinary output, and secondly, linked to this output, a stupendous increase in the complexity of his scores.

Enrico Chapela started life as a guitarist. This is reflected in compositions such as *Melate Binario* for acoustic guitar, or *Crucigrama* for string quartet and guitar quartet. The year 2003 saw the premiere of Chapela's first large-scale work, the symphonic poem *Ínguesu*, a work which is compelling not only on account of its artistry but also in its formal and tonal brilliance.

Amazingly, the music is based on a football game. Not just any game, though. For *Ínguesu* was commissioned by the Carlos Chavez symphony orchestra, an orchestra whose name pays homage to Mexico's most prominent composer, whose musical thinking had been a notable influence on Chapela. In order to write the ultimate national musical drama, as he himself confessed, Chapela decided to set Mexico's heroic and historic victory over Brazil's dream team at the 1999 Confederations Cup in Mexico City to music.

With its remarkably short duration of nine minutes, *Ínguesu* is typical of Chapela's aesthetics: reminiscent of Webern in its condensation but totally different in its tonal character. The music is rigorously pointed, a true tonal drama that is a perfect reflection of the character of an exciting football game. The suspense Chapela creates is electrifying; it gradually takes on a sense of nervous neuroticism, soon becoming virtually intolerable and finally turning into an explosion of fortississimo, a moment that has a redemptive quality. In its percussive energy (Chapela uses kettledrums and four sets of percussion instruments), this work (as well as some others) reminds us of Stravinsky's Parisian ballets – *Sacre*, *Petrushka* and *the Firebird*. In Chapela's music, however, this energy is linked with motives taken from Mexican and Brazilian folk music, as well as football chants familiar to every Mexican child.

The degree to which this music is marked by refined (poly)rhythmic structures sets it apart from folkloristic (and thus potentially affirmative) music. Chapela, as becomes obvious, is a master of dramaturgy. A good description of this opalescent, kaleidoscopic symphonic poem is what Adorno once wrote about Beethoven's late works: that the process of reduction is immanent in the music. In fact, this is true of all of Chapela's music. Its material is no longer extensively explored and developed but is presented in condensed form.

The resulting atmospheric density in Chapela's compositions is further enhanced by a process of crystallization. Not unlike North-American minimal music, Chapela uses very few (fixed) motives as patterns that become players in a game. Again and again these motives recur in the musical sphere, forming a framework that holds it together. It would be wrong, however, to describe these motives as leitmotifs as employed in late Romanticism, or even in a Wagnerian sense, since they are characterized by the rhythmic spirit of contemporary modernism rather than by a melodious potential for illusion.

The Mexican composer's perspective goes beyond the limits of what is considered serious music. With its rhythmic interlocking and cross-fading, elements that are immanent to Chapela's style, a work such as *Irrational Music* has a visible archaic and vitalistic quality. Equally distinctive, however, especially in the highly expressive (and at times highly aggressive) suite *La nato es neta* for rock trio and acoustic quintet, are the influences of an aesthetics epitomized by, amongst others, the American experimentalist John Zorn. Another aspect evident in Chapela's music – both in *Irrational Music* and in *S.O.S.* for chamber ensemble, written in 2005 – is a tendency towards

clustering structures made up of glissandos and multiphonics that open up like an expander and then contract again but at the same time are marked by a process of dialogue. The finesse d'esprit is achieved in the listener's perception: a closer look at the score reveals that what appears to be a clichéd expression of chaos, indifferent in its use of sound, is in fact rigorously based on the principle of canonic imitation. As with all precisely organized music, accurate, both affective and analytical listening for structure is to be recommended.

In Chapela's music, you can never be sure that things will not take surprising turns. Although they seem at first to disturb the organics of the music, a detailed analysis shows that they are precisely calculated and follow a dramaturgical logic. In the work S.O.S. mentioned above, the musical development is interrupted several times. Suddenly, the tonal hardness that pervaded the music is challenged by a melancholy melos that appears like an antiphon of sensibility. The combination of those traditionally divergent patterns of sound is a deliberate device chosen by Chapela. His intention is to set both the noise of the world (likely to be drowned out regularly by the daily swell of noise in his hometown of Mexico City) and the silence before and after to music, hoping to grasp what is in between. The idea of a 'body of sound' takes on an immediate, palpable meaning in his works. For those bodies of sound vibrate so strongly that you cannot resist their fascination.

Radioaxial**2017-18**

10 min

for orchestra

3(III=picc).2.corA.2.bcl.2.dbn-4.3.2.btrbn.1-timp.perc(2):xyl/marimba/vib/t.bells/BD/tam-t
-harp-pft-cel-strings

World Premiere: 06 Apr 2018

Music Hall, Cincinnati, OH, USA

Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra

Conductor: James Gaffigan

Availability: This work is available from Boosey & Hawkes for the world

Shadow Moon Dance**based on the poem Drinking Alone With the Moon by LI BAI****2009**

10 min

for orchestra

1.af1.1.corA.1.bcl.1.dbn-2.2.3.1.timp(=susp.cym).perc(3):l=vib/tam-t/gong(sm in water
bucket, lo); II=crot/tam-t/t.bells/Taiko dr/marimba; III=susp.cym/whirly tube/tgl/rain
stick/bamboo chimes/metal chimes-pft(=cel)-harp-strings; hn2, tpt2, timp, 1vln1, 1vln2,
1vla and 1vlc also play whirly tubes

Availability: This work is available from Boosey & Hawkes for the world

CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

Irrational

2009

8 min

for chamber orchestra

1.1.1.bcl.1-1.1.1.0-perc(2):I=vib/2wdbl/2jam bl/4tom-t/crash.cym;
II=marimba/tamb/cowbell/2cans/2bongo/2conga/crash.cym-pft-strings

World Premiere: 05 Jun 2009

City University, Graduate Center, Elebash Recital Hall, New York, NY, USA

The New Paths Chamber Ensemble

Conductor: David Alan Miller

Availability: This work is available from Boosey & Hawkes for the world

Li Po

2008/09

10 min

for chamber orchestra

1.1.1.1-1.1.1.1-perc(2):I=vib/gong/timp/tam-t(shared with II); II=crot/t.bells/Taiko
dr/marimba/tam-t-strings(2.0.2.2.2); elec.soundtrack

World Premiere: 07 Apr 2009

Walt Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles, CA, USA

Los Angeles Philharmonic

Conductor: Esa-Pekka Salonen

Availability: This work is available from Boosey & Hawkes for the world

SOLO INSTRUMENT(S) AND ORCHESTRA

Encrypted Poetry

2007

18 min

Percussion trio concerto

2.picc.2.corA.2.bcl.2.dbn-4.3.2.btrbn.tuba-timp.perc(3):I=double whistle(glissando whistle)/skull whistle(wind whistle)/crot/t.bells/marimba(shared with P2)/multi perc set(2TD/hi snare/3wdbl/ride cym/chin.cym)/cajón; II=skull whistle(wind whistle)/teponaxtli(log dr)/glsp(shared with P3)/marimba(shared with P1)/multi perc set(2chin.tom-t/med SD/tamb/2cans/sizzle cym/splash cym); III=skull whistle(wind whistle)/glsp(shared with P2)/vib/multi perc set(2timb/lo snare/3cans/crash cym) -pft-strings

World Premiere: 19 Apr 2007

University of Cincinnati, College-Conservatory of Music, Corbett Auditorium, Cincinnati, Percussion Group Cincinnati, percussion; CCM Philharmonia Orchestra
Conductor: Mark Gibson

Availability: This work is available from Boosey & Hawkes for the world

Espresso Doppio

2017

7 min

for two clarinets and orchestra

2.2.corA.2.2-4.2.0.0-timp.perc(2):tamb/tom-t/tam-t/claves/BD/bells/cym/snare/tenor dr-strings

World Premiere: 12 Jan 2018

Staatstheater, Großes Haus, Cottbus, Germany
Duo Gurfinkel, clarinet; Philharmonisches Orchester Cottbus
Conductor: Markus Frank

Availability: This work is available from Boosey & Hawkes for the world

Kaleidoscopio

2015

17 min

Concerto for flute(s) and orchestra

2.picc(=af).2.corA.2.bcl.2.dbn-4.3.2.btrbn.1-timp.perc(3):I=4toms/vib/ bottles/plastic bag/susp.cym; II=maracas/BD/bottles/plastic bag; III=bottles/plastic bag-harp-pft-strings;
solo: soprano, alto, bass flute

World Premiere: 18 Oct 2015

Tetro Juárez, Guanajuato, Mexico
Alejandro Escuer, flute; Orquesta Sinfónica de la Universidad de Guanajuato
Conductor: Roberto Beltrán Zavala

Availability: This work is available from Boosey & Hawkes for the world

MAGNETAR

2011

25 min

Concerto for electric cello and orchestra

2(II=af).2(II=corA).2(II=bcl).2-4.3.2.0-timp.perc(2):I=crot/t.bells/vibratone/susp.crash/ta m-t/3tom-t(lo,med,hi)/BD(horizontal); II=vib/spring dr/tamb/4susp.cym(ride,crash,splash,sizzle)/3SD(lo,med,hi)/BD-harp-pft(=cel)-strings

World Premiere: 20 Oct 2011

Walt Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles, CA, USA
Johannes Moser, cello; Los Angeles Philharmonic
Conductor: Gustavo Dudamel

Availability: This work is available from Boosey & Hawkes for the world

Noctámbulos

2008

30 min

Concerto for rock trio and orchestra

2.picc.2.corA.2.bcl.tsax.2.dbn-4.3.2.btrbn.1-timp.perc(3):I=glsp/claves/darabouka/BD; II=almglocken/teponaxtli/gong/doumbek; III=kalimba/vib/steel dr/djembé; IV=almglocken/t.bells/marimbula/vib/Cajón-prep.pft-elec.git-elec.bass-dr-strings

World Premiere: 06 Sep 2008

Kulturpalast, Dresden, Germany
Jens Legler, elec.gtr / Jesús Lara, b.gtr / Luis Miguel Costero, dr; Dresdner Sinfoniker
Conductor: Olari Elts

Availability: This work is available from Boosey & Hawkes for the world

Noctámbulos (chamber orchestra version)

2008

30 min

Concerto for rock trio and chamber orchestra

2(I=picc).2(II=corA).1.tsax.2(II=dbn)-2.2.1.btrbn.1-timp.perc(4) -prep.pft-elec.git-elec.bass-dr-strings

Availability: This work is available from Boosey & Hawkes for the world

VOICE(S) AND ORCHESTRA

Zimmergramm

2016

17 min

for tenor, baritone, bass, guitar, chorus (SATB) and orchestra

3(1=picc).2.corA.2.bcl.2.dbn-4.3.3.1-timp.perc(2)-harp-pft-strings

CHORUS AND ORCHESTRA

World Premiere: 15 Sep 2016
Beethovenhalle, Bonn, Germany
LandesJugendChor NRW / Bundesjugendorchester
Conductor: Alondra de la Parra

ENSEMBLE AND CHAMBER WITHOUT VOICE(S)

Acoussence

2012 14 min

for mixed octet

fl.ob.cl-2vln.vla.vlc.db

World Premiere: 17 Nov 2012

Centro de Acción Social por la Música, Sala Fedora Alemán, Caracas, Venezuela
Members of the Simón Bolívar Symphony Orchestra of Venezuela
Conductor: Joshua Dos Santos

Availability: This work is available from Boosey & Hawkes for the world

Crucigrama

2006 19 min

for string quartet with guitar quartet
9790202532218 4 guitars, string quartet

World Premiere: 06 Dec 2007

National Centre of Arts, Blas Galindo Concert Hall, Mexico City, Mexico
Cuarteto Latinoamericano & EntreQuatre

Availability: This work is available from Boosey & Hawkes for the world

El Cuarto Camino

(The Fourth Way)

1996 13 min

for string quartet

World Premiere: 01 Jun 1996

Claustro de Sor Juana, Mexico City, Mexico
Camerton String Quartet

Availability: This work is available from Boosey & Hawkes for the world

Lo Nato es Neta

2001-2003 27 min

Suite for rock trio and acoustic quintets

elec.gtr-Bgtr-drum set;
fl.cl.ob.tsax.bn-hn.2tpt.trbn.tuba-perc(4);I=glsp/claves/darabouka;
II=almglocken/kalimba/tabla; III=steel dr/teponaxtlí/djembé;
IV=t.bells/marímbula/cajón-prepared pft-strings

World premiere incomplete: 29 Sep 2001

Teatro, Aguascalientes, Mexico
José White String Quartet
Conductor: Enrique Barrios

Availability: This work is available from Boosey & Hawkes for the world

La Mengambrea

2002 13 min

for saxophone quartet

ssax.asax.tsax.barsax

9790202532164 (Score & parts)

World Premiere: 01 May 2003

National Centre of Arts, Blas Galindo Concert Hall, Mexico City, Mexico
Anacrusax Sax Quartet

Availability: This work is available from Boosey & Hawkes for the world

Nanobots

2010 7 min

for chamber ensemble

vln.vlc.db.bandoneon.pft

World Premiere: 11 Apr 2011

The Apex, Bury St Edmunds, United Kingdom
Britten Sinfonia

Availability: This work is available from Boosey & Hawkes for the world

S.O.S.

2005 12 min

for chamber ensemble

fl.cl-pft-vln.vla.vlc

Availability: This work is available from Boosey & Hawkes for the world

PIANO(S)

Duelo en vela

2008

3 min 40 sec

for piano

9790202532300 Piano

World Premiere: 31 Jul 2008

Teatro Mecodonio Alcalá, Oaxaca, Mexico

Edith Ruiz, piano;

Availability: This work is available from Boosey & Hawkes for the world

INSTRUMENTAL

Melate Binario

2004

6 min

for solo acoustic guitar

9790202532201 **Guitar (score & part)**

World Premiere: 25 Nov 2004

National Centre of Arts, Blas Galindo Concert Hall, Mexico City, Mexico

Gonzalo Salazar, guitar;

Availability: This work is available from Boosey & Hawkes for the world

MISCELLANEOUS

Bowsax

2011

13 min

for string quartet and saxophone quartet

World Premiere: 18 Jul 2011

Vail Mountain School, Vail, CO, USA

Calder String Quartet / Mana Saxophone Quartet

Availability: This work is available from Boosey & Hawkes for the world