

## 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.



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**Radioaxial****2017-18**

10 min

for orchestra

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

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**World Premiere: 06 Apr 2018**

Music Hall, Cincinnati, OH, United States

Cincinnati Symphony Orchestra

Conductor: James Gaffigan

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

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**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

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## CHAMBER ORCHESTRA

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### **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

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**World Premiere: 05 Jun 2009**

City University, Graduate Center, Elebash Recital Hall, New York, NY, United States

The New Paths Chamber Ensemble

Conductor: David Alan Miller

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

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### **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

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**World Premiere: 07 Apr 2009**

Walt Disney Concert Hall, Los Angeles, CA, United States

Los Angeles Philharmonic

Conductor: Esa-Pekka Salonen

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

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## SOLO INSTRUMENT(S) AND ORCHESTRA

### Antiphaser

**2019-20** 20 min

Concerto for electric violin and orchestra

picc.2.2.corA.2.bcl.2.dbn-4.3.2.btrbn.1-timp.perc(2):I=vib/4tom-t/susp.cym/tam-t;  
II=marimba/BD/t.bells-harp-pft(=cel)-strings

**World Premiere: 11 Feb 2021**

Benaroya Hall, Seattle, United States  
Pekka Kuusisto, violin; Seattle Symphony  
Conductor: Thomas Dausgaard

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

### Braceros

**2019-20** 30 min

Cantata for mariachi and orchestra

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

### Encrypted Poetry

**2007** 18 min

Percussion trio concerto

2.picc(=af).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, United States  
Johannes Moser, cello; Los Angeles Philharmonic  
Conductor: Gustavo Dudamel

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

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**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

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**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

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**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

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**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);!l=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)**

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**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

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### **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

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### **Bowsax**

**2011**

13 min

for string quartet and saxophone quartet

**World Premiere: 18 Jul 2011**

Vail Mountain School, Vail, CO, United States

Calder String Quartet / Mana Saxophone Quartet

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