




MARIO LAVISTA



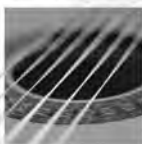
MIRRORS OF SOUNDS



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Mirrors of Sounds
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Acknowledgments

We are moved by things. And in being moved, we make things.

—Sara Ahmed¹

Book projects have rich back stories that often remain untold. These back stories have plots with multiple locations and myriad characters that move the plots forward. My journey into thinking through the pages of this book has taken me to geographies as distant as Buenos Aires, Bogotá, Madrid, Helsinki, and Mexico City, and has covered a span of almost two decades. Like many single-authored scholarly monographs, this project started as an academic assignment. As a foreign graduate student obtaining a degree in a U.S. musicology program (UC Davis), the decision to write my dissertation on the music of Mario Lavista—a living Mexican composer—had to be accompanied by a fierce justification. I would not have succeeded in my attempt to pursue this route if it had not been for the incredible support of my dissertation advisor, Beth E. Levy. Her generous guidance and encouragement have marked me for life. In its doctoral form, this study greatly benefited from advice and feedback from other mentors, especially Sandra J. Graham, Pablo Ortiz, and Chris Reynolds. From the very early stages of my research and through composing the final product, my journey into writing this book has been accompanied by the incomparable support of Luisa Vilar-Payá and Alejandro L. Madrid. Through the years they have read many portions of this study and have offered invaluable feedback. Their encouragement, advice, and friendship continue to make my life and profession richer and fuller every day.

What prompted this study, as is often the case with all my research projects, was my being moved by sound. I began my inquiry into Mario Lavista's music after hearing a live performance of one of his pieces, which stimulated me on both an intellectual and emotional level. From that visceral auditory response, I began to think *through* music. Thinking *through* music prompted other historical and aesthetic inquiries that formed the point of departure for my research. Therefore, to emulate the words of Sara Ahmed, this book can be regarded a “happy object,” as it is the result of being positively affected by music. Although my exposure to Lavista's music dates back to my undergraduate years in Puebla, I did not meet him until later, during a concert at the Center for the Arts Theater in San Francisco, California, in the early 2000s. From that point onward, Lavista's generosity toward this project was boundless, ranging

¹ Sara Ahmed, “Happy Objects,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 33.

from allowing me free access to his scores, manuscripts, recordings, and notes, to gifting me multiple issues of the journal *Pauta* and many other resources.

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*Soli Deo Gloria
ad infinitum*

About the Companion Website

www.oup.com/us/mariolavista

Oxford has created a companion website to accompany this book, and the reader is encouraged to take full advantage of it. The companion website contains a variety of materials, including pictures, program notes, recordings, and music and video links. It also includes lists and tables with information for readers interested in learning more about the topic. These are signaled throughout the text with Oxford's symbol . The website will be updated as new research materials become available.

1

Introduction

The Mirrors of Sounds in Lavista's Music

While attending a new music concert at the Sala Xochipilli of the Escuela Nacional de Música as an undergraduate student, I was particularly struck by a piece for oboe and tuned crystal glasses titled *Marsias*, composed by Mario Lavista. Six musicians were performing the glasses on the left side of the stage, and the oboist was on the right.¹ The physical distance between these two instrumental forces, visible to my eyes, paralleled the sonic contrast made audible from each side of the stage. On the one hand, the pristine soundcloud coming from the glasses' harmonic field was mainly built on perfect intervals; on the other, the intensely coarse oboe line was coming in and out of consonance with the glasses' harmonic field.

While the sonority of the glasses remained pure, clear, and ethereal, the sounds produced by the oboe through the use of extended techniques seemed fractured, garbled, and almost suffocating. At the sonic level I perceived a sense of struggle, but more so, I was feeling it *in my body*. Being familiar with the story of the mythological satyr Marsyas—who after losing a musical contest to Apollo was hung to a tree and skinned alive—I associated the story with the sonic narrative unfolding before my eyes and with the visceral sensation felt in my body. I was captivated not only by the immensely rich sonic sphere that surrounded me, but also by the powerful possibilities of signification that I, as a young listener, gathered from listening.

Driven by affect after that sonic experience, I was eager to get a hold of the score of *Marsias*.² To my surprise, the musical notation was preceded by an epigraph. The quoted words, taken from a short story by Spanish poet Luis Cernuda, seemed to “match” the general gist I had gathered from my listening experience of the piece. Instead of satiating my quest for meaning, the presence of the epigraph prompted more questions. I was intrigued by its presence and its role in the score.³ What was

¹ Oboist and scholar Roberto Kolb-Neuhaus performed *Marsias* on that occasion. The concert took place on December 5, 1996, during a national composition conference hosted by the National School of Music at the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). That was my first experience at the institution, for at the time I was living and studying in Puebla, Mexico.

² Critical theorist Sara Ahmed states that “affect is what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects.” See Sara Ahmed, “Happy Objects,” in *The Affect Theory Reader*, ed. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 29.

³ Titles, epigraphs, dedications, illustrations, and other elements that usually accompany a given work have been defined as “paratexts.” Whether or not the paratexts are considered as *belonging* to the text,

the extent of the connection between the lines of the epigraph and the music that preceded it? Did the epigraph serve purposes other than introducing the score? These initial questions led me to investigate further into the possible confluences between literature and sound and how those confluences connected to Lavista's creative process. As I soon realized, a salient characteristic of Lavista's compositional trajectory was precisely the multiple references to other art forms he brought to his work.

Composer, pianist, intellectual, editor, writer, and pedagogue, Lavista has been regarded as one of the leading composers of Western art music of his generation throughout the Americas. He was a prolific composer of orchestral, stage, chamber, solo, and electronic pieces, and his compositional trajectory was characterized by its intersections with the other arts. His music shows an integration of modernist avant-garde trends and late-medieval and Renaissance compositional techniques. Lavista's music intersects not only with poetry and literature but also with the visual arts. Mapping ways in which Lavista integrated texts or images into his scores serves as a frame of reference, as a way of *seeing* the works.⁴

These and other considerations are at the core of the present study. As a composer, Lavista is noted for his meticulous attention to timbre, motivic permutation, and texture, and his music is often described as evocative, refined, and poetic.⁵ Through an analytical and stylistic discussion of Lavista's music, I offer a panorama of the main compositional principles that guided his career. I take Lavista's music as a point of convergence where resonances arise—understanding by resonance the response evoked by an interacting presence. Exploring the resonances in Lavista's music takes us through a variety of confluences between sound, text, and image.

A frame that is useful to study the interactions of the multiple references Lavista incorporates in his music is intertextuality.⁶ Even though literary theorists have applied this concept mainly to address written texts, it has entered into music

they are there in order to *present* it; to make it present, to assure its presence in the world. While the term *paratext* is used when addressing literary works, it can also be applied to written elements that usually accompany a music score. See Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 1.

⁴ Tia DeNora explains that these ways of seeing provide a frame for the music and “offer the reader a discourse location, a perspective for viewing the musical works.” In a similar way, I aim to map certain ways of evaluating Lavista's works by drawing connections between sound, text, and image. Tia DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 30.

⁵ Aurelio Tello notes that Lavista's use of extended techniques, such as multiphonics or alternative fingering in the winds, creates “atmósferas de sutil refinamiento” (atmospheres of subtle refinement). Aurelio Tello, “La creación musical en México durante el siglo XX,” in *La música en México: Panorama del siglo XX*, ed. Aurelio Tello (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, Conaculta, 2010), 528.

⁶ Literary theorist Julia Kristeva, who coined the term, offers the following definition: “The text is . . . a permutation of texts, an intertextuality: in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another. Julia Kristeva, “The Bounded Text,” in *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to Literature and Art*, ed. Leon S. Roudiez, trans. Thomas Gora, Alice Jardine, and Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1980), 36.

scholarship through discussions of musical borrowings, quotations, or allusions within compositions.⁷ As opposed to intermusicality, the term *intertextuality* allows for a discussion of possible relationships between music and other arts.⁸ A main goal of the present study is to broaden the understanding of Lavista's music by considering the interaction of the multiple texts—musical or otherwise—woven into his musical discourse. The result will not be closed or definitive, but rather suggestive of multiple directions for interpretation. The intertextual dimension of Lavista's music is not limited to poetic or visual references. It can also be explored when considering Lavista's musical self-borrowings, a process he often followed by using the same music in a different context.

While intertextuality is a useful frame to place the different references in a work in dialogue with each other, I propose understanding a *text*—in this case, a musical composition—as a social space.⁹ This social space is perpetually open, allowing anyone to enter and inhabit it as well as to confront, challenge, and transform it from within. Instead of being an *object* of study, Lavista's music becomes an *occasion* for study.¹⁰ As a social space, it presents an invitation that is suggested upon, not imposed. In this multidimensional and multidirectional space, we lose track of ourselves and of each other. Any interpretive considerations that could be offered from within that space are not based on authoritarian paradigms of objectivity. Rather, they are enveloped in a misty fog or, better yet, in clouds that take shape only when the viewer (i.e., the reader) assigns shape to it.

Understanding Lavista's music as a social space is particularly appropriate because he was a *relational* composer. He did not write music as a private enterprise but rather with and for people, often close friends, collaborators, or musicians with whom he had established affective relationships. They are part of the social text as much as the other nonhuman intertexts he incorporated, whether literary, pictorial, or sonic. The way in which the different bodies (human and nonhuman) interact with each other in this spatial world is not linear; it is not based on a single communication system but is best understood as a multiform affective communion made possible

⁷ Music scholars have used intertextuality as an analytical frame in myriad musical traditions. Among musicologists who have explored intertextuality within Western art music are: J. Peter Burkholder, *All Made of Tunes: Charles Ives and the Uses of Musical Borrowing* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995); David Metzger, *Quotation and Cultural Meaning in Twentieth-Century Music* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Michael L. Klein, *Intertextuality in Western Art Music* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); Violetta Kostka, Paulo Ferreira de Castro, and William Everett, eds., *Intertextuality in Music: Dialogic Composition* (New York: Routledge, 2021); and Norton Dudeque, *Heitor Villa-Lobos's Bachianas Brasileiras: Intertextuality and Stylization* (New York: Routledge, 2022).

⁸ J. Peter Burkholder, "Intertextuality," *Grove Music Online*, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>, accessed June 20, 2023.

⁹ I follow poet Fred Moten's view of intertextuality as a social space where "people, things, are meeting there and interacting, rubbing off one another, brushing against one another—and you enter into that social space, to try to be part of it." Fred Moten, "The General Antagonism: An Interview with Stephen Shukaitis," in Stephano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning & Black Study* (New York: Minor Compositions, 2013), 108.

¹⁰ Moten, "The General Antagonism," 108.

through their echoes and reflections bouncing back and forth between them.¹¹ What unifies all of the human and nonhuman bodies in that social space is their sonic potential. The sound of their echoes allows communion through reflection. Therefore, the metaphor of *mirrors of sounds* that grants this book its title can be particularly useful to address the relational affective powers at play in Lavista's music.¹² The pluralized nouns of the phrase signal the multiplicity of voices that emerge in intertextual readings.

If music is a social space where human and nonhuman bodies commune by bouncing reflections off each other, I would like to suggest the act of *mirroring* as that which happens during the listening experience. Engaged listening is a process of recognizing subjectivities made possible only through reflections. In this study, I position myself as a listener who engages in acts of mirroring when approaching Lavista's music. I am interested in the reflections and echoes that unfold when I am attending to the interactions between the intertexts gathered from the music (sonically and through the score).

This subjective engagement with mirroring is possible through an affective connection with the material, understanding affect as a process of sensory experiences that produce histories located in the body. This affective connection symbiotically merges the visceral, emotional, and mental in an indivisible whole and takes in the form of sensations, feelings, emotions, and ideas.¹³ Emerging through the listening experience, they constitute *affective economies* that do not reside in the object per se but are produced as the effects of circulation.¹⁴ Positioning myself as a subjective listener, I intend not to find the emotions *in* the sonic materials, but to pay attention to how the materials generate effects.¹⁵ I focus on the sociality of emotions that surfaces when I enter the social space proposed by Lavista's music and examine what the intertexts are doing, as well as the kinds of effects they generate.¹⁶

¹¹ As Marie Thompson and Ian Biddle state, "affective powers are relational, insofar as they arise and are modulated by the encounters between bodies." Marie Thompson and Ian Biddle, "Introduction: Somewhere between the Signifying and the Sublime," in *Sound, Music, Affect*, ed. Marie Thompson and Ian Biddle (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 9.

¹² In Lavista's lectures and writings, and in writings by others, we often find the use of images of mirrors and reflections in connection to his aesthetic sensibility.

¹³ Articulations of affect are always mediated by our conditioning. We are invested in affective relationalities. Challenging the mind-body binarism and arising in the midst of *in-betweenness*, affect "is integral to a body's perpetual becoming." See Gregg and Seigworth, introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*, 3.

¹⁴ As Sara Ahmed notes, in such affective economies, "emotions *do things*, and they align individuals with communities—or body space with social space—through the very intensity of their attachments." In this model, "emotions work as a form of capital: affect does not reside positively in the sign or commodity, but is produced only as an effect of its circulation." Sara Ahmed, "Affective Economies," *Social Text* 22, no. 2 (2004): 119–20. Moreover, as Ahmed clarifies, by attending to the effects of circulation, we can "think about the 'sociality' of emotion." Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 8.

¹⁵ Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, 19.

¹⁶ Like Ahmed, I begin with the "messiness of the experiential, the unfolding of bodies into worlds, and the drama of contingency, how we are touched by what we are near." Ahmed, "Happy Objects," 30.

Drawing a Biographical Sketch

While the present study is not a biography, in this section I will offer a brief sketch of Lavista's life, especially because the published literature centered on his work generally lacks biographical details.¹⁷ The events included here mainly highlight salient aspects of the composer's upbringing and compositional trajectory.

Mario Lavista Camacho was born in Mexico City on April 3, 1943, alongside his twin sister María Luisa. The twins were named after their parents, Mario Lavista and María Luisa Camacho, whose marriage dissolved soon after the children were born. Abandoned by their father, the twins grew up in the house of their maternal grandparents, Guillermo and María Luisa Camacho, where they lived with their mother and two uncles, Guillermo and Ramón Camacho. This household was located on Gabriel Mancera Street in Colonia del Valle, a middle-class neighborhood in the southwestern part of Mexico City.

The Camacho grandparents were voracious readers, and not surprisingly, they often gifted books to their grandchildren. Being an opera lover, María Luisa often took her children to opera performances at the Palacio de Bellas Artes (Palace of Fine Arts). Literature, music, and the visual arts were part of the twins' upbringing, and they began their formal musical education when they were nine years old.¹⁸ "Kiko" and "Kika," or "Los Kíkaros"—as they were called by their family—started piano lessons with Adelina Benítez, who allowed them to practice at her home since the Camacho household had no piano.¹⁹ For some time, Los Kíkaros would take public transportation to Benítez's house in Calle Tonalá, Colonia Roma. Benítez was not only generous by allowing Los Kíkaros to practice at her home; years later, Lavista learned that she had given them piano lessons at no cost.²⁰

Lavista regarded Benítez as a key figure in his early music education. She introduced him to Claude Debussy's music and encouraged him to perform Debussy's piano pieces, something that Lavista treasured immensely. Later on, Benítez recommended that Lavista study with her own piano instructor, Francisco Gyves (see Figure 1.1). One of Lavista's most pleasurable memories was seeing Benítez many

¹⁷ The most comprehensive biographical sketch of Lavista can be found in the encyclopedia entry written by music historian Consuelo Carredano. See Consuelo Carredano, "Lavista Camacho, Mario," in *Diccionario de la música española e hispanoamericana*, dir. Emilio Casares Rodicio, vol. 6 (Madrid: Sociedad General de Autores y Editores, 2000), 803–12.

¹⁸ The exact age when they began piano instruction is hard to determine. In public interviews Lavista has given different ages, ranging from eight to eleven.

¹⁹ The nickname given to Mario and his twin sister María Luisa, "Los Kíkaros," came from a duet of comedians who were famous in the 1940s.

²⁰ A year after Lavista's passing, composer Ana Lara conducted an interview with Lavista's mother, María Luisa Camacho. In this conversation, María Luisa—who was 99 at the time—shared stories of Lavista's childhood. Lara published seven fragments of this conversation on Mediateca Lavista, an online platform hosted by *Sonus Litterarum*. See Sonus Litterarum, "Mario Lavista: historias de familia (1/7)," YouTube video, 11:54, November 26, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=juwV_0LUrZ8&t=6s, accessed June 21, 2023.



Figure 1.1 After a piano recital, ca. 1960. From left to right: Mario Lavista, Adelina Benítez, Francisco Gyves, and two unidentified persons. From Lavista's personal archive. Unknown photographer. Courtesy of Mario Lavista.

decades after their last encounter. In 2019, Benítez, who was in her 90s at the time, attended a lecture–recital Lavista gave at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM) where he played the prepared piano.²¹ This late encounter with Benítez, to whom he felt indebted for his musical career, was an unexpected, yet immensely joyful, surprise.

Although Lavista's relatives were art and music enthusiasts, they did not support his desire to pursue a career in music. Feeling pressured by his family to become an engineer, Lavista enrolled in the Instituto Politécnico Nacional in 1958. Soon after, however, he quit the program and moved out of the household. He was convinced that he was predestined to follow his musical vocation; he felt that having a musical career was an *inevitable* fate.²² Thanks to Rosa Covarrubias, wife of visual artist Miguel Covarrubias, Lavista met composer Carlos Chávez (1899–1978), who

²¹ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, January 14, 2020. Lavista also talked about his encounter with Benítez in an interview with Saúl Rodríguez. See Saúl Rodríguez, “La poética en Mario Lavista,” *Siglo Nuevo*, December 19, 2019, <https://siglonuevo.mx/nota/2002.la-poetica-en-mario-lavista>, accessed June 20, 2023. This lecture recital at UAM was to be Lavista's last public performance.

²² Mario Lavista, “Mario Lavista: La música eclesiástica actual no se diferencia de la del súper,” interview by EFE, *La Vanguardia* (Madrid), May 30, 2015, <https://www.lavanguardia.com/cultura/20150530/54431978147/mario-lavista-la-musica-eclasiastica-actual-no-se-diferencia-de-la-del-super.html>, accessed June 20, 2023.

heard him perform the piano. Through Chávez, Lavista enrolled in the Conservatorio Nacional de Música (National Music Conservatory) in 1963, at the age of twenty.²³ Chávez admitted him to the Conservatory's Taller de Composición (Composition Workshop), which he directed. During the four years of the curriculum, students received a monthly stipend that allowed them to devote themselves to analysis and composition for eight hours each day, including weekends. This fully immersive program was based on the principle of composing through modeling. After analyzing a number of pieces of a given genre, style, and period—from Bach to Debussy—students were asked to emulate those characteristics in compositional exercises. For the entire duration of the program, Lavista also took analysis courses with Spanish-born composer Rodolfo Halffter (1900–1987).

By the time he completed the four-year program at Chávez's Composition Workshop, Lavista had already composed a number of pieces, received commissions from the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (National Institute of Fine Arts), presented his music at the Palace of Fine Arts—a renowned performance venue in Mexico—and published his first score under Ediciones Mexicanas de Música.²⁴ In 1967, he was granted a scholarship by the French government to study at the Schola Cantorum in Paris with composer Jean-Étienne Marie (1917–1989). Lavista and his wife at the time, Rosa Martha Fernández—who also obtained a scholarship to study film in France—spent over two years in Paris, where their daughter Claudia Lavista was born. During his time abroad, Lavista attended a variety of concerts, classes, and events in various cities across Europe and started to incorporate unconventional sound sources in his music (shortwave radios and alarm clocks), and electronics. The multiple challenges of a newborn baby (Claudia was born early in 1969) led the young parents to return to Mexico, and a few years after their return the couple divorced.

Having studied in Europe brought Lavista significant prestige once he returned to Mexico. He immediately devoted himself to the country's contemporary music scene, which was centralized in the capital, Mexico City. There was a thriving experimental atmosphere during the early 1970s, and Lavista was at its core by founding the collective improvisation group Quanta. Through this ensemble he was involved in a variety of novel multidisciplinary experimental projects. In addition, in 1970 he began teaching at the National Music Conservatory—a post he would hold for the next forty-nine years.²⁵ His four-month stay at the Laboratory of Electronic Music of the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation (NHK) in 1972 gave him the opportunity to explore electronic technology in depth. Throughout the decade, Lavista composed a

²³ Lavista had previously attempted to enroll in the Conservatory, but he was not admitted, arguably because the director at the time, Joaquín Amparán, told him he was already too old to begin his formal studies at that institution. Chávez recommended that Lavista take private music lessons (on harmony and other subjects) with composer Héctor Quintanar (1936–2013).

²⁴ At the time, Ediciones Mexicanas de Música was a thriving publishing house of contemporary music.

²⁵ Lavista taught at the National Music Conservatory from 1970 to 2019. His trajectory in the institution, as student and teacher, is the focus of a short video produced by Alejandra Flores for Canal 22. See Noticias 22, "Mario Lavista: La creación y la interpretación simultánea de la música," YouTube video, 5:46, April 11, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xd3HRci62f8>, accessed June 20, 2023.

number of pieces with various degrees of indeterminacy and a series of graphic scores in conjunction with visual artist Arnaldo Coen (b. 1940). He also began a trend of self-borrowing whereby he would rework his own music by arranging it for different instrumentation. He also continued to perform as a pianist in numerous events, particularly concerts of twentieth-century music. In 1979, he composed the solo flute piece *Canto del alba*, written with and for flutist Marielena Arizpe, his closest collaborator and partner at the time. This piece premiered at the very first iteration of the Foro Internacional de Música Nueva (International Forum for New Music) in 1979, which was founded and directed by composer Manuel Enríquez (1926–1994).

Working closely with performers while exploring a variety of so-called extended techniques characterized Lavista's solo and chamber music since *Canto del alba* and throughout the 1980s and 1990s. In 1982, in conjunction with a group of enthusiastic performers and writers, Lavista founded the multidisciplinary music journal *Pauta: Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical*, an enterprise that, in spite of multiple financial obstacles, lasted over three decades. As its editor-in-chief, Lavista oversaw the publication of 147 issues of *Pauta*. During the 1980s, Lavista solidified his compositional language and composed a series of pieces that granted him a significant reputation both at home and abroad. In 1987, he became a member of the Academia de las Artes and received a Guggenheim Fellowship to write his first and only opera, *Aura* (1988), based on the short story of the same name by Carlos Fuentes. Deemed the catalyst for contemporary Mexican operatic writing, *Aura* premiered in 1989 at the Palace of Fine Arts (see Figure 1.2).²⁶ In 1988, composer, critic, and Lavista's former student Luis Jaime Cortez (b. 1962) edited a publication that included essays and reviews of Lavista's music by prominent writers and music critics, texts written by Lavista, and a list of the composer's works. This volume demonstrated that, at the relatively young age of forty-five, Lavista had already gained significant prominence in the concert music scene.²⁷

The 1990s was a decade of significant national recognition for Lavista. He received the Premio Nacional de Ciencias y Artes and the Medalla Mozart in 1991, an honorable mention from the Sistema Nacional de Creadores del Fondo para la Cultura y las Artes in 1993, and membership in the prestigious El Colegio Nacional beginning in 1998 (see Figure 1.3). He also received several commissions to write large works, including *Clepsidra* (1991), for the San Antonio Symphony Orchestra; *Lacrymosa* (1992), for the Orquesta Sinfónica de Minería; *Tropo para Sor Juana* (1995), for the Orquesta Filarmónica de la UNAM; and the choral piece *Missa Brevis*

²⁶ In Eugenio Delgado and Áurea Maya's words: "Fue la obra de Lavista, sin duda, el detonante de la composición operística en la música mexicana contemporánea." Eugenio Delgado and Áurea Maya, "La ópera mexicana durante el siglo XX," in Tello, *La música en México*, 639. Almost thirty years after its premiere, *Aura* was presented by Escenia Ensemble at the Teatro Esperanza Iris in 2018, directed by Ragnar Conde. This version of the one-act opera can be viewed in Escenia Ensemble, "AURA Escenia Ensemble 2019," YouTube video, 58:29, September 15, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sQA_dyvh1XA, accessed June 20, 2023.

²⁷ Luis Jaime Cortez, ed., *Mario Lavista: Textos en torno a la música* (Mexico City: Conaculta, INBA, Cenidim, 1988).



Figure 1.2 Escenia Ensemble 2018 production of Mario Lavista's *Aura* presented at the Teatro de la Ciudad Esperanza Iris. This image includes the four characters of the opera. From left to right: Carlos López (as General Llorente), Alejandra Sandoval (as Aura), Alonso Sicairos-León (as Felipe Montero), and Carla López-Speziale (as Consuelo). Scene director: Ragnar Conde. Courtesy of Ragnar Conde.

ad Consolationis Dominam Nostram (1994–1995), for Indiana University's Latin American Music Center. His decision to dedicate a religious piece to Our Lady of Consolation (or the *Virgen del Consuelo*) could be seen as a concealed dedication to his wife at the time, musicologist Consuelo Carredano.

Throughout his career, Lavista wrote a number of scores for television and film. Starting in the 1970s, he closely collaborated with director Nicolás Echevarría (b. 1947) for a series of film scores of which *Judea: Semana Santa entre los coras* (1973) was one of the first Mexican films to use electronic music. He continued to write scores for Echevarría's movies, including *María Sabina, mujer espíritu* (1978), *Niño Fidencio* (1982), *Cabeza de Vaca* (1990), and *Vivir mata* (2002). Until late in life, he also produced music for numerous documentaries and television shows commissioned by Televisa and directed by Héctor Tajonar, Echevarría, and Jaime Kuri, among others. His last such project, completed in 2015, was a documentary in homage to photographer Manuel Álvarez Bravo for Canal 22, a television station operated by the Secretariat of Culture.

Even though Lavista was not a practitioner of any particular religion, he wrote numerous works exploring religious genres within the Roman Catholic tradition. This trend was mostly evident from the mid-1990s onward. Two pieces that premiered in Spain in early 2000—*Cristo de San Juan de la Cruz* (2004), commissioned by the Festival Internacional de Música y Danza de Granada, and *Stabat Mater* (2004–2005), written for the Octeto Ibérico de Violonchelos—are among Lavista's many compositions

dealing with religious subjects. In 2013, he received the Premio Iberoamericano de la Música Tomás Luis de Victoria, a prestigious recognition granted to Ibero-American composers by the Sociedad General de Autores y Editores (SGAE) from Spain. To date, Lavista is the only Mexican composer who has received that recognition.

During the first two decades of the twenty-first century, Lavista continued to receive commissions from international festivals, and his works were frequently performed by some of the most distinguished chamber and orchestral groups both in Mexico and abroad. In 2010, Lavista wrote his first concerto (for violoncello), commissioned by and dedicated to Mexican cellist Carlos Prieto. An unexpected return to engaging with collective improvisation after a hiatus of thirty years characterized some of Lavista's projects during the 2010s. These were commissioned by visual artists to be performed in galleries while their installations were exhibited. Toward the end of the decade, in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of Mexico's 1968 student movement, Lavista wrote *Requiem de Tlatelolco* (2018) for orchestra, children's choir, and narrator. This would be Lavista's last large-scale work.

Teaching was a central activity for Lavista, for he found it to be as stimulating and creative as composing. As a pedagogue, Lavista taught music analysis and composition at the Conservatory from 1970 to 2019, and during the last few years of his life he taught analysis and orchestration at the Universidad Panamericana.²⁸ His role as educator and mentor, as Cortez expressed it, was relevant for "practically all Mexican composers younger than him."²⁹ Among the many composers Lavista mentored were Ana Lara, Javier Álvarez, Gabriela Ortiz, Hebert Vázquez, Mariana Villanueva, and Armando Luna. In 2010, the Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo granted Lavista an *honoris causa* doctorate. Until the late 2010s, he regularly gave lectures and master classes in academic institutions and festivals throughout the Americas and Europe, keeping a very active travel schedule. Through his continuous teaching activities both inside and outside of Mexico, Lavista remained an influential mentor to multiple musicians and composers.

Lavista maintained an active role as a writer and public speaker mainly through the series of lecture-recitals he regularly organized as a member of El Colegio Nacional. This prestigious government-funded institution was created to support the research and creative activities of an intellectual elite and to offer events for the general public (see Figure 1.3). During his tenure, he was the only musician on El Colegio's Council. Moreover, his essays appeared in various kinds of publications, including the journal *Diálogos: Artes, letras, ciencias humanas*, and *Letras Libres*, a magazine of literary criticism directed by historian Enrique Krauze.³⁰ Lavista's short essays are included in

²⁸ The Universidad Panamericana is a private Catholic university founded in Mexico City. A snapshot of Lavista's faculty profile is still available: see <https://eba.up.edu.mx/mario-lavista.html>, accessed June 20, 2023.

²⁹ Cortez, *Mario Lavista*, 14.

³⁰ *Letras Libres* remains central to literary production as a thriving and politically active online publication. See Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado, "Mexican Literature in the Neoliberal Era," in *A History of Mexican*



Figure 1.3 Mario Lavista during the ceremony of his induction to El Colegio Nacional in 1998. D.R. © El Colegio Nacional, Luis González Obregón 23, Mexico City, 1998. From El Colegio Nacional's collection. Used with permission.

two collections published by El Colegio Nacional, *Cuaderno de música 1* (2013), and *Cuaderno de música 2* (published posthumously in 2022). He also published a variety of texts in *Pauta*, which he directed throughout the journal's existence.

Lavista passed away on November 4, 2021, after struggling with cancer. A closed casket ceremony was held at the Palace of Fine Arts that same day. Surrounded by flowers and the sonic atmosphere of Lavista's *Lamento*, performed by Alejandro Escuer, Lavista's mother, María Luisa Camacho, his daughter, Claudia Lavista, and his granddaughter, Elisa Carrum Lavista offered their farewells to Mario in the company of some of his close friends and former students.

Expectations Placed on a Mexican Composer

In contrast to other twentieth-century Latin American composers who spent significant time abroad forging a career outside of their native countries, Lavista remained in Mexico his entire life, with the exception of his two-year period in Europe. As a deep listener and committed music analyst, Lavista constantly sought out new music from

around the world to engage with. Instead of imitating European and/or U.S.-American avant-garde trends, Lavista reinterpreted them in a local context.³¹ This allowed him to shape a compositional identity through which he rearticulated a Mexican reality that reflected an alternative Mexico—not the Mexico that was easily consumed by “extractivist” listeners, but a cosmopolitan Mexico that continues to be negated by colonialist empires.³² As Alejandro L. Madrid points out, addressing the work of Latin American composers only in relation to their successful or failed imitation of European models “reproduces the colonialist epistemological models that gave birth to musicology as a discipline and neglects to engage individual agency and consumption as the powerful, meaning-producing acts as they are.”³³ From the beginning of his career, as a modernist and an avant-gardist, Lavista maintained an active dialogue with musicians throughout the Americas and Europe. In that regard, his music should be contextualized not only within a Mexican sphere, but also as a product of “transcultural processes that inform local articulations of cosmopolitan ideas in post-colonial contexts.”³⁴

Presented as a universal experience, the so-called classical music as a cultural system continues to be driven by Western European hegemony.³⁵ The rearticulation of outside materials into a local context—a process Lavista explains as an “overcoming” (*superación*) of the United States and Europe—is a form of intellectual and emotional labor. In this labor, the postcolonial subject resists what Lavista calls “a kind of colonialist penetration whose objective has always been to achieve a cultural deformation in which merchandise and aesthetics are willfully mixed up.”³⁶ This purposeful *overcoming*, therefore, becomes a strategy of resistance against the limiting artistic discourses that imperialist agendas place upon peripheries.

³¹ Throughout the book, I use “America” and “American” to refer to continental matters, and “U.S.-American” when addressing that which pertains to the United States. See Daniel Immerwahr, *How to Hide an Empire: A History of the Greater United States* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2019).

³² For more about extractivist practices and extractivism in Latin America, see Macarena Gómez-Barris, *The Extractive Zone: Social Ecologies and Decolonial Perspectives* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2017); and Gabriela Valdivia, “Of Extractivist Wounds and Healing in the Americas,” *Latin American Research Review* 57, no. 4 (2022): 960–971.

³³ Alejandro L. Madrid, *In Search of Julián Carrillo and Sonido 13* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 18.

³⁴ Alejandro L. Madrid, “Renovation, Rupture, and Restoration: The Modernist Musical Experience in Latin America,” in *The Modernist World*, ed. Stephen Ross and Allana C. Lindgren (London: Routledge, 2015), 415.

³⁵ As Kira Thurman argues, “classical music, like whiteness itself, is frequently racially unmarked and presented as universal—until people of color start performing it.” Kira Thurman, “Performing Lieder, Hearing Race: Debating Blackness, Whiteness, and German Identity in Interwar Central Europe,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72, no. 3 (2019): 832. Sociologist Aníbal Quijano also reminds us that “[a]ll of the experiences, histories, resources, and cultural products ended up in one global cultural order revolving around European or Western hegemony. Europe’s hegemony over the new model of global power concentrated all forms of subjectivity, culture, and especially knowledge and the production of knowledge under its hegemony.” Aníbal Quijano, “Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism, and Latin America,” trans. Michael Ennis, *Nepantla: Views from South* 1, no. 3 (2000): 540.

³⁶ Mario Lavista, “En el ambiente de la renovación creadora de los lenguajes artísticos,” *Boletín Música Casa de las Américas* 66 (1977): 11–16. [...] una forma de penetración colonialista, cuyo objetivo ha sido siempre tratar de lograr una deformación cultural en la que se confunden voluntariamente mercancia y estética.] Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own. Throughout the book I provide quotes in their original Spanish to promote cross-cultural understanding.

Reductionist music history narratives have paid attention to musical scenes from the periphery insofar as they conform to exoticist expectations. Music that is devoid of exotic sonic markers goes unnoticed or is utterly dismissed. Recent initiatives to incorporate diversity and inclusion in Western music repertoires are often driven by a desire to satisfy these expectations.³⁷ Therefore, one of the strategies of resistance used by peripheral composers has been precisely to situate themselves and their work within a network of international references. For composers who have been positioned at the periphery of discourses around Western art music, composition is a strategy for imagining a creative, transgressive freedom.

In the case of the history of twentieth-century concert music in Mexico, for instance, Leonora Saavedra has brought this particular issue to light by challenging the reductionist historiographic accounts that insist on placing Carlos Chávez solely within a nationalist, indigenist framework. She shows how Chávez “was able to direct his musical preferences at will . . . developing a polysemic style capable of evoking a number of diverse associations.”³⁸ In a similar manner, Lavista made the conscious choice of writing *what he wanted*, rather than providing sonic markers that could be identified as Mexican.³⁹ By undertaking the intellectual and emotional labor of building a network of international references around himself, he rearticulated a different kind of *Mexicanness*. “Mozart belongs to me as much as he does to a person from Salzburg,” Lavista said, “Beethoven is also mine. I *demand* that he would be mine. They form part of our tradition too. Cosmopolitanism allows one to shape a personal language beyond the superficiality of sounding Mexican.”⁴⁰

Lavista constantly challenged expectations of what a Mexican or Latin American composer’s music should be about or sound like. Mexican composition, outside of Mexico, is often talked about or programmed insofar as there is a clear “Mexican” element either perceived by the listener or gathered by the critic as such. This could mean, for instance, citing “folk” or “popular” tunes or incorporating musical instruments original to Mexico.⁴¹ According to Venezuelan-American conductor Carmen-Helena Téllez, the expectation of drawing upon Mexican folk or popular tunes was

³⁷ Dylan Robinson uses the phrase “hungry listening” to refer to settler and colonial positionalities of listening. While Robinson is particularly addressing Indigenous music and music making, the form of perception behind the concept of hungry listening can illuminate the dynamics of Othering embedded in Eurocentric ideologies with regard to Latin America and other postcolonial contexts at large. See Dylan Robinson, *Hungry Listening: Resonant Theory for Indigenous Sound Studies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020).

³⁸ Leonora Saavedra, “Carlos Chávez’s Polysemic Style: Constructing the National, Seeking the Cosmopolitan,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society*, 68, no. 1 (2015): 99.

³⁹ In Paulina Lavista’s documentary in celebration of Mario Lavista’s seventieth birthday, flutist Horacio Franco opens his remarks by stating that Lavista “has written what he wants in the way that he wants.” Horacio Franco, in *La escritura musical: 70 años de Mario Lavista*, directed by Paulina Lavista (Mexico City: TV UNAM, 2013), DVD. [. . . ha escrito lo que quiere de la manera en la que quiere escribir.]

⁴⁰ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, December 18, 2006. [Tan mío es Mozart como de una gente de Salzburgo, y Beethoven es mío; exijo que sea mío. Forma parte de nuestra tradición. Este cosmopolitismo te permite formar, o intentar formar, un lenguaje personal que no tenga esos toques tan superficiales de tipo mexicano.]

⁴¹ The perceived *Mexicanness* in the work of composers Arturo Márquez (b. 1950) and Gabriela Ortiz (b. 1964), for example, might play a part in their increased popularity with audiences outside of Mexico.

placed on Lavista by foreigners as well as by nationals.⁴² In contrast, by embracing a cosmopolitan imaginary, Lavista challenged the political and ideological sentiments that inform categorizations that insist on a perceived *Mexicanness*.⁴³ While other composers surrendered to the pressure of adopting particular trends, fashions, or expectations, Lavista didn't. Cortez points out that this attitude reflected Lavista's "absolute artistic sincerity," a determination to engage only in what he "deeply" believed. To Cortez, Lavista represents the kind of "natural sincerity" and "free spontaneity" to which all composers should aspire.⁴⁴

More than a "natural sincerity," what made it possible for Lavista to compose *what he wanted* was a series of sociopolitical and economic factors. Integral to the development of a musical cosmopolitanism was Lavista's location, Mexico City, the great metropolis where the mechanisms that support Western art music in the country are centralized.⁴⁵ And within the massive unequal experience that is Mexico City, Lavista navigated freely across the urban areas that were accessible to and targeted the middle and upper-middle classes.⁴⁶ In the case of Lavista, emerging from the country's capital as a young student and coming back to it after his time in Europe granted him access to technologies and institutions from which to acquire a degree of visibility. Plugging himself into already established and legitimized networks of cultural and artistic influence, and surrounding himself with artists, musicians, and dancers interested in experimental cosmopolitan aspirations allowed him to acquire visibility beyond his discipline and beyond the metropolis. Like other avant-garde Ibero-American composers of his generation, Lavista became both "effective and affective" in his society through engaging in other roles that placed him at the front of the cultural/artistic life of the city not only as a composer, but also as a writer, editor, promoter, and public speaker (see Figure 1.4).⁴⁷

⁴² Carmen-Helena Téllez, in discussion with the author via Zoom, November 19, 2020.

⁴³ Jesús A. Ramos-Kittrell explores *mexicanidad* as "a critical lens to shed light on the transactional and transgressive aspects of human imagination and behavior through which people negotiate difference in order to situate themselves, and that problematize mexicanidad as an identitarian construct." See Jesús A. Ramos-Kittrell, "Introduction: Post-Mexicanidad Apropos of the Postnational," in *Decentering the Nation: Music, Mexicanidad, and Globalization*, ed. Jesús A. Ramos-Kittrell (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2020), xxvi.

⁴⁴ Luis Jaime Cortez, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, July 18, 2012. [Hay otro rasgo que tiene él, su absoluta sinceridad al medio artístico . . . ha ido haciendo las cosas en las que cree profundamente . . . Que puedas encontrar esa voz interior es de lo más difícil para un artista. Y él, gracias a esa sinceridad natural, esa espontaneidad tan libre, pues lo hizo desde el primer momento.]

⁴⁵ According to Tello, seemingly any approach to music composition in Mexico only takes into account activities within the capital. Tello, "La creación musical en México," 551.

⁴⁶ As Eduardo Herrera points out, the work of a Latin American composer is in itself "a metropolitan invention that takes place almost exclusively in cosmopolitan social formations." Eduardo Herrera, "El compositor uruguayo Coriún Aharonián: Música, ideología y el rol del compositor en la sociedad," *Latin American Music Review* 34, no. 2 (2013): 280. [La labor de músico especializado en composición es de por sí una invención metropolitana y toma lugar casi exclusivamente en formaciones sociales cosmopolitas.]

⁴⁷ This is how Eduardo Herrera addresses the "effective and affective" role that composers associated with Centro Latinoamericano de Altos Estudios Musicales (CLAEM) had in their societies. See Eduardo Herrera, *Elite Art Worlds: Philanthropy, Latin Americanism, and Avant-Garde Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 7.



Figure 1.4 Spanish composer Ramón Barce (1928–2008), Cuban composer Harold Gramatges (1918–2008), and Mario Lavista in Madrid, Spain, 1994. Courtesy of Elena Martín.

For decades before his death and up to the present, Lavista has been regularly introduced by critics and journalists as Mexico’s “most important” composer.⁴⁸ Lavista’s centrality in the Western art music scene in Mexico during his lifetime cannot be overlooked. Ever since he was a young composer, he was regarded as

⁴⁸ This was especially true after 2003, when Lavista turned sixty. In news clips from the past decade, Lavista was introduced as “el compositor más importante de música clásica,” and “el compositor mexicano más importante de nuestro tiempo.” Redacción, “Dedican a mexicano Mario Lavista festival en NY,” *Aristegui Noticias*, November 22, 2013, <https://aristeguinoticias.com/2211/kiosko/dedican-a-mexicano-mario-lavista-festival-en-ny/>, accessed June 21, 2023; Juan Carlos Talavera, “Mario Lavista Camacho prepara *Réquiem de Tlatelolco*,” *Excelsior*, April 2, 2018, <https://www.excelsior.com.mx/expresiones/mario-lavista-camacho-prepara-requiem-de-tlatelolco/1229914>, accessed June 21, 2023.

a central figure and talked about as such by music historians and critics.⁴⁹ This high visibility, which became particularly prominent in the last two decades of the twentieth century, was perceived as a concentration of power. As expected, this caused antagonisms and polemics about Lavista's centrality, and his prominent place was subject to backlash and strong criticism. To many, Lavista represented a renowned composer with an "institutional" stature. Moreover, as a music promoter, editor and educator, Lavista's endorsement of Western art music repertoires—which have historically been centered on heteropatriarchy and white supremacy—was severely challenged by a younger generation of musicians and composers.

Paradoxically, Lavista was never in charge of any institution, private or public.⁵⁰ While Chávez and Enríquez before him exerted power by directing national cultural and musical institutions, Lavista never held a directorship of that kind.⁵¹ Regardless of this, during his lifetime, Lavista had a strong influence on decisions that shaped Mexican classical music culture. He presided over government-led sponsorships such as the Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (FONCA), chaired composition prize committees, and acted as member of evaluating committees for cultural/artistic fellowships.

In spite of Lavista's centrality to twentieth-century Mexican concert music, to date there has been no comprehensive study of his work. Scholarship on Lavista's music has been limited to texts that offer analytical considerations of a single work or a small group of compositions.⁵² Among the most extensive of these, we can mention

⁴⁹ As early as 1966, when Lavista was only twenty-three years old, writer and cultural promoter Juan Vicente Melo introduced Lavista as a composer who *should* have a place in the history of Mexican music. Musicologist Esperanza Pulido published two profiles of Lavista in 1971 and 1976 in the peer-reviewed journal *Heterofonía*, which she funded and directed. By the age of thirty-three, Lavista was regarded as a leading voice in contemporary Mexican composition. Paulina Lavista's 2013 documentary on Mario Lavista opens with the following statement by composer Ana Lara: "I believe without a doubt that Mario Lavista is one of the greatest composers this country has had." Ana Lara, in *La escritura musical: 70 años de Mario Lavista*, dir. Paulina Lavista (Mexico City: TV UNAM, 2013), DVD. [Yo creo que sin duda Mario Lavista es uno de los grandes compositores que ha tenido este país.]

⁵⁰ In Hebert Vázquez's view, Lavista was an anomaly, as he had a central position in the Mexican concert music scene while never occupying a directorship or any other institutional seat of leadership. Hebert Vázquez, in discussion with the author, Albuquerque NM, April 7, 2014.

⁵¹ The major institutions Carlos Chávez directed include the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA), the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional, and the Conservatory. Manuel Enríquez also held the directorship of the Conservatory, INBA's Music Division, and the Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información Musical Carlos Chávez (Cenidim).

⁵² Among the published essays that focus on a single piece by Lavista are Eugenio Delgado, "El lenguaje musical de *Aura* de Mario Lavista," *Heterofonía* 108 (1993): 45–51; Ananay Aguilar S., "La circularidad en *Aura*, la ópera de Mario Lavista," *Cuadernos de música, artes visuales y artes escénicas* 2, no. 1 (2005–2006): 53–71; Leopoldo G. Martí, "Un análisis de *Cante* de Mario Lavista," *Pauta: Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical* 101 (2007): 72–84; Hernán Gabriel Vázquez, "Discurso e interpretación en *A Cage for Sirius* de Mario Lavista," *Huellas ... Búsquedas en Arte y Diseño* 7 (2010): 75–86; Susana González Aktories, "Apariciones sonoras entre el texto y la ópera: Sinestesia y transfiguración en *Aura* de Carlos Fuentes y Mario Lavista," *Nuevas Poligrafías. Revista de teoría literaria y literatura comparada* 1 (2020): 19–52; and Leonardo Coral, "Impresionismo, música medieval y técnicas extendidas en el *Stabat Mater* de Mario Lavista," *Sonus Litterarum*, November 14, 2021, <https://sonuslitterarum>.

the analytical study conducted by composer Hebert Vázquez and the two-year research project by Argentinean flutist Beatriz Plana.⁵³ The volume edited by Cortez provides a glimpse into the first two decades of Lavista's compositional production, but it does not provide a broader historical contextualization of the composer's trajectory up to that point.⁵⁴ The present study, although not comprehensive, is the first to offer an interpretive and contextual frame of Lavista's work within contemporary Mexican society. In addition to offering a much-needed contribution to the study of Lavista's music, my book aims to expand the aforementioned literature by discussing the panoramic array of cosmopolitan ideals in the musical and cultural practices in Mexico from the late-twentieth century and up to the present.

While analytical and critical attention given to Mexican music of the first half of the twentieth century has increased in the last decades, historians have paid relatively little attention to the post-1950s concert music scene. The surveys by Julio Estrada (1984) and Yolanda Moreno Rivas (1994) offer a general overview of the major compositional activities during the first half of the twentieth century, but their discussion of music post-1975 is very limited.⁵⁵ More recent volumes edited by Aurelio Tello (2010), and Consuelo Carredano and Victoria Eli (2015) offer a glimpse into the multifaceted activity of contemporary music composition without going too deep into the last quarter of the century.⁵⁶ Issues of nationalism, transnationalism, and political identities in Mexican music during the first half of the twentieth century have been broadly explored, and discussions of cosmopolitanism in Mexican music have increased in the last decade. This study aims to engage with similar lines of investigation while providing a perspective on the cultural practices that have taken place during the last three decades of the twentieth century and into the present.

mx/impresionismo-musica-medieval-y-tecnicas-extendidas-en-el-stabat-mater-de-mario-lavista, accessed June 21, 2023. Among the theses and dissertations that are also centered on a single work by Lavista are Beatriz A. Bonnet, "Mario Lavista and His Music with an Analysis of *Ficciones*" (master's thesis, Rice University, 1988); Amy Thiemann, "Embracing Internationalism: An Examination of Mario Lavista with an Analysis of *Cinco danzas breves*" (DMA diss., University of North Texas, 2017); and Jonathan Ryan Thompson, "Crystal Clear: A Performance Guide and Electronic Accompaniment of Mario Lavista's *Marsias* for Oboe and Crystal Glasses" (DMA diss., University of North Texas, 2019). In more recent years, a number of bachelor's and master's theses written by performers have focused on Lavista's music.

⁵³ Hebert Vázquez, *Cuaderno de viaje: Un posible itinerario analítico en torno a Simurg y Ficciones de Mario Lavista* (Mexico City: Conaculta; Morelia: Proart, 2009). Beatriz Plana's 2005–2007 research project is titled *La flauta contemporánea en la obra de Mario Lavista: Aplicación de las técnicas extendidas en la ejecución musical*.

⁵⁴ Cortez, *Mario Lavista*.

⁵⁵ Julio Estrada, ed., *Período contemporáneo (1958–1980)*, vol. 5 of *La música de México* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, 1984); Yolanda Moreno Rivas, *La composición en México en el siglo XX* (Mexico City: Conaculta, 1994).

⁵⁶ Tello, *La música en México*; Consuelo Carredano and Victoria Eli, eds., *La música en Hispanoamérica en el siglo XX*, vol. 8 of *Historia de la música en España e Hispanoamérica* (Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica de España, 2015). In his essay on twentieth-century Mexican music, Tello addresses salient aspects of Lavista's career. Although the volume was published in 2010, the latest piece by Lavista that Tello addresses is *Danza de las bailarinas de Degas*, from 1992. See Tello, "La creación musical en México durante el siglo XX."

Aesthetic Sensibilities and Affective Responses

In his writings, speeches, and public interviews, Lavista avoided positioning himself as a composer with any particular label, whether experimental, progressive, postmodern, or postnational. He did however go to great length to address his artistic predilections. As an artist, he subscribed to the aesthetics of suggestiveness, the symbolic, and the abstract. He was rooted in a tradition he forged for himself, and his ideal listener was one able to perceive in his music a quality of being simultaneously antique and contemporary.⁵⁷ The obligatory inquiry about who or what influenced him caused Lavista to reiterate on multiple occasions his admiration for Claude Debussy's music as well as for the French symbolist poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé. Lavista articulated that his interests gravitated toward the mysteries of music and poetry, where things cannot be *revealed* but can only be *inhabited*. Whenever he was asked to address his own music, he usually steered the conversation toward talking about poets he admired. He repeatedly expressed that poetry and music are twin sisters. Fully committed to a life devoted to *art for art's sake*, to symbolist aesthetics, and to dwelling within the mysteries of poetry and music, Lavista avoided the adoption of overtly partisan positions, at least to the public eye. He was never interested in writing music that blatantly responded to political or social matters. Composing remained his personal way of knowing the self and knowing the world; "it is about something at the individual level, not about a political movement."⁵⁸

On multiple occasions Lavista expressed that music provides a means to grasp human history and is a window to the soul. He took pride in his practice as a listener, that is, as someone who actively engaged with music he chose to listen to. As he once stated, "Let others boast from what they have written; I boast from the music I have listened to."⁵⁹ He preferred to talk about the music he was listening to before addressing the music he was composing. In that regard he maintained a posture of *letting his music speak for itself*. He did not publish any analytical writings on his works and, even though he taught music analysis for decades, he never discussed his own scores in the classroom.

⁵⁷ Lavista elaborated on this notion in an interview for the video program *Mario Lavista: Medir el tiempo con música*, from the Conaculta series *Creadores eméritos*, directed by Juan Arturo Brennan and produced by Sara Elías Calles, 1999–2000. The whole program can be seen here: <https://interfaz.cenart.gob.mx/video/creadores-emeritos/>, accessed June 21, 2023.

⁵⁸ Lavista, in Rodríguez, "La poética en Mario Lavista." [Estoy hablando de algo muy individual, no de un movimiento político.]

⁵⁹ Mario Lavista, "Una ida de pinta al billar, llevó a Mario Lavista a ser compositor," interview by Adrián Figueroa, *Crónica*, February 18, 2019, https://www.cronica.com.mx/notas-una_ida_de_pinta_al_billar_llevo_a_mario_lavista_a_ser_compositor-1110587-2019.html, accessed June 21, 2023. [Jorge Luis Borges dijo: "que otros se enorgullecen de lo que han escrito, yo me enorgullezco de lo que he leído." Y yo puedo decir: que otros se enorgullecen de lo que han escrito, yo me enorgullezco de lo que he oído.]

For Lavista, music was not a career but a lifestyle. Composing, as well as writing and teaching about music, was as enjoyable to Lavista as sharing a meal. And this sharing was a primary characteristic of the encounters people had with Lavista. Until the COVID-19 pandemic, he regularly invited close friends to his home to share meals and to engage in conversation. Lavista's close contacts and family members with whom I spoke noted that he was a good conversationalist (see Figure 1.5). Most often, what they meant is that Lavista was as good at speaking as he was at listening, thereby facilitating a two-way interaction. His conversational demeanor was often relaxed; he never seemed to be in a hurry and his way of speaking wasn't rushed but



Figure 1.5 Mario Lavista with his daughter and granddaughter. From left to right: Claudia Lavista, Elisa Carrum Lavista, and Mario Lavista, 2011. Photo by Martín Gavica. Courtesy of Claudia Lavista.

had a moderate cadential flow.⁶⁰ One could find a parallel between Lavista's conversational dynamic and his compositional process. He wrote music not as a private exercise but for and with specific performers. And an immersion into conversation and communion is what drove him to compose. Whenever he was not writing for and with specific performers, he wrote music in response to poets, painters, or others. His music, in that regard, is best described as *relational*, always in relation to someone or something else.

One could read interviews conducted as early as 1970s or as late as 2020s and realize that both Lavista's approach to his work and his methods remained constant. Moreover, since the late 1970s, certain characteristics in his music persisted until the end of his life. In this regard, his trajectory is unlike that of other composers who develop contrasting musical languages over the decades. Lavista's care-free approach to his own oeuvre—he never pursued the edition/publication of his score manuscripts or updated his own catalogue of works—poses an alternative approach to modernist (and postmodernist) composition practices that thrive on notions of authority, originality, and quantity.

Critics, writers, and musicians often describe Lavista's music as elegant, refined, delicate, and sensual.⁶¹ They also point out that his music reflects his personality, as Lavista has also been described as an elegant, delicate, and sensual person. These adjectives, which often are gendered as *feminine*, contrast with the highly masculine, patriarchal context of the contemporary music scene in Mexico. Interestingly, these comments have come from a diverse group of people, from all intersectional axes. Regardless of age, gender, and sexual orientation, people who have come in contact with Lavista or with his music often find him and/or his work captivating.

Performers and composers who collaborated closely with Lavista point out that Lavista's music, while utterly demanding, is also utterly sensual. And this is, in fact, a perception Lavista would have wanted performers to have, as he expressly wanted musicians to “make love” to their instruments when performing his music. Vázquez notes that this musical sensuality stems from Lavista's own seductive qualities, which had little to do with his physical attributes and more to do with his ability to draw people to himself.⁶² This ability is perhaps what led Colombian composer Rodolfo Acosta to characterize Lavista's music as an open door.⁶³

⁶⁰ My typing speed nearly parallels Lavista's moderate speaking speed, which allowed me to transcribe interviews without pausing or reducing the speed of the audio files.

⁶¹ The refinement attached to Lavista's personality has also been connected to sophistication and elegance, adjectives that are often used as class markers. These adjectives are also regularly used to describe Lavista's music.

⁶² Vázquez, discussion. In Vázquez's own words, “Lavista's relationship with others is spontaneously generous. He treats others with a refined seduction that envelops them in a warm dynamic.” [Su relación con los demás es espontáneamente generosa, lo que le da una seducción y un refinamiento para tratar a los demás y envolverlos en esa dinámica cálida e influyente, en ese trato refinado.]

⁶³ In this regard, Rodolfo Acosta states: “Without being condescending with his audience—and especially with his first audience, the performers, [Lavista] has offered us all—audiences, performers, and composers—a cultural object, which is his work, that is of open doors.” Rodolfo Acosta, in discussion with the author, via Zoom, August 7, 2020. [Sin ser condescendiente con su público y su primer público, que son

Who constitutes Lavista's audience? By raising this question, my intention is to dispel notions of universality that are commonly found in discourses around concert music. The reception of Lavista's music has been highly localized among Western European art music aficionados, largely those from middle- and upper-middle-class backgrounds located mostly in urban settings. Moreover, Lavista's music has been consumed primarily by classically trained musicians and music lovers with significant exposure to classical music. It is important to clarify that Lavista was never interested in catering to a broader audience. His first and intended audience consisted of people involved in concert music scenes.

Lavista's compositional choices were meant to address his intended audience, and I, as a member of that audience, am affected by them. As a subjective, interpretive act and as a process rooted in affective responses, my analysis of Lavista's music is the result of a personal approach to it. Understanding analysis as a methodology rooted in affective responses allows us to dismantle the objective aura that often permeates analytic writings. Through my process of analyzing multiple scores and listening to practically all commercially available recordings of Lavista's music, as a listener I have also been *seduced* by Lavista's music. His music has provided me with highly sensorial listening experiences, enveloping my senses in a sonic sphere where I find myself captivated.⁶⁴ In this regard, I do not shy away from disclosing the highly subjective approach that guides my writing. Positioning myself as listener, analyst, and scholar, I write this book from the personal—and quite visceral—relationship I have developed with Lavista's music.

A Word about Approach, Methodology, and Sources

In spite of Lavista's centrality to discourses on twentieth-century Mexican concert music, I do not adhere to modernist premises that uphold the prominence of "great composers" and their "masterworks." Neither do I subscribe to the notion of the exceptional peripheral composer who deserves to be counted in the canon—a tokenistic approach that has unfortunately been preponderant in recent discourses of diversity and inclusion in academia. Those premises reproduce hierarchies rooted in white and male supremacy that I have sought to dismantle in both my scholarship and my teaching. Instead of proving the "greatness" of Lavista's music within a modernist paradigm, I have set myself the task of deeply engaging with his music from an affective standpoint. As such, my investigation into his music is, first, a response to an affective

los intérpretes, les ofreció, nos ofreció a todos, público, intérpretes, y compositores—un objeto (en su obra) cultural que es de puertas abiertas.]

⁶⁴ As Kristin M. Knittel has stated, "the listening experience is not—and can never be—a neutral one: like any other perception, it is structured not only by our backgrounds and experiences, but also by our preconceived ideas." K. M. Knittel, *Seeing Mahler: Music and the Language of Antisemitism in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 2.

experience.⁶⁵ While the concept of affect is elusive—especially since the development of affect theory in the 1990s—here I propose a basic understanding of affect as an interpretive register rooted in individual sensorial, emotional, and mental responses.

Instead of exhausting the possibilities of what is “found” in the music, I am interested in exploring the subjective ways in which I interpret what the musical elements are doing, which is an affective process. By highlighting certain descriptive aspects of the music, the reader will get a sense of how those features may generate affective responses. Musical meaning is not immanent but is brought to life through a subjective interplay of interpretations.⁶⁶ My study can only be understood as the product of affective responses developed through my interactions with Lavista and his music over the past two decades. As a tree with many branches, these affective resonances have extended into binding relations with other musicians, artists, and scholars whose voices inform my writing.⁶⁷

The present study is the result of engaging in multiple methodologies, ranging from archival work to music and hermeneutic analysis, to oral history and (auto)ethnography, using a (trans)historical approach. Not quite a biography, nor an ethnography, the pages of this book are filled with quotes from multiple interviews and conversations I had with composers, performers, visual artists, writers, intellectuals, and aficionados from 2004 to 2023. The conversations and the friendships that formed in the process of writing this book constitute the backbone of this research.⁶⁸ While this is not an exhaustive examination of Lavista’s compositional career, in this study I take Lavista’s trajectory as a point of departure to discuss the contemporary concert scene in Mexico during the past fifty years. I argue that, through adopting an intertextual approach to music composition, Lavista forged a cosmopolitan imaginary that allowed him to claim universality as a strategy to challenge imposed stereotypes of what Mexican music should sound like. By constructing a network of contemporary and past figures, both real and fictional, Lavista articulated his own cosmopolitan aspirations.

In addition to printed publications gathered in various libraries across Mexico and the United States, the relevant sources for the present study include historical

⁶⁵ As Ana Hofman expresses, “affect is seen as a potential, a bodily capacity to affect and to be affected.” Ana Hofman, “The Affective Turn in Ethnomusicology,” *Muzikologija* 18, no. 1 (2015): 36.

⁶⁶ DeNora, *Music in Everyday Life*, 22. DeNora notes that the music analyst plays a significant role in the mobilization of musical texts. I am aware that, by providing analytical considerations of Lavista’s music, this study is contributing to mobilizing this repertoire.

⁶⁷ I propose to understand affective writing as a feminist strategy. See Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, “La escritura afectiva como estrategia feminista en la biografía musical,” *Boletín Música Casa de las Américas* 58 (2022): 9–21.

⁶⁸ I want to emphasize that these conversations took place while Lavista was still alive. Instead of paraphrasing what I gathered from my conversations with those interviewed, most often I opt for using direct quotations. This is my purposeful attempt to reflect each person’s tone and emphasis as well as possible. While I translated quotes from the original Spanish to English, prior to publication most of my interlocutors had an opportunity to read and modify the translated quotes as desired. The communal aspect of my research is best reflected in the many direct quotes I include from the people who generously shared their time with me. The bilingual reader will have the opportunity to read portions of conversations conducted in the original Spanish.

newspapers, unpublished writings, and concert programs. Materials gathered from Lavista's personal archive hosted at El Colegio Nacional, such as personal documents, program notes, concert programs, and newspaper clips, were extremely useful, particularly for my research on the first decades of his compositional career (the 1960s and 1970s). Scores (published and unpublished) and recordings (commercial and noncommercial) of Lavista's music are some of the primary sources for my research, most of which I obtained through Lavista himself.

Since 2004 and until a few months before his death I conducted a series of interviews with Lavista, most of which took place at his house in Colonia Condesa, Mexico City.⁶⁹ While at first, the format of the interviews was formal (I was following a set of previously formulated questions) and staged (sessions were videorecorded), over the years they became longer, informal conversations. I visited Lavista at his home at least twice a year, during my regular trips to Mexico, in summer and winter breaks.

While Lavista did not keep a catalogue of his own compositions, since 2006 I began to compile a list of works. At the end of each year, during our meetings, I updated this list according to new information he provided.⁷⁰ Although he published a good number of pieces, mostly under Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, the vast majority of his music remains unpublished, and some is still only in manuscript form.⁷¹ In contrast to other composers of his generation who used computer software to write music (e.g., Finale or Sibelius), Lavista never felt inclined to do so. Nor did he feel the need to create and maintain an online presence.⁷² He did not have a personal website, nor did he participate in social media platforms. Lavista's online presence is, therefore, only constituted by tertiary parties. As a member of El Colegio Nacional, his profile is included in the members' section. In the early 2000s, El Colegio's website maintained a list of Lavista's works, but updated versions of the site no longer do. At the end of this book, I include a list of Lavista's compositions which I compiled with his help (see the Appendix).

⁶⁹ During the global confinement of the COVID-19 pandemic, from early 2020 until the summer of 2021, I did not travel to Mexico. However, I remained in constant communication with Lavista via phone, email, WhatsApp, and video calls via Zoom.

⁷⁰ The last update, in consultation with Lavista, happened during the spring of 2021.

⁷¹ Although he kept his scores, manuscripts, and recordings of his works in a centralized place in his house, Lavista did not keep his materials in an organized fashion. With the help of close friends and family members, Lavista's daughter, Claudia, organized his personal archive after his passing. She is currently in conversation with several U.S. institutions interested in its acquisition. Lavista's scores and manuscripts have been digitized by staff at Cenidim. This process has been coordinated by Luis Jaime Cortez and Ana Lara.

⁷² During his lifetime, Lavista did not own a personal computer. The online platform Mediateca Lavista was launched in November 30, 2022—a year after Lavista's passing. This project, hosted by *Sonus Litterarum* (directed by Cortez and Lara), was created to be a central repository of everything related to Lavista. Mediateca Lavista is making a significant contribution toward the exposure of Lavista's music and thought. I currently serve as its main curator and member of the advisory board. See "Mediateca Lavista. Un espacio para entrar en el mundo de Mario Lavista a través de todos los caminos posibles," <https://sonuslitterarum.mx/mediateca-lavista/>, accessed June 21, 2023.

The fact that the majority of Lavista's compositions have not been published and are not easily found online has significantly limited broad access to his work. Throughout his life, performers interested in his music, whether in Mexico or abroad, contacted Lavista directly, via phone calls, emails (since the 1990s), or WhatsApp (since the 2010s). If possible, he provided PDF versions of his scores when requested.⁷³ Most often, however, he redirected interested parties to the performers who had previously played his music in order to obtain the scores directly from them. In spite of this limitation, Lavista's music is regularly performed throughout the Americas and Europe. In Latin America, his music is often distributed from person to person by photocopying available scores—a common practice today. Many of Lavista's pieces are available in commercial recordings. However, most of them have a limited international distribution.⁷⁴ Information on available recordings for the compositions addressed throughout the book can be found in the footnotes.⁷⁵

Exploring the music of Mario Lavista allows me to offer the reader a panorama of the contemporary concert music scene in Mexico—a topic that has remained largely neglected in scholarly discourse. Although my book is informed by a series of interviews, conversations, and personal correspondence with Lavista over a span of seventeen years, my interpretive approaches are not the result of a collaborative endeavor *per se*, nor was the content of this book supervised by the composer. Since the beginning of my research into his music, Lavista showed genuine interest in reading my texts, although he never demanded to see them before they were published. This book was fully completed before Lavista's passing, and he was able to read complete drafts of each chapter. At every stage of the process, he showed a respectful attitude; he did not dispute any of my statements, nor did he question any of my asseverations. He abstained from offering feedback on the content of the present text; however, given his noteworthy editorial skills, he provided some acute editorial remarks.⁷⁶

I recognize my acts of agency as I acknowledge Lavista's own agency in the memories that he selected, rejected, and refined as he moved forward in life. In my approach to the subject matter and in the production of my argument, I assume different degrees and kinds of distancing(s): generational, ideological, geopolitical, aesthetic, and gender-based. As a result of these distancings, my study departs from scholarship that reproduces, either partially or completely, a homogeneous laudatory discourse

⁷³ Lavista was extremely generous in freely sharing his scores. He did not pursue making a profit from selling his music.

⁷⁴ An exhaustive list of commercial recordings of Lavista's compositions remains outside the scope of this study.

⁷⁵ Lavista's music has a very limited presence in online music streaming platforms, such as Spotify, iTunes, and Naxos. A good number of recordings of his music are available through YouTube. His personal audio archive—which comprises recordings in a variety of formats, including reel-to-reel audio tapes, cassette tapes, and compact discs—is hosted at the Fonoteca Nacional (National Sound Archive), in Mexico City. Currently, this material is being digitized for on-site consultation.

⁷⁶ Lavista's respectful attitude toward my writing and approach remained a constant throughout the multiple texts I published on his music during his lifetime.

on Lavista's music. Lavista is a controversial figure, as he maintained a strong presence in artistic and intellectual circles in Mexico. Thinking through and writing from the United States and not from within the political network of Mexican music circles has presented me with some challenges and at the same time has granted me a certain degree of liberty, a factor that puts me in an advantageous position.

Even though at times I address biographical aspects, more often than not I focus on issues of networking, institutionalization, agency, ideology, and aesthetics. In its scope and goals, my book is different from other books that fall into the category of "life and works." I do not attempt to offer a comprehensive picture of Lavista as a subject, composer, or entity. Moreover, I am not interested in engaging with unidirectional historical accounts that locate originality at the forefront of artistic validation. Instead, I am interested in uneven, cluttered narratives that reflect the inconsistencies inherent in the discourses articulated by composers. I do not adopt a historiographical approach that understands Lavista's compositional trajectory as the result of an evolution of linear development. Nor do I provide easy answers to the complex layers of meaning one may potentially gather from Lavista's music.

In my discussion of the configuration of Lavista's cosmopolitan ideal, I address his music as a site of negotiation between *influences*, between *reactions* and *actions*, and between *monologues* and *dialogues*. In my discussion of Lavista's cosmopolitan ideal—which is a heterogeneous performance complex—what I intend to portray are the many ideals for which Lavista strived.⁷⁷ Issues of self-fashioning are crucial to understanding what he aimed to attain in his own compositional processes. Through exploring these processes, I hope to encourage my readers to reflect on their own journeys toward self-discovery.

Book Organization

The chapters of this book do not follow a strict chronological progression. Instead, they center on broad topics that explore particular aspects of Lavista's trajectory, placing them in context. In Chapter 2, I position Lavista as a focal point within a larger discourse of the musical scene in Mexico during the 1960s and 1970s. While some composers were still adhering to models of nationalism, a young generation of composers mentored by Chávez embraced serialism and experimental practices. For Lavista, this turn was accompanied by a cosmopolitan ideal shared with a consolidated artistic and intellectual elite in Mexico City. By examining Lavista's early works, I show how this cosmopolitan ideal informed Lavista's compositional decisions and how it played a role in establishing his public persona.

Chapter 3 explores Lavista's relationship with John Cage (1912–1992). A closer look at Lavista's adoption of Cage's philosophy shows that, through performative

⁷⁷ For more about performance complex, see Madrid's introduction to *In Search of Julián Carrillo*, 1–31.

processes of interpretation and resignification, Cage became a symbol, Cage-the-*jaula*—a container that, far from being restrictive, allows for multiple permutations. Cage's 1976 visit to Mexico prompted Lavista and Arnaldo Coen to create the graphic score *Jaula* (1976). After *Jaula*, Lavista abandoned the use of indeterminacy and improvisation. Instead, he composed a series of scores where he incorporated atomized musical quotes and a variety of literary references.

Chapter 4 further explores a series of intertextual webs present in a group of chamber pieces. Starting in 1979 and continuing throughout the 1980s, Lavista composed music in close collaboration with individual performers. The creative intimacy Lavista fostered with them during the compositional process was a crucial step in solidifying his compositional style. These pieces, which incorporate poetic references, also allow us to explore Lavista's affective relationship with the literary arts. I understand the journal *Pauta*—founded and directed by Lavista—as an extension of this affective relationship.

In Chapter 5, I discuss a group of Lavista's pieces that establish a connection with literary texts (beyond poetry), pictorial works (paintings, drawings, and installations), and dance. The metaphor of *mirrors*—a central concept of this book—illuminates the ways in which each intertext bounces back to another. In each bounce—or reflection—a spiral of meaning is drawn. Beyond these multi- and interdisciplinary references, I also explore the intertextual possibilities that Lavista created when he incorporated previously composed music into new compositions. In this way, he transformed the past of his previous works by giving them a new meaning and a new future.

Chapter 6 has at its core Lavista's interest in using religious genres, particularly from the Roman Catholic tradition. His incursion into religious music came after writing memorial pieces and was the result of his affinity for late-medieval and Renaissance Western European musical thought. I explore the ways in which, by writing religious music, Lavista built spiritual bridges that connected him with other beings, human and spiritual. His use of religious genres helped him to relocate the cosmopolitan in a musical space where he confronted the anxiety of influence, his own spirituality, and the contradictions he found in the practices of the Mexican Catholic Church.

Chapter 7 focuses on Lavista's activities as a member of El Colegio Nacional. I provide a brief history of the institution and contextualize the role Carlos Chávez, as a founding member, had in promoting a type of didactic modernity. This model was then followed by Chávez's successors, Eduardo Mata, and Lavista. I offer some considerations of how his tenure at El Colegio Nacional allowed Lavista to advocate for and promote twentieth- and twenty-first-century concert music, support Mexican performers mostly devoted to that repertoire, and cultivate his role as a public intellectual and educator.

In the brief epilogue, I return to the concept of *mirrors of sounds* as a way to approach Lavista's compositional trajectory. It is through creative intimacy that Lavista

fostered in his music a social space where humans and nonhumans not only interact with each other, but also bounce into one another. Through a process of affective responses, the listener is invited to inhabit that space. Taking into account the testimonies of some of Lavista's students, I highlight ways in which his activities as a composer, teacher, mentor, promoter, editor, writer, and intellectual influenced the concert music scene in Mexico for the past fifty years.

2

Embracing a Cosmopolitan Ideal

Since early in his career, Mario Lavista was regarded as one of the most renowned Mexican composers. When we view this statement from a transnational perspective, however, how relevant is it to label a composer's music as representative of a particular nation? Discourses surrounding the music of composers living outside the Anglo-European center have stressed categorizations of place, which are frequently based on expectations of difference and otherness.¹ These expectations have repercussions for the composer's self-perception, which in turn results in the composer's adherence to particular ideological frameworks.

During the second half of the twentieth century, Mexican composers mostly abandoned the nationalist agendas that had been carried over from the time of the Mexican Revolution (1910–1920s), instead favoring music trends representative of an “international avant-garde.” For Lavista, this turn was accompanied by his explicit rejection of representations of the “national” (or what could be perceived as such) and an embrace of a cosmopolitan ideal. This cosmopolitan ideal can be understood as a strategy Lavista used to root his artistic persona within an international artistic circle and therefore challenge limiting discourses of *Mexicanness*. Examining how Lavista constructed this ideal is useful for understanding his music, which was a result of a mediation between his self-identity and his aesthetic proclivities.² An analysis of how this construction informed Lavista's compositional decisions, as shown in his early works, facilitates an exploration of his negotiation of both national and international expectations. Lavista's output from the late 1960s and early 1970s exemplifies the formation of his public persona as that of a composer willing to embrace a perceived internationality to manifest an antinationalist position—a central move in framing his cosmopolitan ideal. By developing a cosmopolitan ideology, Lavista not only effectively navigated the aesthetic move toward internationalization prevalent in the country, but also secured national validation. Exploring his process of

¹ The use and purpose of national categories in music history have been severely challenged by scholars in recent decades. Recent studies of Latin American musical expression and performance from a postnational and transnational perspective include Ignacio Corona and Alejandro L. Madrid, eds., *Postnational Musical Identities: Cultural Production, Distribution, and Consumption in a Globalized Scenario* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2008); Alejandro L. Madrid, ed., *Transnational Encounters: Music and Performance at the U.S.-Mexico Border* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Juan Pablo González Rodríguez, *Pensar la música desde América Latina: Problemas e interrogantes* (Santiago de Chile: Ediciones Universidad Alberto Hurtado, 2013); and Pablo Palomino, *The Invention of Latin American Music: A Transnational History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

² In this context, I use the term *self-identity* to describe how individuals construct a sense of self that is in part a response to their perception of the image others have of themselves, and in part influenced by their connections to particular social networks.

“self-fashioning” is relevant to understanding his compositional strategies and intellectual output.³

Local Cosmopolitanisms: Navigating Elite Art Circles

The construction of a cosmopolitan imaginary or ideal, in the case of Lavista, does not ignore local affiliations. Recent theories have criticized approaches of cosmopolitanism that are detached from particular localities.⁴ As Bruce Robbins notes, “the term should be extended to transnational experiences that are particular rather than universal and that are unprivileged—indeed, often coerced.”⁵ As will be evident from the pieces included in this chapter, Lavista’s compositional decisions were the result of the complexities presented by the simultaneity of the local (or national) and trans-local (or international).⁶ The individual perception of the local is thus constructed in relation to the international. In Gerard Delanty’s words, “Cosmopolitanism . . . concerns the multiple ways the local and the national is redefined as a result of interaction with the global. The resulting situation will vary depending on the precise nature of the interaction.”⁷ Contrary to the philosophical view of cosmopolitanism as a posture where the individual’s self-perception is as a “citizen of the world,” a “discrepant cosmopolitanism,” as James Clifford has shown, is rooted in actual practices of local cultures rather than in ideals of universal rights.⁸ Although Camila Fojas and Jacqueline Loss have situated Latin American production within a cosmopolitan strategy, their studies have also acknowledged the ways in which the work of Spanish-American writers could be understood as sites of negotiation between multiple worldly and local

³ According to literary theorist Stephen Greenblatt, *self-fashioning* is the process of constructing one’s identity and public persona according to a set of publicly accepted standards. See Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980).

⁴ The term *cosmopolitanism* has had multiple (and sometimes contradictory) applications. Carol A. Breckenridge, Sheldon Pollock, Homi K. Bhabha, and Dipesh Chakrabarty opted for the use of the plural *cosmopolitanisms* in their edited volume in order to emphasize the multiplicity of modes that the term includes. They regard the concept as a “project whose conceptual content and pragmatic character are not only as yet unspecified but also must always escape positive and definite specification, precisely because specifying cosmopolitanism positively and definitely is an uncosmopolitan thing to do.” Carol A. Breckenridge et al., eds., *Cosmopolitanism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 1. The present study concentrates on one such “mode” of cosmopolitanism as it pertains to a particular context.

⁵ Bruce Robbins, “Introduction Part I: Actually Existing Cosmopolitanism,” in *Cosmopolitics: Thinking and Feeling Beyond the Nation*, ed. Pheng Cheah and Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), 1.

⁶ About this, Thomas Turino states, “Cosmopolitan cultural formations are . . . always simultaneously local and translocal.” Thomas Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Music in Zimbabwe* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 7.

⁷ Gerard Delanty, “The Cosmopolitan Imagination: Critical Cosmopolitanism and Social Theory,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 57, no. 1 (2006): 36.

⁸ James Clifford, “Traveling Cultures,” in *Routes: Travel and Translation in the Late Twentieth Century* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 17–46; James Clifford, “Mixed Feelings,” in Chea and Robbins, *Cosmopolitics*, 362–70.

affiliations.⁹ In this context, we can interpret Lavista's adherence to a cosmopolitan discourse as an effort to defend his aesthetics against marginalization. Thus, his cosmopolitan ideal becomes a defensive strategy—a counterpoint to a Euro-American centrality that categorizes Latin American art as distinct, peculiar, and exotic.

Explorations of what constituted cosmopolitanism, internationalism, and universalism in discourses of twentieth-century Mexican music have been addressed by scholars in the field, especially in the last three decades. Leonora Saavedra, Alejandro L. Madrid, Luisa Vilar-Payá, and Roberto Kolb-Neuhaus, among others, have criticized the ways in which historiography of the second half of the twentieth century stereotyped its immediate and not-so-immediate past.¹⁰ While following their revisions, I propose that Lavista's individual construction of a cosmopolitan ideal could be understood as inherited from composers who came immediately before him, particularly his mentor Carlos Chávez. I offer a view of this cosmopolitan ideal as a “professional” tool the composer used to navigate local and global scenarios while adapting and distancing himself from discourses of *Mexicanness*.

Composers, especially those outside of the Anglo-European center, are often asked to locate themselves in the parameters of national versus international. They are usually expected to situate their work within discourses of differentiation, to describe the aspects that make their music representative of their place of origin.¹¹ While this expectation is placed upon composers whether living at home or abroad, it should be noted that Lavista remained in his native Mexico most of his life.¹² Whether speaking

⁹ Camila Fojas, *Cosmopolitanism in the Americas* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2005); and Jacqueline Loss, *Cosmopolitanisms and Latin America: Against the Destiny of Place* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005). Fojas concentrates on literature at the turn of the century (*modernismo*), while Loss focuses on the work of Cuban writer Reinaldo Arenas (1943–1990), and Chilean writer Diamela Eltit (b. 1949).

¹⁰ Leonora Saavedra, “Chávez y Revueltas: La construcción de una identidad nacional y moderna,” in *Silvestre Revueltas: Sonidos en rebelión*, ed. Roberto Kolb and José Wolfffer (Mexico City: UNAM, 2007), 39–54; Leonora Saavedra, “Carlos Chávez's Polysemic Style: Constructing the National, Seeking the Cosmopolitan,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 68, no. 1 (2015): 99–150; Alejandro L. Madrid, *Sounds of the Modern Nation: Music, Culture, and Ideas in Post-Revolutionary Mexico* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009); Alejandro L. Madrid, “Música y nacionalismos en Latinoamérica,” in *A tres bandas: Mestizaje, sincretismo e hibridación en el espacio sonoro iberoamericano*, ed. Albert Recasens Barberà and Christian Spencer Espinoza (Madrid: SEACEX and AKAL Ediciones, 2010), 227–35; and Alejandro L. Madrid, *In Search of Julián Carrillo and Sonido 13* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Luisa Vilar-Payá, “La originalidad, la música heterogénea y la recepción de Silvestre Revueltas a partir de Otto Mayer-Serra,” *Discanto: Ensayos de investigación musical* 1 (2005): 205–18; and Roberto Kolb-Neuhaus, *Silvestre Revueltas: Sounds of a Political Passion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2023).

¹¹ This is true for Latin American composers residing at home or abroad. For further discussion on the expectations placed on Latin American composers, see Walter A. Clark, “Preface: What Makes Latin American Music ‘Latin’? Some Personal Reflections,” *The Musical Quarterly* 92, no. 3–4 (2009): 167–76; Yara El-Ghadban, “Facing the Music: Rituals of Belonging and Recognition in Contemporary Western Art Music,” *American Ethnologist* 36, no. 1 (2009): 140–60; Marc Gidal, “Contemporary ‘Latin American’ Composers of Art Music in the United States: Cosmopolitans Navigating Multiculturalism and Universalism,” *Latin American Music Review* 31, no. 1 (2010): 49–78; and Luisa Vilar-Payá and Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, “Estrategias de diferenciación en la composición musical: Mario Lavista y el México de fines de los sesenta y comienzos de los setenta,” *Revista Argentina de Musicología* 12–13 (2012): 267–90.

¹² With the exception of over two years in Europe (mainly in France and Germany) from 1967 to 1969, and a brief stay in Japan in late 1971–early 1972, Lavista always resided in Mexico. Therefore, the

locally or abroad, in public interviews Lavista demonstrated a strong reluctance to address issues pertaining to *lo mexicano* (Mexicanness). This was particularly the case when those issues were accompanied by the explicit or implicit expectation of finding themes or sonorities in his music that could be perceived as pertaining to Mexico. His reluctance was largely the product of a shared ideological program of internationalization that was prevalent in the country after the Revolution (during the 1930s and 1940s) and throughout the rest of the twentieth century. For Lavista, the expectation of finding in the music something that could be perceived as inherently Mexican was a threat against the capacity for *pensamiento abstracto* (abstract thinking):

It is very sad to realize that people expect exotic music from me. It is [actually] outrageous, for those listeners are denying Latin America its capacity of abstraction. For them, we are not capable of having abstract thinking. . . . They expect from us the exotic; that *is* [for them] what being Mexican means. No, I'm sorry but Mexicans have also the capacity for abstraction and the invention of a [artistic] language.¹³

This attitude—shared by many Latin American composers—is rooted in a cosmopolitan view. Lavista's perception of what Mexican music should be (or is) had little to do with a sense of the local (which could be perceived as exotic) and more to do with discourses of absolute music and technical craftsmanship of Western European classical music. This cosmopolitan view had also been prominent for a group of writers, intellectuals, musicians, and artists who were of pivotal importance in Lavista's formative years. Embracing this group's cosmopolitan aspirations was critical to the consolidation of Lavista's role within the circle. He was to be regarded not only as a renowned musician and composer, but also a composer–intellectual.¹⁴

In the late 1960s, Lavista faced a challenging intellectual landscape in Mexico City. He gravitated toward a group of artists who were hostile to the nationalist agendas of the previous decades. This group—which formed part of the intellectual elite of Mexico City—was comprised of artists, poets, playwrights, musicians, and critics. Most of the visual artists of this group were associated with the *movimiento de ruptura* (or *generación de la ruptura*)—a convenient label that functioned as a strategy of historical categorization emphasizing their shared attitude against “official and institutional art.”¹⁵ Among its leading figures were Manuel Felguérez, Vicente Rojo, and

configuration of Lavista's cosmopolitan ideal remained localized. However brief, Lavista's time in Europe facilitated the development of cross-cultural affiliations present in his life and work.

¹³ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, August 14, 2004. Lavista continued to articulate this posture in public interviews and other forums. [Me parece muy triste que esas gentes esperen de mí música exótica. Es muy indignante, porque esos oyentes nos están negando a América Latina la capacidad de abstracción; para ellos nosotros no somos capaces del pensamiento abstracto. . . . Esperan de nosotros lo exótico, eso es ser mexicano. No, perdóneme, también el mexicano tiene capacidad de abstracción e inventar un lenguaje.]

¹⁴ For more about Lavista's role as a composer–intellectual, see Chapter 7.

¹⁵ Jorge Alberto Manrique, “La obra y el concepto de Manuel Felguérez,” in *El proceso creativo: XXVI Coloquio Internacional de Historia del Arte*, ed. Alberto Dallal (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones

Lilia Carrillo. Some members of this intellectual elite were associated with the *Revista Mexicana de Literatura* and included Tomás Segovia, Huberto Batis, Juan García Ponce, Juan Vicente Melo, Salvador Elizondo, and José de la Colina. As Claudia Albarrán indicated, this group, “rejected every nationalist or chauvinist attitude in virtue of a cosmopolitanism and a universalism largely based in former Mexican journals, like *Contemporáneos* ... and *Taller*, which Octavio Paz had directed—in which literature was conceived as an activity without borders or nationalities.”¹⁶

Apart from being creators, critics, and promoters, the members of this group actively participated in cultural organizations that served as institutional scouts to recruit and form young intellectuals. One such organization was Casa del Lago, which was dedicated to endorsing artistic projects associated mostly with the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). The sponsorship Lavista received from this group, in particular from physician and writer Juan Vicente Melo (1932–1996), who directed Casa del Lago from 1962 to 1967, was crucial to his gaining national recognition early in his career. At that time, Lavista, like any other young composer, strove to achieve musical individuality and aesthetic distance from the compositional exercises he had produced as a student. His first public works resonated with and contributed to the ideology of the group—one with particular cosmopolitan aspirations.

Lavista’s negotiation of the national and the international, which constitutes the formation of his cosmopolitan ideal, played a key role in establishing the parameters of validation for his music.¹⁷ As Brigid Cohen, Marc Gidal, and others have demonstrated, the binary national–international denies the possibility of cross-cultural affiliations, especially in the case of composers whose careers develop in countries other than their places of origin.¹⁸ In Lavista’s case, however, the negotiation of the national–international was the product not so much of his time abroad, but of what was happening at home in Mexico’s elite art world. In an attempt to embrace internationality, artists in Mexico reformulated what they considered *lo mexicano*. In the words of music historian Yolanda Moreno Rivas, “this new face of Mexican art was anti-realistic and anti-folkloristic; it rejected critically all commonplaces of *Mexicanism* as fate and as the only definition of art, in order to initiate a deeper

Estéticas UNAM, 2006), 197. [El grupo no seguía una poética o lineamientos específicos; su unidad se creó por estar en contra del arte oficial e institucional.]

¹⁶ Claudia Albarrán, “La generación de Inés Arredondo,” *Revista Casa del Tiempo de la Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana* (September 1998), <https://www.uam.mx/difusion/revista/septiembre98/albarran.html>, accessed June 21, 2023. [Rechazó toda actitud nacionalista o chauvinista, en virtud de un cosmopolitismo y un universalismo tomados, en gran medida, de revistas mexicanas anteriores—como *Contemporáneos* ... y *Taller*, que había dirigido Octavio Paz—en las que se concebía a la literatura como un quehacer sin fronteras ni nacionalidades.]

¹⁷ Discussing these parameters within the context of what has been called “music cosmopolitanism” becomes useful, for as Martin Stokes has argued, “[i]t helps us understand the intellectual formations and dispositions of nationalist ideologues and reformers. It points to the self-conscious exercises in musical exchange and hybridization that have absorbed many in this musical world, and it clarifies the political work they do.” See Martin Stokes, “On Musical Cosmopolitanism,” *The Macalester International Roundtable* (2007): 9–10, <https://digitalcommons.macalester.edu/intlrtable/3/>, accessed June 21, 2023.

¹⁸ Brigid Cohen, “Limits of National History: Yoko Ono, Stefan Wolpe, and Dilemmas of Cosmopolitanism,” *The Musical Quarterly* 97, no. 2 (2014): 181–237; Gidal, “Contemporary ‘Latin American’ Composers.”

reflection about ‘the Mexican’ as essence and as part of a *universality*” (emphasis added).¹⁹

Leaving the essentialism embedded in the quoted passage aside, Moreno Rivas attests to an attitude shared by composers emerging in the second half of the twentieth century who were directly influenced by Chávez’s search for universality. Moreno Rivas’s explanation of the quest for musical universalism has also permeated narratives of subsequent historians such as Consuelo Carredano, Victoria Eli, and Aurelio Tello.²⁰ The universality that Moreno Rivas refers to was characterized by an embracing of certain trends in composition, especially the use of serialism—a technique she considered the main alternative medium Latin American composers adopted in order to avoid using nationalist trends in music: “similar to Europe, America produced post-Weberian and serialist generations as a valid alternative to the isolationist nationalism practiced until that time by some Latin American schools of composition.”²¹ By midcentury Chávez was adopting experimental compositional strategies—like the principle of nonrepetition—which became models for younger composers.²² Hence, critics and historians soon labeled a group of Chávez’s disciples as the *generación post-nacionalista* (postnationalist generation) or *generación de la transición* (transition generation).²³ Some of them were members of the Taller de Composición (Composition Workshop) Chávez founded at the Conservatorio Nacional de Música (National Music Conservatory) in 1960. According to María

¹⁹ Yolanda Moreno Rivas, *La composición en México en el siglo XX* (Mexico City: Conaculta, 1994), 73. [Este nuevo rostro del arte mexicano era antirrealista y anticostumbrista; rechazaba críticamente todos los lugares comunes del mexicanismo como fatalidad y única definición del arte, para iniciar una reflexión más profunda sobre “lo mexicano” como esencia y parte de una universalidad.]

²⁰ Consuelo Carredano and Victoria Eli, eds., *La música en Hispanoamérica en el siglo XX*, vol. 8 of *Historia de la música en España e Hispanoamérica*, ed. Consuelo Carredano and Victoria Eli (Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica de España, 2015); and Aurelio Tello, “La creación musical en México durante el siglo XX,” in *La música en México: Panorama del siglo XX*, ed. Aurelio Tello (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, Conaculta, 2010), 486–555.

²¹ Carredano and Eli, *La música en Hispanoamérica*, 66. [El estilo de composición generado por Anton Webern (1883–1945) marcó paradójicamente una impronta indeleble en las generaciones de la posguerra y se convirtió en una inspiración. La técnica serial, readaptada a las nuevas concepciones sonoras, sacó a la música del estancamiento de los años perdidos de la guerra mundial. De ahí que, al igual que Europa, América haya producido generaciones posweberianas y serialistas como una alternativa válida al nacionalismo aislacionista practicado hasta ese momento por algunas escuelas latinoamericanas de composición.]

²² Amy Bauer, “Non-Repetition and Personal Style in the *Inventions* and *Solis*,” in *Carlos Chávez and His World*, ed. Leonora Saavedra (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 165–77.

²³ Julio Estrada, ed., *Periodo contemporáneo (1958–1980)*, vol. 5 of *La música de México*, ed. Julio Estrada (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Estéticas, UNAM, 1984), 188, 194. This “postnationalist” label, as used by Moreno Rivas, has not been fully problematized or questioned. Historical narratives, especially after 1960, began to label the music of emergent composers as “postnational,” mostly inferring that it was music that purposefully avoided the inclusion of folk or popular themes—what was labeled “nationalism” or “the national.” The categorization “postnational” has been passed down as a functional label to create distance from the nationalist agenda of previous decades. Leonora Saavedra’s distinctions are pertinent: “I use the term ‘nationalism’ whenever it is clear that the issue at stake is the creation of a ‘nationalist movement’ in Mexican music that mimics foreign nationalisms. I use ‘national music’ to denote Mexican music in any style, when composers are aware of it as being separate from European music. Finally, I use ‘national-sounding music’ to denote music that deliberately signifies the Mexican, regardless of whether or not the composer intends it to become part of ‘nationalistic music’ within a grander historical design.” See Leonora Saavedra, “Of Selves and Others: Historiography, Ideology, and the Politics of Modern Mexican Music” (PhD diss., University of Pittsburgh, 2001), 12.

González and Leonora Saavedra, the postnationalist generation questioned nationalist principles while embracing “a more or less violent rupture, an explicit or tacit rejection.”²⁴ Even though each composer assimilated this ideology in a unique way, hence producing dissimilar outcomes, the conflict with nationalist aesthetics was an excuse to formulate an ideal of musical internationalism, which departed from any purposeful use of national traits. In the words of Moreno Rivas, “Thanks to the lack of emphasis on the ‘unquestionable’ value of that which is specifically Mexican, composition in Mexico got ready to participate in the general avant-garde movement.”²⁵ The question to ask is, how did composers construct their own view of the international avant-garde to feel they could participate in it? In the particular case of Lavista, was he consciously trying to be part of it, and if so, what compositional trends did he adopt to this end? Moreover, in what ways did these trends construct a cosmopolitan imaginary?

The Profile of an Emerging Cosmopolitan Composer

Little has been written about Lavista’s early works.²⁶ The composer himself regarded his early pieces as part of an “apprenticeship period,” an “experimentation phase” that he went through but abandoned. Many of Lavista’s early scores were inscribed in compositional methods largely influenced by serial techniques from the so-called Second Viennese School. His free use of dodecaphony came in large part through the Spanish (Mexican-naturalized) composer Rodolfo Halffter (1900–1987). Lavista had taken Halffter’s analysis classes while he was still a student at the Conservatory’s Taller de Composición, from 1963 to 1967 (see Figure 2.1).²⁷ It was through Halffter that Lavista became acquainted with the music of the Second Viennese School, particularly the work of Arnold Schoenberg (more about their relationship will be explored in Chapter 6). Halffter was a crucial figure not only in Lavista’s formation but also in that of contemporary composers such as Mario Kuri Aldana, Luis Herrera de la Fuente, Héctor Quintanar, Eduardo Mata, Julio Estrada, and Jorge González Ávila. In

²⁴ María Ángeles González and Leonora Saavedra, *Música mexicana contemporánea* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1982), 54. [... una ruptura más o menos violenta, un rechazo explícito o tácito ... es la primera [generación] en intentar situar su propia música dentro del contexto de la música occidental a partir de 1950.]

²⁵ Yolanda Moreno Rivas, *Rostros del nacionalismo en la música mexicana: Un ensayo de interpretación* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1989), 249. [Gracias a esa falta de énfasis en el valor “incuestionable” de lo específicamente mexicano, la composición en México se aprestó a participar en el movimiento general de la vanguardia.]

²⁶ See Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, “Forging a Cosmopolitan Ideal: Mario Lavista’s Early Music,” *Latin American Music Review* 35, no. 2 (2014): 169–96; and Vilar-Payá and Alonso-Minutti, “Estrategias de diferenciación.”

²⁷ Lavista was personally invited to become a member of the Conservatory’s Taller de Composición by Chávez, who founded it in 1960 and was its director until 1964. Héctor Quintanar became Chávez’s successor and directed the Taller until 1977.



Figure 2.1 Mario Lavista's student ID card from the National Music Conservatory during the year 1966 (age 23). From Lavista's personal archive. Courtesy of Mario Lavista.

addition to teaching serialism at the Conservatory, Halffter also introduced students to neoclassicism and polytonality.²⁸

Students at the Conservatory's Taller de Composición were asked to write music modeled after Western European musical genres. Later in life, Lavista regarded these works as merely “compositional exercises” and excluded most of them from his catalogue of works. Most of these pieces were forgotten after their first performance. One notable exception is his *Sinfonía modal* (1965), a four-movement work in which he explored the use of “modal reminiscences.”²⁹ This orchestral piece has now reached a wider audience as a result of a commercial recording released in 2008 by the Orquesta Sinfónica Juvenil Carlos Chávez, directed by Guillermo Salvador. Perhaps in an effort to show the precociousness of both Lavista and Eduardo Mata (1942–1995), this recording includes two symphonic works written at a time when both were students at the Taller.³⁰ In the liner notes Lavista states that he wrote this piece to familiarize

²⁸ Consuelo Carredano, *Ediciones Mexicanas de Música: Historia y catálogo* (Mexico City: Conaculta, INBA, Cenidim, 1994), 25.

²⁹ In Lavista's words, “My *Modal Symphony* is not entirely modal. Of course, there are many reminiscences of modality, above all the mode that begins on the note D, the Doric mode, which I like very much.” Mario Lavista, quoted in Juan Arturo Brennan, liner notes for *Sinfonías Tempranas: Eduardo Mata, Mario Lavista*, Orquesta Sinfónica Juvenil Carlos Chávez, dir. Guillermo Salvador, trans. Alan Stark, Conaculta, 2008, compact disc, 22. [Mi *Sinfonía modal* no es totalmente modal. Desde luego, hay muchas reminiscencias de la modalidad, sobre todo el modo que se inicia en la nota re, el modo dórico, que a mí me gusta mucho.]

³⁰ Eduardo Mata's symphony included in the recording is: *Sinfonía no. 2 en Do mayor* “Romántica” (1963).

himself with writing for orchestra at a time when he was discovering Sergei Prokofiev's music. He adamantly affirmed that none of the Taller students considered these pieces to be the product of a personal voice; they were just "academic exercises."³¹

Lavista's first commissioned piece, which has been regularly listed as the first in his catalogue, is *Monólogo*.³² Written for baritone, flute, double bass, and vibraphone, *Monólogo* premiered in June 1966 at the second iteration of the Festival de Música Contemporánea held at the Sala Manuel M. Ponce of Mexico City's Palacio de Bellas Artes. Pianist and promoter Miguel García Mora and the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA) commissioned the piece, which was received very positively by audiences and critics alike.³³ In his laudatory review of the work, for instance, Melo deemed it as "one of the 'young' and most interesting Mexican works that could be heard at this festival." About Lavista, he estimated that "[one could see] a musician of great sensibility, restless, willing to say all that an artist wants to say, without resorting to easy theatricalities or to the less gratuitous procedures of the avant-garde that are turning into inevitable and easily recognized clichés."³⁴

Melo's praise of *Monólogo* illustrates Lavista's successful bridging of the local and the international. On one hand, the young composer was using the principles of serialism, a compositional technique that at the time was being recognized as representative of the international avant-garde. On the other hand, he was using fragments of Nikolai Gogol's *Diary of a Madman*, a text that had gained a great deal of local attention through the performances of Mexican actor Carlos Ancira. As theater critic and journalist Benjamín Bernal points out, the writings of Gogol were known in Mexico mainly through Ancira, who performed the monologue for more than two decades (1960–1985) in both Mexico City and St. Petersburg.³⁵ Ancira's performance was directed by Chilean Alejandro Jodorowsky and first premiered in Mexico City's Teatro Reforma in 1960. As Melo suggested in a subsequent review, it was Ancira's interpretation that prompted Lavista to write the work,³⁶ and in fact, it was Ancira himself who, after a performance, gave Lavista a copy of Gogol's text.³⁷ Hence, Lavista's choice of text was far from arbitrary; it was the product of his connection with a

³¹ See Brennan, *Sinfonías Tempranas*.

³² Juan Vicente Melo labels *Monólogo* as Lavista's "first official piece." Juan Vicente Melo, "Mario Lavista: Un nuevo compositor," in *Mario Lavista: Textos en torno a la música*, ed. Luis Jaime Cortez (Mexico City: Conaculta, INBA, Cendim, 1988), 19. Text originally written in 1966.

³³ Armando Lavalle conducted the concert, and baritone Roberto Bañuelas was the lead singer for Lavista's *Monólogo*.

³⁴ Melo, "Mario Lavista: Un nuevo compositor," 19. [... una de las "jóvenes" obras mexicanas más interesantes que pudieron escucharse en ese Festival. ... [S]e advertía a un músico de gran sensibilidad, inquieto, deseo de decir lo que todo artista desea decir, sin caer en fáciles efectismos ni en no menos gratuitos procedimientos de vanguardia que ya van convirtiéndose en inevitables y reconocibles clisés.]

³⁵ See José Vilchis, and "A Gogol se le conoce más en México por Carlos Ancira que por la lectura de sus libros: Benjamín Bernal," Sala de Prensa Conaculta, May 23, 2007, <https://web.archive.org/web/20070710182248/http://www.conaculta.gob.mx/saladeprensa/index.php?indice=6&fecha=2007-05-23>, accessed June 21, 2023.

³⁶ Juan Vicente Melo, "Las Canciones de Mario Lavista: Fidelidad a la música y a la palabra," in Cortez, *Mario Lavista*, 45. Text originally written in 1967.

³⁷ Juan Arturo Brennan, "Textos, instrumentos, epígrafes," in Cortez, *Mario Lavista*, 145. Text originally written in 1983.

particular local artistic-intellectual circle and a reflection of that circle's fascination with Gogol through Ancira.

Diary of a Madman is the only work in which Gogol uses the first-person narrative. The book is written in the form of a diary, and the main character, Poprishchin (a civil servant), relates his attempts to win the attention of the woman he loves, who happens to be the daughter of his boss (a senior official). To learn more about the woman, Sophia, Poprishchin steals the letters between two dogs, one of which is Sophia's dog Madge. With each diary entry, he slips deeper into insanity. After discovering that Sophia is getting married to a general, Poprishchin becomes convinced that he is supposed to be the next king of Spain, Ferdinand VIII. When he is put in an asylum, the madman believes he is being taken to Spain, and when the authorities treat him badly, he believes he has fallen into the hands of the Inquisition. At the end of the tale, in the last entry of the diary, the desperate madman seems to recover some degree of sanity, as he cries out for his mother to help him. The last diary entry reads as follows:

DA 24 TE MH. YRAE, FEBRUARY 349.

No, I have no more strength to bear it! O God what are they doing to me! They pour cold water on my head! They don't heed me, don't see me, don't listen to me! What have I done to them? What reason have they for torturing me? What do they want from me in my misery? What can I give them? I have nothing. I have not the strength, I cannot suffer all their tortures, my head burns, and everything is circling about me. Save me! Take me away! Give me a *troika*, steeds swift as the whirlwind! Drive on, man, let my bell ring out, soar upward steeds, bear me from this world! Further, further, that nothing may be seen, nothing. The sky whirls before me; a star glitters in the distance; the forest rushes on with its dark trees and the crescent moon; a violet mist carpets the ground; the string vibrates in the mist; the sea is on one side and Italy upon the other; and now the Russian huts appear. Is that my house that grows blue upon the distance? Is that my mother sitting before the window? Mother, save your wretched son! Drop a tear upon his aching head! Look how they torture him! Clasp a poor orphan to your breast! There is no place on earth for him! They are casting him off! Mother, have pity on your sick child! . . . By the way, do you know that the Bey of Algiers has a wart right under his nose?³⁸

We do not know for sure which Spanish translation of Gogol's text Lavista used for his *Monólogo*.³⁹ Whether or not he took his version directly from Ancira, Lavista decided to set the text entirely without punctuation, articulating it only through the use of silences. The excerpt that Lavista chose from Gogol's text comes from this

³⁸ Nikolai Gogol, *Diary of a Madman, Nevski Prospect*, trans. Beatrice Scott (London: L. Drummond, 1945), 47–49.

³⁹ When I asked Lavista about which translation he used, he was not certain as to whether he had consulted a published translation of Gogol's *Diary* or Ancira's personal photocopies of the text.

entry, at the point where the madman has a moment of illumination, when he invokes his mother at the very end of the diary. Lavista explains:

I was attracted by the possibility of finding a sonorous equivalent of the atmosphere, completely stripped of superfluous elements, and from the acute sense of solitude that is present all throughout this work by Gogol. I was interested in making a dramatic work in which an individual confuses his dreams with reality and tries, through memory, to recover the image of his mother in order to recover the images of his own childhood.⁴⁰

Lavista's choice of instrumentation—baritone, flute, double bass, and vibraphone—corresponded to his interest in the sonic world of Schoenberg's expressionist aesthetics, which he had been studying under Halffter. The subject matter Lavista selected (a madman's desperation) also echoes the psychological explorations found in works of composers associated with the Second Viennese School—solitude, blurred boundaries between sanity and insanity, consciousness and unconsciousness, and the like—all inscribed in a modernist fashion. Before *Monólogo*, Lavista had also used the twelve-tone technique in *Seis piezas para orquesta de cuerdas* (1965). Like *Monólogo*, this set of six pieces for string orchestra was a product of Lavista's exploration of nontonal writing and reflects his assimilation of Anton Webern's economy of means and careful control of notation and expressive markings.⁴¹

In terms of pitch content, Lavista based *Monólogo* on the same tone row that Schoenberg used in his *Variations for Orchestra*, op. 31 (1926–1928)—a work he might have studied in Halffter's analysis courses (see Examples 2.1a and 2.1b).⁴² In Lavista's words, "Schoenberg's row . . . contains multiple possibilities depending on the imagination of whoever uses it. I wanted to use it in my work and to manipulate it in a different way. Since [*Monólogo*] was my 'first opus,' I thought that having a twelve-tone row could guarantee me a certain intervallic unity in the piece."⁴³

⁴⁰ Mario Lavista, quoted in Brennan, "Textos, instrumentos, epígrafes," 140. [Me sentí atraído por la posibilidad de encontrar un equivalente sonoro de la atmósfera, totalmente despojada de elementos superfluos, y del agudo sentido de la soledad que recorre esta obra de Gogol. Me interesó realizar una obra dramática en la que un individuo confunde sus sueños con la realidad y que intenta, a través del recuerdo, rescatar la imagen de su madre para tratar de recuperar las imágenes de su propia niñez.]

⁴¹ *Seis piezas para orquesta de cuerdas* did not premier until 1981. It is dedicated to Raúl and Helena Lavista. The piece was recently performed by the Orquesta de Cámara de Bellas Artes, directed by Ludwig Carrasco, in November 2021. Carrasco prepared a critical edition of the work published by Cenidim in 2022 and made available in Mediateca Lavista. See "Seis pequeñas piezas (orquesta de cuerdas): Mario Lavista," *Sonus Litterarum*, November 27, 2022, <https://sonuslitterarum.mx/seis-pequenas-piezas-orquesta-de-cuerdas-mario-lavista/>, accessed June 21, 2023.

⁴² Lavista's *Monólogo* has never been edited or published. The score is in manuscript format only. Unless otherwise noted, the transcriptions of excerpts from Lavista's scores are by Eduardo García.

⁴³ Mario Lavista, email message to author, January 28, 2008. Lavista continued to use Schoenberg's *Variations for Orchestra*, op. 31 in his analysis classes at the Conservatory. [La serie de Schoenberg . . . contiene múltiples posibilidades dependiendo de la imaginación de quien la use. Quise emplearla en mi obra para tratar de manipularla de manera diferente y también porque, siendo mi "primer opus" pensé que una serie podría garantizarme cierta unidad interválica en la pieza.]

Example 2.1a Arnold Schoenberg's twelve-tone row from *Variations for Orchestra*, op. 31.



Example 2.1b Row used by Lavista in *Monólogo*.



Example 2.2 Lavista, *Monólogo*, mm. 34–36.

The use of Schoenberg's row not only granted Lavista intervallic unity, but it may have also helped him secure his public reputation by adhering his "first public piece" to a widely known and highly regarded twelve-tone composition.⁴⁴ The row is first presented in its entirety by the flute in the form P11. After an instrumental introduction, the baritone enters with the original form of the row (see Example 2.2). The baritone's text, which comes from the beginning of the madman's last diary entry, starts with: "¡No, ya no tengo fuerzas para aguantar más! ¡Dios mío!, ¿qué es lo que están haciendo conmigo? Me echan agua sobre la cabeza. No me hacen caso, no me miran ni me escuchan" (No, I have no more strength to bear it! O God what are they doing to

⁴⁴ Schoenberg's *Variations for Orchestra*, op. 31 had a prominent place among contemporary music circles. Various composers had published analysis of this work in European and U.S.-American venues. As Laura Emmery demonstrates, these analyses show the extent of which Schoenberg influenced diverse schools of thought on both sides of the Atlantic. See Laura Emmery, "Elliott Carter's and Luigi Nono's Analyses of Schoenberg's *Variations for Orchestra*, Op. 31: Divergent Approaches to Serialism," *Twentieth-Century Music* 16, no. 2 (2019): 191–229.

Example 2.3 Lavista, *Monólogo*, mm. 62–64.

The image shows a musical score for four instruments: Baritone, Flute, Vibraphone, and Contrabass. The Baritone part is the vocal line, with lyrics in Spanish: "yo no ten - go na - da no ten-go fuer - zas no pue-do,a-guan-tar más". The Flute part has a melodic line with a "6 de 5" interval marked. The Vibraphone and Contrabass parts provide accompaniment with various dynamics and articulations like "ppp" and "vibrato".

me! They pour cold water on my head! They don't heed me, don't see me, don't listen to me!).

In addition to quoting the tone row from *Variations for Orchestra*, Lavista also uses a vocal technique favored by Schoenberg, *Sprechstimme* (a cross between speaking and singing), to suggest the madman's desperation. In the second verse, after asking the Lord what had he done to deserve such torment, the baritone line abandons pitch in order to speak the text with only a suggested rhythmic pattern, as if, indeed, the madman had nothing left to offer (see Example 2.3): "yo no tengo nada, no tengo fuerzas, no puedo aguantar más" (I have nothing. I have not the strength, I cannot bear this any longer).

Lavista emphasizes the madman's desperate cry for his mother's help by isolating the word *madre* when it appears for the first time and giving the vocal line a melodic sigh with a gesture of a minor second in the high register of the baritone (G–F#). This moment will be the last time that the voice will "sing" specific pitches. After that, the remaining text, leading to the conclusion of the piece, is spoken. Lavista also alters the text to emphasize the madman's crying for maternal help. Although Gogol's madman ends his diary with a series of exclamations, Lavista modifies Gogol's text by omitting certain phrases and by ending the piece with a repetition of the word *madre* four times (see Example 2.4): "Madre salva a tu pobre hijo mira cómo le martirizan en el mundo no hay sitio para él lo persiguen madre ten piedad de tu niño enfermo madre madre madre madre" (Mother, save your wretched son! Look how they torture him! There is no place on earth for him! They are casting him off! Mother, have pity on your sick child! Mother, mother, mother).⁴⁵

By omitting the very last line of Gogol's diary—the sentence that implies the madman's slip back into insanity—*Monólogo* ends in a hopeful tone: instead of regressing into irrationality, the madman recognizes his need for help. This subtle shift

⁴⁵ There are no punctuation or accents in Lavista's manuscript. The English translation provided in parenthesis is adapted from Beatrice Scott's.

Example 2.4 Lavista, *Monólogo*, mm. 98–100.

symbolically signaled the emergence of a hopeful artist, Lavista, who proved to be well versed in the experimental trends of musical and literary circles. *Monólogo* could also be regarded as a successful response to a desire to meet the expectations of an intellectual elite. On one hand, Lavista skillfully used a compositional technique perceived throughout Latin America as a path toward internationalization, and, on the other, he used a literary text that was “in vogue” within contemporary artistic circles in Mexico.⁴⁶ In doing so, he embraced both local and international ideologies to construct a sense of musical cosmopolitanism—one that looked beyond the nation.

In the same year of *Monólogo*'s premiere (1966), critic and composer José Antonio Alcaraz deemed Lavista a composer with “undeniable gifts” and “incipient dramatic instinct.” He clarified that Lavista's choice of a small ensemble was the result of finding his creative voice not by using great symphonic forces, but rather by resorting to an intimate and detailed means of expression.⁴⁷ This asseveration turned out to be a constant in the composer's career, as Lavista had a preference to write music for solo and chamber ensembles.

Lavista's incipient recognition was further advanced after the premiere of his next work, *Dos canciones* (1966). Written for mezzo-soprano and harpsichord or piano, it was a commission he received from Melo (then director of Casa del Lago).⁴⁸ *Dos*

⁴⁶ About the role of serialism in Latin American avant-garde music, see Graciela Paraskevaïdis, “An Introduction to Twelve-Tone Music and Serialism in Latin America,” *Interface* 13, no. 3 (1984): 133–47; Carol A. Hess, *Representing the Good Neighbor: Music, Difference, and the Pan American Dream* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Daniela Fugellie, *Musiker unserer Zeit: Internationale Avantgarde, Migration and Wiener Schule in Südamerika* (Munich: Edition Text + Kritik, 2018); and Eduardo Herrera, *Elite Art Worlds: Philanthropy, Latin Americanism, and Avant-Garde Music* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

⁴⁷ José Antonio Alcaraz, “*Dos canciones* de Mario Lavista,” in Cortez, *Mario Lavista*, 41. [... un músico con innegables dones y que mostraba poseer un naciente instinto dramático.]

⁴⁸ All the composers featured during the concert at Casa del Lago, Manuel Enríquez, Eduardo Mata, and Joaquín Gutiérrez Heras, were associated with the labels “postnationalist” or “transition” generation. Their shared opposition to nationalism certainly generated stereotypes about previous music and followed certain guidelines, such as avoiding the use, quotation, appropriation, or even invention of folk or popular themes.

canciones was regarded as a piece that defined Lavista's "individual style." However, as we will see shortly, this "individuality" reflected certain choices that were in accordance with the dominant aesthetic. Melo, who endorsed Lavista as an emerging artist worthy of the intellectual elite's attention, published a highly positive review of *Dos canciones* in which he praised Lavista's "adequate" selection of poetic sources: two poems by Octavio Paz (1914–1998). In his review he noted: "[Our composers] are used to re-poetizing García Lorca *d'après* Silvestre Revueltas or Salvador Moreno, or in the opposite case, to re-baptizing autochthonous and anonymous poets." Lavista, by contrast, realized "that there are other writers capable of stirring musical ideas thanks to the exercise of poetry. . . . The first virtue of *Dos canciones* . . . is to be faithful to Octavio Paz's poems."⁴⁹ As this quote suggests, Melo was validating Lavista against the backdrop of composers from a previous generation purely on the basis of his text selection. Moreover, it is quite obvious that while endorsing Lavista's choice, Melo was also interested in placing him next to Paz—an already established and respected poet and an intellectual who had gained an extensive international reputation by the late 1960s.

The two poems Lavista chose for his *canciones*, "Palpar" and "Reversible" (1958–1961), were examples of Paz's poetic shift toward the higher degree of malleability he would fully explore in *Blanco* (1966), a text of multidirectional readings where he plays with the space and coloring of the lines. "Palpar" comes from the collection *Salamandra*, and "Reversible," from *Días hábiles*, both from 1958 to 1961. The text of "Palpar" (Touch) reads as follows:

Touch

My hands
 open the curtains of your being
 clothe you in a further nudity
 uncover the bodies of your body
 My hands
 invent another body for your body⁵⁰

Regarding the selection of this text, Lavista explains, "[This poem] was convenient to me for its brevity, as I was looking for ways to work with compacted structures,

⁴⁹ Melo, "Las *Canciones* de Mario Lavista," 44. [Acostumbrados a repoetizar a García Lorca *d'après* Silvestre Revueltas o Salvador Moreno, o en el caso contrario de rebautizar a autóctonos y anónimos poetas, nuestros compositores no se habían fijado que existen otros escritores capaces de suscitar ideas musicales gracias al ejercicio de la poesía. . . . La primera virtud de las *Dos canciones* . . . es la de ser fiel a los poemas de Octavio Paz.]

⁵⁰ Octavio Paz, "Palpar," in *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz 1957–1987*, ed. Eliot Weinberger, trans. Charles Tomlinson (New York: New Directions, 1990), 114–15. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp. Original Spanish of Paz's poems is not included because of COVID-19 delays in obtaining copyright permissions.

following Webern's teachings."⁵¹ While not strictly serial, in the first song Lavista favors the sets [017] and [016] throughout.⁵² The melodic line of the voice presents a wide registral range, *Sprechstimme*, and quarter-tones, while the keyboard player must play *glissandi* on the strings inside the piano. While looking to Webern—yet another exponent of the Second Viennese School—as an imaginary mentor in the crafting of “Palpar,” Lavista went one step further in endorsing ideologies of internationalization rooted in a sense of the local by his choice of text, which in turn supported the tenets of his cosmopolitan imaginary. The text of the second song “Reversible” (Reversible) reads as follows:

Reversible

In space
 I am
 inside of me
 the space
 outside of me
 the space
 nowhere
 I am
 outside of me
 in space
 inside
 is space
 outside of it
 nowhere
 I am
 in space
 etcetera⁵³

In this poem Paz plays with the order of words to alter the location of the “self” (I) and the space (e.g., inside, outside, nowhere). During this period, Paz was concerned with concrete poetry. He aimed for an almost mathematical structure based on playful permutations of words and was fascinated by the poetry of Stéphane Mallarmé.⁵⁴ In his musicalization of this poem, Lavista uses an intricate structure of several canonic

⁵¹ Lavista, quoted in Brennan, “Textos, instrumentos, epígrafes,” 141. [Me convenía por su misma brevedad, ya que yo buscaba el manejo de formas muy pequeñas, siguiendo la enseñanza de Webern.]

⁵² Here I use terminology from pitch-class set theory. The pitch set with prime form [016] (which may be voiced as C–F#–G) has also been called “Viennese trichord” because it was favored by the composers associated with the Second Viennese School.

⁵³ Paz, “Reversible,” in *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz*, trans. Eliot Weinberger, 52. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

⁵⁴ Some years later in his larger combinatorial poem *Blanco* (1966), Paz would take this playfulness to its fullest extent: this poem can be read in at least six different ways.

Example 2.5 Lavista, *Dos canciones*, “Reversible,” mm. 22–25.

imitations between the soprano and the top line of the keyboard. He carefully assigns different musical effects to each phrase of the text. While the work starts with the pedal down and pizzicato on the low range of the piano strings, the voice, *casi murmurando*, whispers “en el espacio.” The next time that phrase appears, the voice whispers it again, while the keyboard sustains a chord for five seconds. Every two phrases the vocal line either descends or ascends with a glissando. In the middle of the piece, the vocal line sings “en el espacio” almost inaudibly, and whispers the word “etcétera.” After that point, the text is heard in reverse, starting with “en el espacio,” and it retains the music originally associated with that text (see Example 2.5).⁵⁵

One of the most common usages of the adjective “reversible” is in reference to something that can be restored to its original condition after a change by reversing that change. Lavista *literally* follows the title of Paz’s poem by repeating the text backwards, line by line, with each line accompanied by the same music. While doing so, the composer also takes the concept of reversibility one step further than the poet; while Paz plays with the permutations of the words, Lavista explores a backward reading of the poem, and by doing that, he reestablishes the original condition of the text. Lavista explained that what was interesting about this process was being able to construct musical phrases that were modular in nature, so that they could work in different places:

At the middle of the piece, I take the music that I used in the last phrase and use it for the first phrase of the second half. I do not follow this process note by note but by sections, precisely those sections that the poem stresses. The interesting thing for me was constructing musical phrases that were permutable in the piece

⁵⁵ *Dos canciones* was published by Ediciones Mexicanas de Música as Lavista’s opus 2 in 1966. No commercial recording is available, and there have been very few performances of this set. Singer Ingela Onstad and pianist José Luis Hurtado performed the set at a concert in honor of Lavista’s 70th birthday I co-organized with Hurtado at the University of New Mexico on October 31, 2013, with Lavista in attendance. To the best of my knowledge, the last performance of the piece took place at the Tenri Cultural Institute in Manhattan by singer Luisa Hidalgo and pianist Roberto Hidalgo, on February 12, 2022.

and that, while occupying two distinct places in it, work equally well in each case.⁵⁶

Two reviews of *Dos canciones* illustrate certain paradigms that, when applied to this work, helped establish Lavista as a noteworthy new composer. For Melo, Paz's permutable poem allows Lavista to permute the music; the poem is what provides the image of "mirroring," thus proposing a musical image that Lavista only translates. Therefore, the composer's aptitude is recognized by the way in which he *follows* something that was *already* in Paz's poem. Melo does not hesitate to describe Lavista as already belonging to the "history of Mexican music": "the truth is that, with *Dos canciones*, Mario Lavista is, at 23, a composer who should already be counted in the history of Mexican music (the true history that must be written someday . . .)."⁵⁷ Moreover, Melo does not forget to mention that *Dos canciones* had been chosen for publication by Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, regarded as the main publishing house of contemporary music in the country.

In a second review of *Dos canciones*, written by Alcaraz, we find additional validation parameters to which the composer seems to have conformed, which coincided with the aesthetics of internationalization that praise austerity and symmetry:

Without embroideries or ornaments, we do not find in the entire work a single sound whose duration is prolonged through vocalization. Lavista thus reaffirms his zeal for stripping himself of everything that is not strictly necessary, even exaggerating a will for austerity or attention to detail. Despite its beautiful irregular melodic sequences, the work possesses a symmetry that appears dangerous to us because it grants the work a sort of uniform pattern of conduct.⁵⁸

Alcaraz regards *Dos canciones* as "a page worthy of attention in Mexican music" because it exemplifies the ideology of a generation that "distances itself from picturesque customs in order to devote itself to the true and properly musical endeavor."⁵⁹ Again,

⁵⁶ Lavista, quoted in Brennan, "Textos, instrumentos, epígrafes," 141. [A la mitad de la pieza, tomo la música que utilicé en la última frase y la empleo para la primera frase de la segunda mitad. No sigo este proceso nota por nota, sino por secciones, justamente las secciones que me marca el poema. Lo interesante para mí fue construir frases musicales que fueran permutables en la obra y que al ocupar dos lugares distintos en ella funcionaran igualmente bien en cada caso.]

⁵⁷ Melo, "Mario Lavista: Un nuevo compositor," 21. [Lo cierto es que, con estas *Dos canciones*, Mario Lavista es, a los 23 años, un compositor que debe ya contarse en la historia de la música mexicana (esa, la verdadera, que algún día tendrá que escribirse . . .)]

⁵⁸ Alcaraz, "*Dos canciones* de Mario Lavista," 41–42. [Sin bordados ni ornamentaciones; no hay tampoco en toda la obra un solo sonido cuya duración sea prolongada a través de una vocalización, y Lavista reafirma así su afán de despojarse de todo lo que no sea estrictamente necesario, exagerando incluso esta voluntad de austeridad o detallismo. A pesar de sus hermosas secuencias melódicas irregulares, la obra posee una simetría que nos parece peligrosa, puesto que ello proporciona a toda la obra una especie de patrón uniforme de conducta.]

⁵⁹ Alcaraz, "*Dos canciones* de Mario Lavista," 42. [. . . una página digna de atención en la música mexicana . . . se aleja del pintoresquismo costumbrista para entregarse de lleno a la tarea verdadera y propiamente musical.]

we see that one parameter for “true” music was a refusal of any perceived national (exotic) trait. Lavista’s songs were validated, and, as Melo predicted, Lavista became a “new composer”; that is, he was newly accepted into an intellectual and artistic circle. Not surprisingly, a year later, in 1967, *Dos canciones* was performed at the ceremony for Octavio Paz’s admission into El Colegio Nacional, the institutional apparatus of the country’s intellectual elite. This occasion symbolically confirmed Lavista’s official recognition as a composer worthy of national attention and in a way foreshadowed his own admission to El Colegio Nacional, which was to happen a little over three decades later, in 1998.

After *Dos canciones*, Lavista composed another choral work, *Homenaje a Samuel Beckett*, for three mixed choirs *a cappella* (amplified). This piece presents aleatoric elements alongside fixed sections.⁶⁰ The text comes from Samuel Beckett’s *Comment c’est*, which writer José Emilio Pacheco had recently translated into Spanish.⁶¹ Once more, Lavista’s text selection reflects the interests of the group, for it was Melo who gave Lavista a copy of Pacheco’s translation of Beckett’s text. As with *Monólogo*, this text projects an atmosphere of solitude. And as in *Dos canciones*, in *Homenaje a Samuel Beckett* Lavista continued to explore ways in which he could write permutable music. In his own words:

The fragments of Beckett I chose also have a very acute sense of solitude, as his work generally does. These texts talk about a sack that is carried, about the mud, in short, about a series of symbolic elements. Beckett’s work does not have punctuation, which offers the possibility of many readings and many interpretations of the text: this is what I wanted to achieve also in the music, the possibility of many readings.⁶²

Although *Homenaje a Samuel Beckett* has never been premiered and remains unpublished as of the time of this writing, it was granted scholarly recognition by composer and scholar Julio Estrada (b. 1943), who included it in his edited multivolume work, *La música de México*, published in 1984. In this piece, he saw a novel path for Mexican choral music:

The *Homenaje a Samuel Beckett* for three choirs *a cappella* by Mario Lavista inaugurates in Mexican music a modality of distribution of the musical ensemble. Each

⁶⁰ José Antonio Alcaraz, “Mario Lavista: La música un solo universo: De la edad media a la electrónica,” in *Hablar de música: Conversaciones con compositores del continente americano* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 1982), 39. Text originally published in *Diorama de la Cultura, Excelsior*, May 9, 1976. [... obligado por la problemática que yo mismo me he planteado, un tipo de escritura en la que reúno elementos aleatorios y secciones fijas.]

⁶¹ Samuel Beckett, *Cómo es*, trans. José Emilio Pacheco (Mexico City: Editorial Joaquín Mortiz, 1966).

⁶² Lavista, quoted in Brennan, “Textos, instrumentos, epígrafes,” 141–42. [Los fragmentos de Beckett que elegí tienen también un sentido muy agudo de la soledad, como toda su obra en general. Se habla en estos textos de un costal que se carga, del lodo, en fin, de una serie de elementos simbólicos. Esta obra de Beckett no tiene puntuación y esto ofrece la posibilidad de varias lecturas y de varias interpretaciones del texto: esto fue lo que traté de lograr también en la música; la posibilidad de varias lecturas múltiples.]

choir is constituted by eight voices and all together they form a spatial triangle in which the communication games of vowels and consonants have been prepared by the author in the score. To the listener, the choral mass seems to have mobility thanks to the homogeneous formation of each choir.⁶³

With these three pieces, *Monólogo*, *Dos canciones*, and *Homenaje a Beckett*, Lavista inaugurated his public career. Both critics and audiences received him as a promising young composer with an individual voice. His voice was rooted in a cosmopolitan ideal that complied with the expectations of a “postnationalist” ideological agenda of employing compositional trends characteristic of the European avant-garde. Lavista’s literary choices—from the madness of Gogol’s *Diary* to Beckett’s modernist narrative and Paz’s concrete poetry—reflect a preference for flexible texts, permutable in nature, with no linear coherence or internal logical narrative. Gogol’s last entry in the *Diary* lacks linear coherence; Paz’s poems are short and fragmentary and allow for alternate readings, and Beckett’s text also has a unique flexibility provided by its lack of punctuation. Lavista began making a name for himself through exploring serialist techniques while grappling with the literature relevant to a circle of Mexican artists and intellectuals.

While in Europe: A Cosmopolitan Avant-Garde

In 1967, the French government awarded Lavista a grant to study at the Schola Cantorum in Paris. Earlier he had met French avant-garde composer Jean-Étienne Marie (1917–1989) in Mexico, who encouraged him to pursue studies at the Schola Cantorum. French critic and writer Louis Panabière, who was at the time the director of the Alliance Française in Mexico City and cultural ambassador for the French Embassy in Mexico, supported Lavista’s scholarship application. In Paris, Lavista studied mainly with Marie, but he also attended classes with Nadia Boulanger (1887–1979).⁶⁴ While in Europe, he also attended the Rheinische Musikschule (Cologne, Germany) in 1968. In Cologne, he took a percussion seminar offered by Christoph Caskel, a seminar on Anton Webern’s and John Cage’s music taught by Henri Pousseur, and a course on improvisational processes by Karlheinz Stockhausen. He also studied music analysis under György Ligeti at the New Music Courses in

⁶³ Estrada, *Período contemporáneo*, 200. [El *Homenaje a Samuel Beckett*, para tres coros a cappella, de Mario Lavista, inaugura en la música mexicana esta modalidad de distribución del ensamble musical. Integrado cada uno de los coros con ocho voces, el conjunto forma un triángulo espacial en el que los juegos de comunicación de vocales y consonantes han sido preparados por el autor en la partitura. Para el oyente, la masa coral parece tener movilidad gracias a la formación homogénea existente en cada uno de los coros.]

⁶⁴ Lavista took Boulanger’s analysis course centered on Franz Schubert’s sonatas. See González and Saavedra, *Música mexicana contemporánea*, 117.

Darmstadt.⁶⁵ During his time in Europe, Lavista embraced the use of mobile forms and other kinds of indeterminacy, electronic music, and *musique concrète*. The experience he gathered abroad was fundamental to his creative output, particularly throughout the 1970s.

While in Paris, Lavista wrote *Divertimento* (1968),⁶⁶ which was commissioned by UNAM's Dirección General de Difusión Cultural. The piece is scored for woodwind quintet, five woodblocks, and three shortwave radios. It was the first work in which Lavista used nontraditional musical instruments (shortwave radios), open form, and audience participation—a testimony of the techniques he was being exposed to while in Europe. *Divertimento* was first performed by the Contemporary Music Ensemble of Paris under the direction of Karl Simonovic during the Semaines de Musique Contemporaine d'Orléans (founded by Marie). There are two versions of this work. In the version that Simonovic selected, the audience participates by making sounds with marbles, sheets of paper, and sheets of wood, under the direction of three conductors.⁶⁷ “The writing is merely graphic, and clashing sounds are obtained by beating the keys of the instruments and the bell of the horn, in addition to the parts that the instrumentalists play on woodblocks beaten with drumsticks.”⁶⁸ The piece is divided into four sections. The conductor is free to select the order of the sections and the number of repetitions prior to each performance. In that regard, the duration of the work could vary considerably.

Divertimento could be regarded as a direct antecedent of the 1969 string quartet *Diacronía*.⁶⁹ Lavista tells us that the concept of *diacronía* (diachrony), contrary to the idea of synchrony, which implies a certain “immobility of time,” represents musical discourse as a pure succession of forms.⁷⁰ In the same manner as *Divertimento*, the score of *Diacronía* specifies pitches, dynamics, and the articulation of each note. Nevertheless, rhythm and tempo are notated only vaguely, with an approximate duration of eight seconds per measure. The succession of events unfolding in time is

⁶⁵ Although some sources include Iannis Xenakis in the list of Lavista's teachers while in Europe, he did not enroll in any of Xenakis's courses. He did, however, attend some presentations and lectures by the Greek-French composer.

⁶⁶ Not to be confused with *Divertimento: Para una coreografía imaginaria* (2006), for two cellos and prepared piano, dedicated to the ensemble Cello Alterno.

⁶⁷ The second version of *Divertimento* was first performed in Mexico in a concert in memory of Lavista by the Ensemble Cepromusic, directed by José Luis Castillo, at the Auditorio Blas Galindo (National Center of the Arts), on June 11, 2022. See Centro Nacional de las Artes, “... todo muta, Mario | Ensemble Cepromusic,” YouTube video, 1:50:25, June 11, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HrvVpm6StnM>, accessed June 21, 2023.

⁶⁸ Mario Lavista, “*Divertimento*,” in Cortez, *Mario Lavista*, 88–89. [La escritura es netamente gráfica y se utilizan efectos percutidos logrados al golpear las llaves de los instrumentos, el pabellón del corno, además de las partes que los instrumentistas tocan en wood blocks percutidos con baquetas de tambor.]

⁶⁹ Before *Diacronía*, Lavista had composed *Seis piezas para cuarteto de cuerdas*, dedicated to Rodolfo Halffter. Lavista's signature includes the location and date: Mexico, October 5, 1967. In spite of having completed these short pieces two years prior to *Diacronía*, Lavista consistently regarded *Diacronía* as his first string quartet. Recently, Cuarteto José White recorded *Seis piezas* for online streaming at Mediateca Lavista.

⁷⁰ Mario Lavista, “*Diacronía*,” in Cortez, *Mario Lavista*, 90. [... una cierta inmovilidad del tiempo, representa el discurso musical como una pura sucesión de formas.]

thus dependent on the performers, who are granted complete liberty to determine the tempo and total length of the work.⁷¹ Although there is a similar treatment of rhythm and tempo in both *Divertimento* and *Diacronía*, the quartet is to be played in a linear fashion; there is no openness with regard to its form. As early as the 1980s, Lavista recognized *Diacronía* as a composition in which he started to find his “own voice.”⁷² In retrospect, however, this piece is strikingly different from the series of quartets that he would compose later in life with regard to the treatment of instrumental effects, the use of microtonal inflections, and overall harmonic drive.

Lavista continued to use nonconventional materials in further compositions. In 1969, he conceived *Kronos*, a piece for any number of alarm clocks that, in concept, alludes to Ligeti's *Poème symphonique* (1962) for one hundred metronomes. *Kronos* premiered in 1970 at Mexico's National Music Conservatory under Lavista's direction. As with *Diacronía*, there are two versions of the instructions for performing *Kronos*. In the version realized by Spanish composer Carlos Cruz de Castro (b. 1941), the performers are asked to use the largest possible number of clocks, whether electronic or not. The duration of the piece is determined “at the convenience” of the performers, and the work ends when “all alarm clocks have had their chance to sound their respective bells.”⁷³ In another version of the score, designed by architect Rafael Sumohano, Lavista recommends using at least fifteen clocks and three microphones (see Figure 2.2). The instructions included in this version are much more detailed, even specifying where to hold each clock: “the performers, each one with their respective alarm clocks held with two hands in front of their waists, will come out to the stage and will stand, in a straight line, in front of the public.”⁷⁴

In this second version, Lavista provides general suggestions about what types of clocks to use, how to prepare them before the concert, the distance between clocks and microphones, and so on. He additionally provides instructions as to when the performers are to come to the stage, how many signals the conductor should provide, and when the performers are to leave the stage. The score even grants three possible routes for concluding the work. In exploring nonmusical instruments and embracing flexible forms in his scores of the late 1960s, Lavista purposefully integrated the compositional techniques he was being exposed to in Europe, thereby shaping his compositional voice in the frame of a cosmopolitan ideal. His time abroad was marked by an

⁷¹ Lavista, “*Diacronía*,” 90. [... a pesar de estar indicado cuantitativamente, [el ritmo] está sujeto a la subjetividad de los ejecutantes de quienes depende, en gran medida, la *duración total* de la obra.]

⁷² Jeannine Wagar, “Stylistic Tendencies in Three Contemporary Mexican Composers: Manuel Enríquez, Mario Lavista and Alicia Urreta” (DMA diss., Stanford University, 1985), 134.

⁷³ Carlos Cruz de Castro, “*Cronos*” (unpublished program note given to the author by Mario Lavista). [... se tenga la seguridad de que todos los despertadores han agotado el turno de haber sonado el timbre correspondiente.] A year later, Cruz de Castro composed *Menaje* (1970), a work for nonconventional instruments (i.e., kitchen utensils). He continued to program Lavista's *Kronos* and Ligeti's *Poème symphonique* alongside *Menaje* throughout the 1970s.

⁷⁴ Rafael Sumohano, “*Kronos*” (unpublished drawing that includes indications for performance given to the author by Mario Lavista). [... los ejecutantes cada uno con su respectivo despertador sostenido con las 2 manos a la altura del estómago, saldrán al escenario colocándose en línea recta, frente al público.]

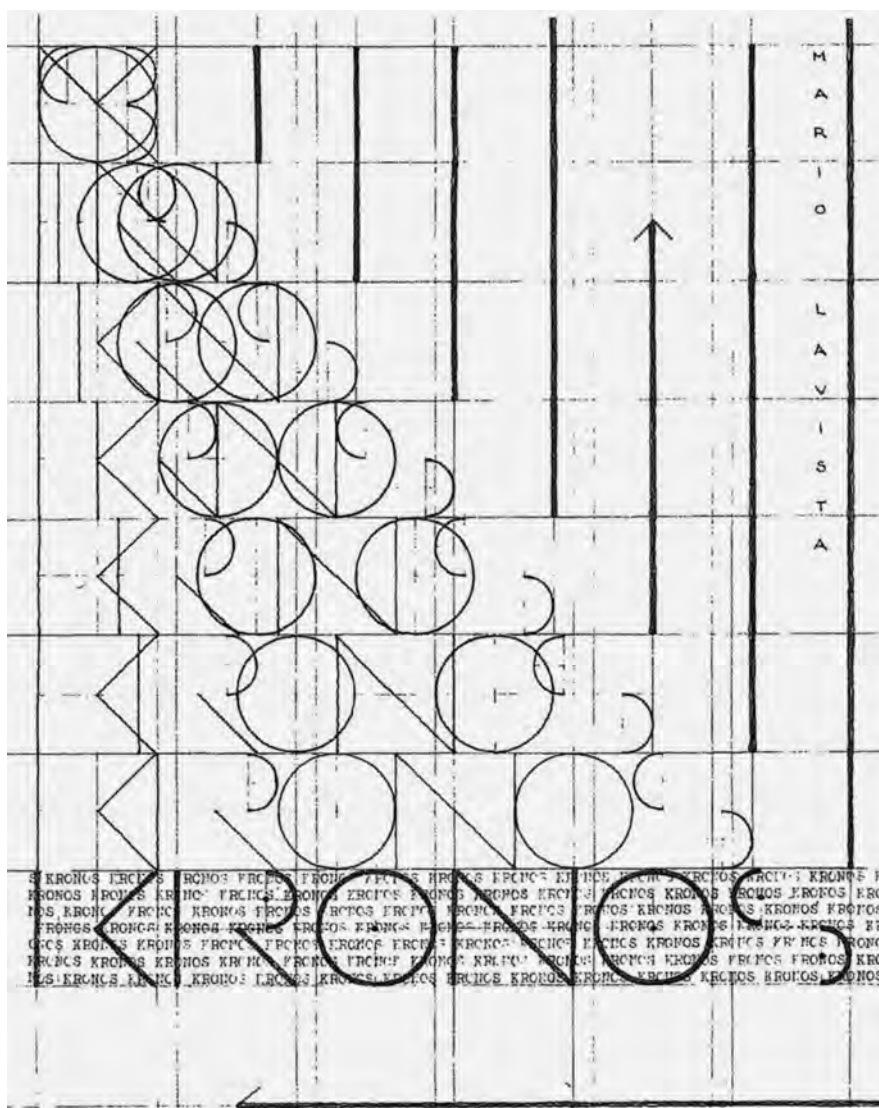


Figure 2.2 Cover of *Kronos* by R. Sumohano. From Lavista's personal archive. Courtesy of Mario Lavista.

embrace of then-prevalent avant-garde techniques: open forms and certain degrees of indeterminacy, electronic (tape) music, extended techniques and extended notation, and the use of nonconventional objects (*musique concrète*). These techniques, which started to appear in Lavista's works in the late 1960s, continued to permeate his output throughout the mid-1970s. In retrospect, the composer understood these works as exploratory venues allowing him to feel free to assimilate what he was learning and

observing. He might have kept in mind that, at his return to Mexico, he would have been expected to bring home the latest trends of the European avant-garde.

That Lavista chose France—and Paris in particular—as a site to pursue music studies abroad was not serendipitous. Nor was it solely the result of having received Jean-Étienne Marie's invitation. Lavista grew up in a home where he was exposed to the music of Claude Debussy and Maurice Ravel, and his devotion to Debussy's music only increased over time. Moreover, from a young age, he was an avid reader of French literature and developed a deep interest for French symbolist aesthetics. Years prior to his stay in France, Lavista had formally studied French at the Alliance Française with Panabière, who, more than a teacher, became a very close friend. A fascination for everything French among intellectuals and artists in Mexico City had been prevalent since the time of the *Porfiriato*, the dictatorial regime of President Porfirio Díaz (1877–1880; 1884–1911), who asserted a dominant French aesthetics in the nation. Wearing French clothes, listening to French music, reading French literature, and learning the French language were upper-class/highbrow class markers throughout twentieth-century Mexico.⁷⁵ Lavista's fascination with France remained with him all his life and permeated his sense of identity and aesthetic affiliations.

The scholarship that Lavista was granted by the French government was not intended to lead to the completion of an academic degree of any sort. Thus, Lavista was free to be selective in the courses he was interested in taking, in Paris, Cologne, and Darmstadt. Moreover, this scholarship, though barely sufficient to cover basic survival needs, could be easily renewed. Aside from taking courses and seminars that were advantageous to his compositional development, being in Europe allowed him to attend the world premieres of works he considered fundamental: György Ligeti's *Lontano*, Luciano Berio's *Sinfonia* (the complete five movements), and Karlheinz Stockhausen's *Stimmung*. Given these favorable conditions, Lavista might have stayed in France several years. However, family matters required that he cut his stay short and return to Mexico after just two years abroad. His daughter Claudia was born in Paris in 1969, and, given the economic restrictions of having to support a family while living abroad, he found it impossible to stay. He returned to Mexico with his baby daughter and his wife at the time, Rosa Martha Fernández.⁷⁶ Given his new realities as a father, a steady income was imperative. Lavista applied for a position at the National Music Conservatory in Mexico City and initiated his long teaching career at that institution in 1970.⁷⁷ Although he began to teach solely in response to an economic necessity, he soon developed an enthusiasm for teaching. He started offering classes

⁷⁵ Studying music in France was seen, throughout the twentieth century, as a marker of success. The list of Mexican composers who were able to study in France is vast. For a brief account of French influences in Mexican music, see Pablo Castellanos, "Presencia de Francia en la música mexicana," *Heterofonía* 4, no. 22 (1972): 4–9.

⁷⁶ Lavista married Rosa Martha Fernández shortly before their departure to Europe in 1967. Fernández also had received a scholarship to study in Paris. It is to her that Lavista dedicated the first of his *Dos canciones*, "Palpar" (1966). The relationship between Lavista and Fernández deteriorated while in Europe and it ended around 1972.

⁷⁷ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, February 22, 2012.

in harmony, counterpoint, music analysis, and, later, composition. Little did he know then that his post at the Conservatory would last almost fifty years.

“La destrucción renovadora” de los Quantas: Social Insurrection?

Upon his return to Mexico and motivated by his exposure to and engagement with collective improvisation during his time in Europe, in 1970 Lavista formed a collective improvisation group he named Quanta.⁷⁸ Apart from a commitment to sonic experimentation, the group’s ideals responded to an anticonformist attitude that permeated the youth in Mexico City. Their activities were perceived by mainstream media as a “popularizing movement.”⁷⁹ The members of the group were Lavista, Nicolás Echevarría, Juan Cuauhtémoc Herrejón, and Fernando Baena, who was later replaced by Antero Chávez. In their performances, they would play a variety of electronic and acoustic instruments—including composer Julián Carrillo’s microtonal harps and pianos—using an assortment of objects. The sonorous result was perceived as “psychedelic,” an invitation to experience altered states of consciousness.⁸⁰ With the slogan “If people don’t go to the concert, the concert will go to the people,” the group was critically responding to the indifferent attitude of bourgeois audiences toward experimentation. Performing on the streets opened sites of contradiction, where social expectations and musical traditions collided. Media critics labeled their practice “subversive art,” and their public appeal quickly came to be regarded as a sign of resistance, that of the “true new music.” During its two-year existence, to many people, Quanta represented a symbol of resistance that resonated with a broad sentiment of opposition to the repressive governmental regime that prevailed in Mexico during the 1960s and 1970s (see Figure 2.3).

As musicologist Benjamin Piekut has noted, experimentalism is a grouping, not a group, not what is described but what is *performed* as experimental.⁸¹ Quanta

⁷⁸ At the Reinische Musikschule, Lavista took a composition course taught by Stockhausen in which students analyzed some of Stockhausen’s pieces that were based on improvisation. While in Paris, Lavista acquired some experience in collective improvisation and started a group with three composers, among them Julio Estrada, who was also residing in France. Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, December 18, 2006. Lavista considered this group’s improvisations unsuccessful, as the group lacked a sense of unity. See González and Saavedra, *Música mexicana contemporánea*, 119.

⁷⁹ “Nuevas Modalidades,” *El Nacional*, June 13, 1971.

⁸⁰ Regarding this, Echevarría recalls: “Everybody that saw us playing those harps said that we were playing extraterrestrial music.” Later on, he said that audiences were “fascinated with the strange sound of the harps. [Some] were perturbed by that sound; they were scared of it.” Nicolás Echevarría, in Paulina Lavista, dir., *La escritura musical: 70 años de Mario Lavista* (Mexico City: TV UNAM, 2013), DVD. The reported perception of Quanta’s sound as psychedelic or extraterrestrial has also been present in other performance contexts where Julián Carrillo’s microtonal instruments are used. See Madrid, *In Search of Julián Carrillo*.

⁸¹ Benjamin Piekut, *Experimentalism Otherwise: The New York Avant-Garde and Its Limits* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).



Figure 2.3 Arnaldo Coen's *Montaje fotográfico de Quanta* (1971). Left to right: Juan Cuahutémoc Herrejón, Nicolás Echevarría, Mario Lavista, and Antero Chávez. Courtesy of Arnaldo Coen.

performed experimentalism by negotiating an ambivalent place in the official discourses of the musical avant-garde and, at the same time, by adopting a subversive attitude that echoed that of a youth counterculture thirsty for social change. Although the name *Quanta* has been reproduced in virtually every historical narrative of twentieth-century Mexican music as a prime example of “experimentalism,” no account provides further elaboration of that statement.⁸² Apart from being referred

⁸² For a discussion of the performative nature of experimentalisms in the context of Latin American music scenes, see Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, Eduardo Herrera, and Alejandro L. Madrid, “The Practices

to as a “collective improvisation group,” there is no thorough documentation of the types of practices carried out by Quanta; nor is there contextualization of its place in the broader cultural scene of Mexico City.⁸³

The country Lavista left in 1967 to pursue studies in Europe was not the same one he returned to in 1969. Historians concur that one of the darkest moments of twentieth-century Mexican history and a culminating event in the long postrevolutionary period of governmental suppression was the brutal Tlatelolco massacre of 1968. After a summer of intense campaigns against the government’s policies of repression and two weeks before the opening of the Olympic Games in Mexico City—which were anticipated as testimony to the rest of the world of the “advances of Mexico’s modernization”—on October 2, student protesters gathered at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas. The Mexican army surrounded the peaceful meeting with tanks, a helicopter began to circle around the crowd, and after two flares were dropped, the army began firing into the crowd, killing and wounding participants at random.⁸⁴

This horrific effort to repress protesters would not be the last. Three years later, on June 10, 1971, there was a military shooting of a group of students who had gathered in Mexico City’s downtown districts. Throughout the next several years, the government continued to arrest, torture, or imprison suspected “radicals.” It was common for the police to arrest individuals solely on the basis of their physical appearance; any young man wearing long hair or dressing like a “hippie” was subject to arrest.

Although this extreme repression resulted in widespread social demoralization, the attitude of pacifist resistance carried out by Mexican youth found alternative venues

of Experimentalism in Latin@ and Latin American Music. An Introduction,” in *Experimentalisms in Practice: Music Perspectives from Latin America*, ed. Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, Eduardo Herrera, and Alejandro L. Madrid (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1–17.

⁸³ When I began my research into Quanta, back in 2005, no recordings of Quanta’s improvisations were available, and Lavista affirmed that there was no recorded trace of their improvisational activities. Five years later, Antonio Russek gave Lavista a compact disc containing one of Quanta’s improvisations he had recorded—the exact date of this recording is still yet to be determined. Russek’s recording was later included in the compilation (*Ready*) *Media: Hacia una arqueología de los medios y la invención en México*, produced by Laboratorio Arte Alameda in 2010. Moreover, the same track was used in Paulina Lavista’s documentary *La escritura musical: 70 años de Mario Lavista*. The compilation (*Ready*) *Media* is accompanied by an essay by Manuel Rocha Iturbide in which he situates Quanta within a broader context of sound experimentation in Mexico during the 1970s. See Manuel Rocha Iturbide, “Arqueología de la música experimental en México,” in (*Ready*) *Media: Hacia una arqueología de los medios y la invención en México*, ed. Karla Jasso and Daniel Garza Usabiaga (Mexico City: Laboratorio de Arte Alameda, INBA, Conaculta, 2010), 169–81. A few years later, I presented preliminary research on Quanta at the 80th Annual Meeting of the American Musicological Society in Milwaukee, WI, in 2014. See also Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, “La ‘destrucción renovadora’ de Quanta,” *Pauta: Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical* 130 (2014): 22–34.

⁸⁴ Research into the events that led to the 1968 massacre abounds. However, it is important to note that, throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s, government repression persisted, and information about the massacre was limited, if not blocked. It was not until the beginning of the 2000s that significant studies and documentaries emerged. The early reporting that Elena Poniatowska published in *La noche de Tlatelolco: Testimonios de historia oral* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1971) is fundamental. Also see Sergio Aguayo Quezada, 1968: *Los archivos de la violencia* (Mexico City: Grijalbo-Reforma, 1998); Raúl Álvarez Garín, *La estela de Tlatelolco: Una reconstrucción histórica del movimiento estudiantil del 68* (Mexico City: Editorial Grijalbo, 1998); Eugenia Allier Montaño, “Presentes-pasados del 68 mexicano: Una historización de las memorias públicas del movimiento estudiantil, 1968–2007,” *Revista Mexicana de Sociología* 71, no. 2 (2009): 287–317; and Susana Draper, 1968 *Mexico: Constellations of Freedom and Democracy* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2018).

for its manifestation. The emergence of *La Onda*, a counterculture movement associated mostly with literary circles, and within it a Mexican native rock'n'roll movement, provided channels for venting frustrations caused by repression and violence.⁸⁵ The massive appeal of these alternative routes culminated in the Festival Rock y Ruedas of 1971. The festival was colloquially called Festival Avándaro, or simply Avándaro, because it took place on the shores of Lake Avándaro in the State of Mexico. Inspired by Woodstock, which had taken place just a couple of years before, Avándaro surpassed its organizers' expectations in that it brought together around 250,000 people of all social classes for a liberating two-day experience. The inexplicable unity of thousands of people, and their feelings of empowerment, must have represented a significant threat to state authorities. While the event was intended for a television program, all of the footage was confiscated, the transmission was cut, and the festival was demonized by all mass media. As a result, for over a decade, rock music was suppressed. Eric Zolov explains that, within this atmosphere of repression, "the counterculture became an important vehicle for channeling the rage and cynicism felt toward a political system that denied democratic expression and toward a family structure that seemed to emulate it."⁸⁶

The events prior to 1971 did not directly affect all the members of Quanta; Lavista remained in Europe from 1967 to 1969, and Echevarría lived in Guadalajara until 1969. Although as a group *los Quantas*—as they were called—did not overtly participate in any political movement, the irreverent attitude they adopted in their performances resonated with young Mexican audiences, who found in them a channel for expressing resistance against the extreme oppression they had recently experienced. Each member of Quanta came from a very different musical background. Lavista had been classically trained as a pianist and composer, Echevarría had a background as a jazz pianist, Herrejón had participated in folk and popular ensembles,⁸⁷ and Baena had been part of a successful rock band called Los Profetas, which had been around since the mid-1960s and became famous in 1967. (Not surprisingly, Baena and Echevarría were present at the Avándaro rock festival but not Lavista.) What ultimately brought these four individuals (Echevarría, Baena, Herrejón, and Lavista) together was their affiliation with the Conservatory.

⁸⁵ Alejandro L. Madrid adds that this movement provided "their Mexican middle-class fans with a sense of identification beyond the crumbling nationalist discourse of the Mexican state, although eventually falling victim to the political censorship and cultural repression that such crises provoked among governmental institutions." See Alejandro L. Madrid, *Music in Mexico: Experiencing Music, Experiencing Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 110.

⁸⁶ Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), 132.

⁸⁷ In an interview with Gerardo de la Torre (ca. 1971), Juan Cuauhtémoc Herrejón stated: "He sido músico de orquestas populares en diversos conjuntos y he investigado música folklórica para el INBA... En el primer renglón, el trabajo con las orquestas de baile, de restaurante, de quiosco, de iglesia, y su aplauso tan diferente y significativo. En el segundo aspecto, el contacto con los grupos indígenas de nuestro país y su manifestación artística, a través de la cual se revela toda una idiosincrasia." Juan Cuauhtémoc Herrejón, "Cartas de Presentación: Diálogo con Juan Cuauhtémoc Herrejón: Músico," interview by Gerardo de la Torre, n.d., ca. 1971. Mario Lavista's Personal Archive, Fondos Reservados, El Colegio Nacional. No further source documentation could be ascertained.

Prior to forming Quanta and during his time in Europe, Lavista became familiar with the improvisatory process of Stockhausen's "intuitive music" and with John Cage's incorporations of different types of indeterminacy (a topic covered under a seminar taught by Pousseur). During those years, several experimental groups emerged and performed staged concerts throughout Europe; these groups included the Gruppo di Improvvisazione Nuova Consonanza, Musica Elettronica Viva, Vinko Globokar's Free Music Group, and New Phonic Art. While it is not possible to determine if Lavista attended performances of these groups, he was keenly aware that collective experimentation was being conducted throughout Europe.

Echevarría, Herrejón, and Baena were studying at the Conservatory when Lavista began his post there after returning from Europe. Although Lavista was to become their teacher, their interactions were collegial: they were close in age, and all shared common artistic affinities.⁸⁸ One night, while experimenting with different sonorities inside the box of an upright Petrof piano at Echevarría's apartment, they decided to form a group.⁸⁹ Lavista gave the group the name Quanta (plural of *quantum*) because of his fascination with the French biologist Jacques Monod's theory of chance. According to Monod, the origin of life is purely the product of chance: "on the microscopic level there exists a source of even more radical uncertainty, embedded in the quantum structure of matter."⁹⁰ Therefore, the name Quanta carried the core of Lavista's vision for the group: to engage in sonorous creativity obtained collectively through chance.⁹¹

The first aim of the newly formed group was to establish a discipline of regular improvisation sessions at the Conservatory.⁹² But their activities inside the Conservatory were denied any official institutional recognition. They never held a public concert in that venue, nor were they granted much support from the faculty. Quanta's first public performance took place in April 1970 at the Alliance Française thanks to the invitation of its director, Panabière—Lavista's former French teacher and close friend. Along with the printed program, they included a written explanation of the dynamics of their practice: their improvisations were a result of a "coordination system" that followed a process of action and reaction among the performers. The emphasis was on creating a *new experience* in which "the musical 'form' is ephemeral, since it is

⁸⁸ Echevarría recalls having met Lavista while waiting for a bus, outside of the National Music Conservatory. They started a conversation while riding public transportation to their respective homes. Later, Lavista would be Echevarría's composition teacher at the Taller. They became life-long friends. Nicolás Echevarría, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, July 25, 2012.

⁸⁹ Echevarría, discussion. He recalls: "Empezamos a tocar adentro de las cuerdas, no con baquetas pero con palos. Y a Mario se le ocurrió, 'hagamos un grupo.' Ensayábamos en el Conservatorio, nos daban un lugar para ensayar."

⁹⁰ Jacques Monod, *Chance and Necessity: An Essay on the Natural Philosophy of Modern Biology*, trans. Austryn Wainhouse (New York: Knopf, 1971), 114.

⁹¹ During the summer of 2012, I spoke to both Echevarría and Lavista about the origins of Quanta. By that time, the other two founding members had passed away.

⁹² Alberto Dallal, "Hacer música, hoy: Diálogo con Mario Lavista," *La Capital*, August 2, 1970.

destroyed in the very moment in which it is *being created*. . . . The important aspect of this experience is in *creating*, not preserving.”⁹³

During the spring and throughout the summer of 1970, los Quantas received myriad invitations to perform in a variety of venues: cultural centers such as Casa del Lago, the Israeli Sport Center, UNAM’s Department of Architecture, the Instituto Politécnico Nacional, the theaters of Coyoacán and Santo Domingo, and various art galleries. These invitations came about in part through Lavista’s personal affiliation with the aforementioned network of artists and intellectuals. Their performances during the following year incorporated visual artists, dancers, and choreographers—especially those associated with UNAM’s newly formed Taller Coreográfico (Choreography Workshop) directed by Gloria Contreras (1934–2015). As Contreras reported: “we worked with Mario Lavista and his group Quanta. They created the music in the moment, with Julián Carrillo’s electro-acoustic [*sic*] instruments; we did the dancing. This experience captured the reality that was being lived. The identification between artists and audience was remarkable.”⁹⁴

The collaborative efforts with the Taller Coreográfico were Lavista’s first formal projects with dancers.⁹⁵ After that, dance became part of Lavista’s creative output in many ways, particularly after his daughter, Claudia Lavista, became a dancer, choreographer, and co-founder of Delfos, a renowned contemporary dance company. Contreras recalled that “[i]t was a very important experience. Had these events continued, we would have opened great paths. When we were in those improvisations, the formalism of the ‘normal’ works became absurd because the openness of the simultaneous creation was immense.”⁹⁶ The documentation of the convergences between Quanta and experimental dance projects is minimal; however, we can infer that working with dancers and choreographers motivated an intense exploration of daily improvisations. According to one of the dancers, Valentina Castro, their work with Quanta was pioneering in the national experimental arena. She recalls that they would improvise daily, developing a communication system in which the dancers would react to the sonorous feedback of the musicians and vice versa. Castro states, “We spent three or four months of daily improvisation until we reached [the desired] feedback. We needed to follow the music, but at the same time, they were the ones following our movements.”⁹⁷

⁹³ Program note, “*Quanta*: Concierto de improvisación,” La Casa de la Alianza Francesa, April 23, 1970. Emphasis in original. A copy of the program is included in the companion website for this book.

⁹⁴ Arturo Melgoza Paralizábal, *El maravilloso monstruo alado: Gloria Contreras y el Taller Coreográfico de la UNAM* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1996), 53. [Trabajamos con Mario Lavista y su grupo Quanta. Ellos creaban la música en el momento, con los instrumentos electroacústicos de Julián Carrillo, nosotros hacíamos la danza. Esta experiencia captó la realidad que se vivía. La identificación entre artistas y público fue impresionante.] Carrillo’s microtonal instruments were not actually electroacoustic.

⁹⁵ Lavista’s collaborative endeavors with choreographers and dancers are further explored in Chapter 5.

⁹⁶ Óscar Flores Martínez, “Mario Lavista y la danza,” in Cortez, *Mario Lavista*, 164. Text originally written in 1988. [Fue una experiencia muy importante. De haber continuado estos eventos hubiéramos abierto caminos muy grandes. Cuando uno estaba en esas improvisaciones, el formalismo de las obras “normales” se hacía absurdo porque la apertura de la creación simultánea era inmensa.]

⁹⁷ Margarita Tortajada Quiroz, *Mujeres de danza combativa* (Mexico City: Conaculta, 1998), 174. [Pasamos como tres o cuatro meses diariamente improvisando hasta que logramos una retroalimentación,

One of the first reviews of Quanta's performances, published in the prominent newspaper *Excélsior*, qualified the activities of the group as "disturbing the musical order," for the audience perceived a certain aggression toward musical conventions.⁹⁸ The anonymous reviewer asked Lavista if theirs was a subversive art, and the composer responded: "Of course!! Our concerts are 'subversive' from the moment in which our music becomes dangerous because it threatens the comfortable balance of traditional bourgeois audiences, which are only used to responding to bourgeois music with calm excitement."⁹⁹ What this statement makes clear is that Quanta introduced itself to the public as a dissident group that had placed itself in opposition to conservative music circles that were unsupportive and indifferent to new music.¹⁰⁰

Beginning with their very first performances, Quanta manifested an intention of "making the composer disappear." This nonhierarchical experimental practice, which was shared at least in principle by similar groups across continents, was meant to reflect a democratic social relation.¹⁰¹ Their concert programs only included the number of improvisations, the names of the members of the group, and a list of the instruments used. This list included prepared piano, amplified viola, cello, and double bass with contact microphones, record players, shortwave radios, and Baena's electric guitar. Often, the instruments were placed on a table or on the floor, and the four musicians used mallets, drumsticks, Ping-Pong balls, blackboard erasers, soda glass bottles, spoons, forks, and other objects to "make them sound." The sonorous emphasis was, overall, more on timbre and less on rhythm. The interchangeability in their use of everyday utensils and musical instruments responded to an intention to depart from conventional ways of interacting with sound and to achieve collective liberation. The four members would rotate playing the instruments as they saw fit; no one was assigned a particular role. This type of practice, along with the fact that none of them acted as conductor or assumed the title of composer, was meant to reflect a democratic attitude.

porque nosotros nos motivábamos y ellos nos motivaban; nosotros teníamos que seguir la música pero al mismo tiempo ellos nos seguían los movimientos.]

⁹⁸ "Concierto de improvisación musical," con los Quanta, en Alianza Francesa, de Polanco," *Excélsior*, April 23, 1970.

⁹⁹ "Concierto de improvisación musical." [¿Arte "subversivo"? -¡Claro! Son conciertos "subversivos" desde el momento en que se vuelve nuestra música peligrosa porque atenta contra el equilibrio-cómodo-burgués de un público tradicional que está acostumbrado sólo a responder con las excitaciones tranquilas de la música burguesa. Pero nuestra finalidad no es agredir.]

¹⁰⁰ When asked about his experiences during the 1960s, in 2003 Lavista noted: "Durante los años 60 viví la impugnación del Sistema, absoluta y totalmente, de una manera tan frívola como un joven que se deja el cabello largo y fuma mota; era inevitable. También lo viví en mi relación con el fenómeno musical, que era básicamente el que nos unía a todos y nos sigue uniendo." Mario Lavista, "Vivir dentro del misterio de la música, un privilegio. Entrevista a Mario Lavista," interview by Ángel Vargas, *La Jornada*, April 3, 2003, <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2003/04/03/03an1cul.php?printver=1>, accessed June 21, 2023.

¹⁰¹ See Georgina Born, *Rationalizing Culture: IRCAM, Boulez, and the Institutionalization of the Musical Avant-Garde* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 58–59. Also see Amy C. Beal, "'Music Is a Universal Human Right': Musica Elettronica Viva," in *Sound Commitments: Avant-Garde Music and the Sixties*, ed. Robert Adlington (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 99–120. Collective improvisation in academic circles was also practiced in South America beginning in the late 1960s, particularly in the context of Buenos Aires's Centro Latinoamericano de Altos Estudios Musicales (CLAEM). See Herrera, *Elite Art Worlds*, 116–18.

The sonorous palette of Quanta's collective improvisations entered yet another dimension when the group was able to borrow some of the microtonal instruments that Mexican composer Julián Carrillo (1875–1965) and his disciples had invented and that had been kept by his daughter Dolores Carrillo. To some critics, this was a significant inclusion, for Quanta was “rescuing” Carrillo’s instruments from oblivion.¹⁰² As one journalist reported: “The instruments of maestro Carrillo allowed these four ambitious boys to give faith to a musical evolution that, apart from a few hubs, remains ignored for its lack of ‘commerciality.’”¹⁰³ Interestingly, Lavista was first exposed to Carrillo’s instruments not in Mexico but while in Paris, thanks to Marie. Marie—who had extensively experimented with microtonality in his own works—promoted Carrillo’s music in Europe and had copies of Carrillo’s microtonal pianos in third and sixteenth tones.¹⁰⁴

Los Quanta’s interest in using Carrillo’s microtonal instruments was not necessarily tied to their microtonal capabilities, and even less to following Carrillo’s system, but was a response to the need to distance themselves as performers from the familiarity of tempered instruments. Moreover, their aggressive use of Carrillo’s microtonal instruments (Echevarría recalls that they would sometimes kick the instruments) could also be regarded as a reaction to a “parental authority” that characterized the youth culture. At that time, the figure of Carrillo within the Mexican musical academic circles was very polarized, and some regarded him as nothing more than an eccentric individual who represented the opposite of the mainstream concert music tradition led by Chávez. This thinking might have been another factor that prevented Quanta from obtaining support and recognition from academic music circles, including other composers of new music such as Manuel Enríquez.¹⁰⁵

Los Quanta’s adoption of the microtonal instruments also coincided with the financial sponsorship they received through Emilio Azcárraga Sr., then director of Telesistema Mexicano, which later became Televisa—one of the largest television networks in Latin America. Echevarría recalls that the stipend they received from Azcárraga was substantial and that it became their main source of income.¹⁰⁶ However, this generosity was extended with one condition: Azcárraga requested that Quanta not disclose his financial support, for he did not want his name or his company to be associated with their endeavors.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² Their first concert using four of Carrillo’s pianos and three harps was in the summer of 1971, at the Alliance Française.

¹⁰³ Jesús Luis Benítez, “El ‘Quanta’ tocó con los instrumentos de Carrillo,” *El Nacional*, June 4, 1971. [Los instrumentos del maestro Carrillo, repetimos, permitieron a estos cuatro ambiciosos muchachos dar fe de una evolución musical que, salvo por algunos núcleos, permanece ignorada por su carencia de “comercialidad.”]

¹⁰⁴ Lavista, discussion, February 22, 2012. About Marie’s involvement with Carrillo’s music, see Madrid, *In Search of Julián Carrillo*, 277.

¹⁰⁵ For more about the polarized reception of Carrillo and the appropriation of his instruments by different music communities after his death, see Madrid, *In Search of Julián Carrillo*.

¹⁰⁶ Echevarría, discussion.

¹⁰⁷ Echevarría, discussion. To this regard, Echevarría adds: “Nos pagaba muy bien. Nos dijo: ‘les voy a pedir un favor, que conserven el secreto y no digan quién les paga.’” Further details about Azcárraga’s endorsement of Quanta are yet to be disclosed.

Why would a rich and powerful impresario, such as Azcárraga, fund experimental practices such as those carried out by Quanta? According to Echevarría, Azcárraga had been impressed by the vibrant musical scene he had witnessed on the streets of several European cities and wanted to replicate that at home. Hence, he hired four ensembles to hold daily performances for several months at four designated points in Mexico City: the Zona Rosa, an area which in the 1960s and 1970s was regarded as an upscale neighborhood and a site for the relocation of artists and intellectuals, giving the neighborhood a “bohemian” reputation; the Zócalo (downtown square); the plaza outside of Santo Domingo’s church; and Liverpool Insurgentes, one of the largest upscale departmental stores in the country.¹⁰⁸

Among the musical groups that Azcárraga financed anonymously, Quanta was the only one devoted to experimental music. Perhaps the impresario was one of many who connected Quanta’s practices with those of the *rockeros*. After all, since the 1960s and until Festival Avándaro (1971), Telesistema had supported the creation of rock programs, such as *La Onda de Woodstock* or *¡1, 2, 3, 4, 5, a Go-Go!*, a program devoted to avant-garde rock, which integrated rock music and theater to produce spontaneous television performances.¹⁰⁹ However, Telesistema’s support of these musical expressions seemed to have always been conditioned on government approval. Hence, after Avándaro, no further support was provided for any kind of music that could be associated with rock. We can speculate that in keeping his support anonymous, Azcárraga’s interest in avant-garde expressions would go unnoticed by state authorities; after all, he supported them to perform on the streets, not to broadcast their performances on television.

Azcárraga’s support for Quanta was also the result of a long-term project designed to move the country toward further wider internationalization and cosmopolitanism; in fact, a number of media outlets granted Quanta that recognition. As a journalist stated in the newspaper *El Día*, “The group’s performances reflect more than anything an unexpected surprise: in Mexico we do indeed have composers who aspire to a universalization based on a Mexican experience.”¹¹⁰ Regardless of the unclear motivations behind Azcárraga’s sponsorship, the financial stability it granted los Quantas allowed them to engage in an intense pace of collective improvisation to the point that it became a *lifestyle*; they were improvising for several hours seven days a week, performing hundreds of times a year.

The different street scenarios where Quanta performed exposed audiences to experimental practices that would otherwise remain inaccessible to them. Each of the four points attracted different social sectors: the middle to upper class in the Zona Rosa, the middle class in the department store Liverpool, the middle to lower class in

¹⁰⁸ The department store Liverpool was originally founded in the nineteenth century by a French businessman, Jean Baptiste Ebrard.

¹⁰⁹ Zolov, *Refried Elvis*, 117.

¹¹⁰ Brooker T. W., “El Quanta, una auténtica experiencia musical,” *El Día*, March 22, 1971. [Las presentaciones del grupo reflejan antes que nada la sorpresa: en México sí hay compositores que tratan de universalizarse, a partir de una experiencia mexicana, entendida con un juicio crítico impresionante.]

Santo Domingo, and a mixture of all (including tourists) in the Zócalo. Performing in the streets was crucial for the group's integration of audience participation during their improvisations.¹¹¹ Journalist Juan Jacobo Trigos reported that the public's response to this invitation was largely enthusiastic. One audience member stated: "I don't understand a thing, but I am eager to play with them."¹¹² A session of collective improvisation was an act of inclusion in which no distinction was made between the professionals and the audience, and what's more, there was no difference between the *experience* and the *music*. Dance historian Alberto Dallal declared that the "Quanta experience *is* the music. Nothing more. With everything, with all."¹¹³ This enthusiastic engagement from various types of audiences might have taken los Quantas by surprise.

Along with the enthusiasm of Quanta's audiences, their practices also resonated with a particular social group: that of college students and twenty-something professionals, many of whom had been involved in the student uprising of 1968.¹¹⁴ They identified with the four longhaired guys in their twenties who were violating musical conventions and producing piercing and liberating sounds. Even older audiences identified with Quanta. Dallal, for example, exclaimed: "We are listeners and creators. Thanks to the inventiveness of four musicians who improvise, we all become young."¹¹⁵

Quanta's street performances opened a significant chapter in the history of global collective improvisation. While many experimental groups in Latin America, the United States, Europe, and elsewhere continued to uphold modernist notions of authorship and the work concept, Quanta's practices strayed from those conventions.¹¹⁶ Their improvisations lacked titles, graphic scores, or verbal indications; no labels or names were attached. While Quanta's performances were based on "intuition," they were meant to remain ephemeral; they were not designed to exist by themselves, never

¹¹¹ About this, Lavista stated: "Nosotros entregamos un universo musical estructurado, pero al mismo tiempo 'abierto' en el sentido que Umberto Eco otorga a esta palabra. Por tanto, el oyente es (debe ser) el centro activo de una serie de relaciones, entre las cuales él elabora, en última instancia, su propia forma en un acto de libertad consciente." See Dallal, "Hacer música, hoy."

¹¹² Juan Jacobo Trigos, "El que tenga oídos," *El Nacional*, January 24, 1971. [No entiendo nada, pero me dan ganas de tocar con ellos.]

¹¹³ Dallal, "Hacer música, hoy." [La experiencia Quanta es la música. Sin más. Con todo, con todos.]

¹¹⁴ Although neither Lavista nor Echevarría experienced the Tlatelolco massacre at first hand, they shared the anticonformist attitude of the era. In 2008, Echevarría produced a series of six programs titled *El memorial del 68* in which Lavista's music accompanies images of the massacre. Lavista wrote music in response to Tlatelolco many years later. Commissioned by UNAM, in 2018 he composed *Requiem de Tlatelolco*, for orchestra and children's choir, as part of the initiatives to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the 1968 Mexican student movement. More about this piece is explored in Chapter 6.

¹¹⁵ Alberto Dallal, program notes, "El Centro Universitario Cultural presenta al Grupo Quanta. Música electroacústica," UNAM Centro Universitario Cultural, July 9, 1970. [Somos oyentes y creadores. Gracias a la inventiva de cuatro músicos que improvisan, todos quedamos convertidos en jóvenes.]

¹¹⁶ Similar collective improvisation groups in South America, for instance, assigned titles to their improvisations and were bound to the presence of (graphic) scores. CLAEM's *Grupo de experimentación musical* (sometimes called *Grupo de improvisación musical*), for instance, assigned titles to the pieces in their programs and, although no composer was ever mentioned, some members would later claim authorship. See Herrera, *Elite Art Worlds*, 118.

to be separated from their immediate context. As Herrejón once commented: “There is no ambition for posterity, of leaving a work for humanity. The important factor is for the work to be constantly created.”¹¹⁷ While exercising collectivity and emphasizing process, Quanta engaged in practices that stand apart from other avant-garde initiatives operating under a modernist commitment.

As Georgina Born has documented, many avant-garde movements, especially those focused on formal experiments, did not seek any broader social engagement or political effect, and Quanta could be counted among these movements. However, as Born states (following Haskell), “this did not prevent aesthetic experiment from being read as social or political critique, a phenomenon that rests on the close association between modernism and the avant-garde and on the radical political connotations of the concept of an avant-garde.”¹¹⁸ The audience read Quanta’s transgressive attitude toward their instruments as a necessary rebellious action against any imposed constraint. Trigos labeled their practice as *la destrucción renovadora*—renovative destruction, a creative expression that comes out of the need to postulate nonconformity with the establishment.¹¹⁹ And this was precisely what Mexican philosopher Leopoldo Zea¹²⁰ meant when he introduced Quanta as “[t]he anti-culture, which is not the negation of culture, but expression of culture. . . . [B]ehind the negation . . . an affirmation is being shaped. An affirmation that in the meantime is expressed as nonconformity.”¹²¹ Therefore, Quanta represented an *alternative reaction* of youthful hostility against the establishment.

The audience’s perception of Quanta as an emblem of social activism might have been accentuated when, during a street performance in the Zona Rosa, a policeman abruptly stopped their show and arrested them for not having a written permit from the city to perform outside. In the end, the policeman did not take them into custody because journalist Luis Fernández de Castro, who was present at the event, publicly defended them. Fernández de Castro began by listing the musicians’ academic credentials—after all, Lavista was a faculty member at the Conservatory. He also clarified Quanta’s “legitimate” use of Carrillo’s instruments, which were regarded as “national treasures.”¹²² In his published report of this

¹¹⁷ Herrejón, “Cartas de Presentación.” [No hay ningún afán de posteridad, de legar una obra a la humanidad. Lo válido, lo importante, es que la obra se produce conscientemente y se da el momento vivencial del creador.]

¹¹⁸ Born, *Rationalizing Culture*, 42–43.

¹¹⁹ Juan Jacobo Trigos, “El que tenga oídos: El Quanta y los instrumentos microtonales de Carrillo,” *El Nacional*, June 13, 1971.

¹²⁰ At the time, Zea was UNAM’s Director General de Difusión Cultural.

¹²¹ Leopoldo Zea, program notes, “La anti cultura como expresión de una cultura,” UNAM Teatro de Ciudad Universitaria, November, 16, 1970. [La anticultura en general, que no es precisamente la negación de la cultura, es expresión de la cultura. Pero detrás de esta negación, subconscientemente, se va perfilando una afirmación. Afirmación que por lo pronto es expresada como inconformidad.]

¹²² Luis Fernández de Castro, “Música en la calle de la Capital. ‘Si la gente no va a los conciertos, el concierto irá a la gente,’ es la divisa,” *Excelsior*, May 25, 1971. In 2012, when Lavista retold this incident, he was of the opinion that the police intervention was naturally caused by los Quantas’s “hippie” aspect and the fact that they were “playing weird stuff.” Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, July 10, 2012.



Figure 2.4 Nicolás Echevarría performing a microtonal harp in a street performance of *Quanta* at Mexico City's Zona Rosa, ca. 1971. Photo by the author.

incident, Fernández de Castro concluded that the reason behind the policeman's intervention had less to do with the lack of a written authorization and more to do with *Quanta's* apparent disturbing and chaotic practices, which the policeman associated with "crazy hippies."¹²³

When recalling this incident in 2012, both Lavista and Echevarría laughed uncontrollably, perhaps because of the irony that they were being subject to arrest for performing experimental music. None of *Quanta's* members admitted to adopting an explicit political agenda. When they explained their practices, they stated their sole intent on breaking away from traditional musical conventions through sonic experimentation. This might be why the rhetoric surrounding *Quanta* continues to be expressed in purely aesthetic and musical terms. Nonetheless, to obtain a clearer view of the group's unexpected positive reception, one must understand its practices as resonating with an attitude of resistance by students who saw in the counterculture a channel of release from government oppression. *Quanta's* rebelliousness, their weird sounds, and their hippie appearance embodied the urgency of an uprising (see Figures 2.4 and 2.5).¹²⁴

¹²³ Fernández de Castro, "Música en la calle de la Capital."

¹²⁴ In contrast to *Quanta's* apolitical posture, other collective improvisation groups throughout Latin America communicated overt political dissent. One significant case is the group *Movimiento Música Más* (MMM), which was formed by Norberto Chavarri, Roque de Pedro, and Guillermo Gregorio in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1969. Similar to *Quanta*, MMM also held performances in various public sites, gathering a multitude of audiences. However, their practice was embraced by its members as art activism, "a commitment to bringing art and people into public spaces during a time of rigid governmental control of those spaces and bodies, and an interest in the political symbolism generated by their actions." See Andrew Raffo Dewar, "Performance, Resistance, and the Sounding of Public Space: *Movimiento Música Más* in Buenos Aires, 1969–1973," in Alonso-Minutti, Herrera, and Madrid, *Experimentalisms in Practice*, 281.



Figure 2.5 Mario Lavista performing a microtonal harp (with a blackboard eraser) in a street performance of Quanta at Mexico City's Zona Rosa, ca. 1971. Photo by the author.

As Amy Beal, Benjamin Piekut, Eduardo Herrera, and others have recently argued, the avant-garde is immersed in a series of contradictions.¹²⁵ Quanta's experimental practices present a series of contradictions worth enunciating: on one hand, while Quanta's collective improvisations were regarded as representative of antiacademism, critics and journalists alike never failed to mention los Quantas's academic credentials.¹²⁶ On the other hand, while Quanta's performances were viewed as the country's "revolutionary vanguard," after two years of intense activity, none of its members continued to improvise collectively.¹²⁷ For composer and scholar Manuel Rocha Iturbide, the beginning of Quanta marked the "birth of Mexican experimental music."¹²⁸ He justifies that enthusiastic statement by describing the unprecedented multidisciplinary activities that characterized Quanta's performances. Quanta brought together seminal figures in Mexico City's performance and visual arts, and their practice opened unexplored territory in (academic) improvisational practices. This ebullient improvisational activity, however, was short-lived.

Quanta came to an end in 1972. Rocha Iturbide deems that Quanta's end signaled a lagging of the country's experimental drive that would last for decades.¹²⁹ When

¹²⁵ Amy C. Beal, *New Music, New Allies: American Experimental Music in West Germany from the Zero Hour to Reunification* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006); Benjamin Piekut, ed., *Tomorrow Is the Question: New Directions in Experimental Music Studies* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2014); and Herrera, *Elite Art Worlds*.

¹²⁶ Juan Jacobo Trigos, "Esperanza. El que tenga oídos. El Quanta en la vida musical de México," *El Nacional*, June 27, 1971.

¹²⁷ "La música moderna debe ser," *Avance*, October 13, 1971.

¹²⁸ Rocha Iturbide, "Arqueología de la música experimental," 175.

¹²⁹ Rocha Iturbide, "Arqueología de la música experimental," 178. [... la senda experimental se volvió a quedar rezagada durante décadas dentro del campo académico.] Rocha Iturbide's asseverations pertain to the field of "academic" music. In his essay, he goes on to address experimental practices that occurred

I asked Lavista and Echevarría why the project was abandoned, both provided aesthetic and practical reasons. Lavista recalled that they began to repeat themselves, which defeated the purpose of their experimental improvisatory practice, and Echevarría explained that Quanta ended when its members chose alternative careers. After Quanta, none of its original members continued collective improvisation practices. Baena, the first to leave the group, pursued a career as a mime (he passed away in the early 2000s); Antero Chávez, who replaced him, continued his career as a percussionist and performed in the country's major orchestras until his passing in 2022; Juan Cuahutémoc Herrejón was known primarily for his electronic music and died prematurely in 1993; Echevarría moved to New York to pursue a career in filmmaking and became a renowned film and documentary director who remains very active in his field; and Lavista abandoned the use of collective improvisation altogether for forty years. Surprisingly, in 2011 onward, he once again became involved in creating musical projects that allowed considerable improvisation.¹³⁰

For two years, the Quanta phenomenon represented a utopian liberation for its members and audiences alike. The perceived transgression of these four young musicians provoked their audiences to respond with an irreverent attitude. College students, housewives, executives, literary critics, artists, dancers, and all those in need of alternative routes for expression in times of oppression saw a viable route in Quanta's sounds. Their improvisations allowed young and old to become, if only for just an instant, *una destrucción renovadora*. Quanta's democratic collective principle resonated with multiple artists and audiences alike and provided an urban soundscape to a city in desperate need of cultural renovation.

Electronic Cosmopolitan Experimentation

It was while he was in Europe that Lavista began to experiment with electronic instruments and technologies (tape and synthesizers). Although electronic media did not have a predominant place in his oeuvre, his early experiments with this medium were notable, as he was one of the first Mexican composers to do so. Among the several works for tape that Lavista designed, he included only three in his catalogue of works: *Espaces trop habités* (1969), *Alme* (1971), and *Contrapunto* (1972). *Espaces trop habités*—a six-hour-long tape piece—was created at the Experimental Music Studio of the Schola Cantorum. For this project, Lavista worked in conjunction with fellow students of Jean-Étienne Marie. The piece was commissioned by the Grand Palais

in other scenes, such as that promoted by theater director Juan José Gurrola (1936–2006). After Quanta, a fruitful free improvisation collective, *Atrás del Cosmos*, emerged. Greatly influenced by the ideas of Alejandro Jodorowsky's experimental theater, *Atrás del Cosmos* engaged in highly theatrical free jazz performances in Mexico City, especially at the theater El Galeón. See Tamar Barzel, "We Began from Silence: Toward a Genealogy of Free Improvisation in Mexico City: *Atrás del Cosmos* at Teatro El Galeón, 1975–1977," in Alonso-Minutti, Herrera, and Madrid, *Experimentalisms in Practice*, 189–226.

¹³⁰ Lavista's renewed engagement with collective improvisation is explored in Chapter 5.

for an opening exhibition, and it was intended as ambient music for the occasion. Two tape pieces by Lavista, *Dúo* and *Bleu*, both from 1969, were listed by musicologist Esperanza Pulido when she published a brief profile of the young composer in 1971.¹³¹ A third tape piece, *Antinomia* (1973), was included in Beatriz Bonnet's list. According to Bonnet, the composer refused to include these electronic pieces in his catalogue of works because he did not deem them worth preserving.¹³²

Lavista's return to Mexico coincided with the establishment of the Conservatory's Laboratorio de Música Electrónica (Electronic Music Laboratory) in 1970—the first of its kind in Mexico (and one of the first in Latin America). The laboratory was possible thanks to Carlos Chávez's support and the financial sponsorship of private donors. It was first directed by composer Héctor Quintanar (1936–2013), who succeeded Chávez as director of the Taller de Composición, and by sound engineer Raúl Pavón Sarrelangue (1928–2008).¹³³ A key figure in implementing the methodology followed in this laboratory was Marie, who also taught at the Taller and established the norms under which the laboratory was to function.¹³⁴ As a newly appointed faculty member at the Conservatory, Lavista was free to experiment with the laboratory's two synthesizers, Buchla and Moog (see Figure 2.6).¹³⁵

The first work Lavista created there was *Alme*, a twelve-minute piece for synthesizer composed in real time, with no posteditorial process. The title, *Alme*, is a made-up word based on the initials of two names: Mario Lavista and Eva Alcázar. Lavista met Mexican pianist Eva Alcázar Leyva (b. 1945) in the Conservatory when she was pursuing piano studies. Although Alcázar went on to reside in Spain for decades, they remained very close until Lavista's passing. Alcázar mentions that both her and Lavista jointly chose the title over a phone conversation.¹³⁶ Lavista considers *Alme* as “monochromatic” in the sense that it does not explore contrasts in timbre as much as dynamics and range. The different sections of the work succeed each other without

¹³¹ Esperanza Pulido, “Fichero de compositores menores de 45 años: Mario Lavista,” *Heterofonía* 4, no. 21 (1971): 23. Pulido also notes that *Alme* exists in two versions. These pieces are listed in Aurelio de la Vega, “La música artística latinoamericana,” *Boletín Interamericano de Música* 82 (1971–72): 17.

¹³² Beatriz Bonnet, “Mario Lavista and His Music with an Analysis of *Ficciones*” (master's thesis, Rice University, 1988), 14, 17.

¹³³ Manuel Rocha Iturbide, “The First Retrospective of Mexican Electroacoustic Music,” *eContact!* 12, no. 3 (2010), https://econtact.ca/12_3/mexico_iturbide.html, accessed June 24, 2023.

¹³⁴ Manuel Rocha Iturbide, “Primer retrospectiva de la música electroacústica mexicana en el festival Radar 2003,” *Pauta: Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical* 89 (2004): 26–39. In 2008, Rocha produced a 3-CD set that compiles twenty-seven electronic works by Mexican composers, an extraordinary documentary endeavor. See Manuel Rocha Iturbide, comp., *México Electroacústico* (1960–2007), IRRADIA, 2008, 3 compact discs.

¹³⁵ At the time, Lavista was second in command at the Conservatory's Taller de Composición. Quintanar remained in charge until 1974. For a historic overview of the Taller during Chávez and Quintanar's directorships, see Alejandro Barceló Rodríguez, “El Taller de creación musical. Carlos Chávez y Héctor Quintanar: 1960–1974, primera parte,” *Pauta: Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical* 139–140 (2016): 110–61.

¹³⁶ Eva Alcázar, in discussion with the author, via Zoom, January 12, 2023. Alcázar briefly addressed her relationship with Lavista in an online obituary. See Eva Alcázar, “Mario Lavista: Una presencia constante,” *Sonus Litterarum*, November 4, 2021, <https://sonuslitterarum.mx/mario-lavista-1943-2021/>, accessed June 21, 2023.

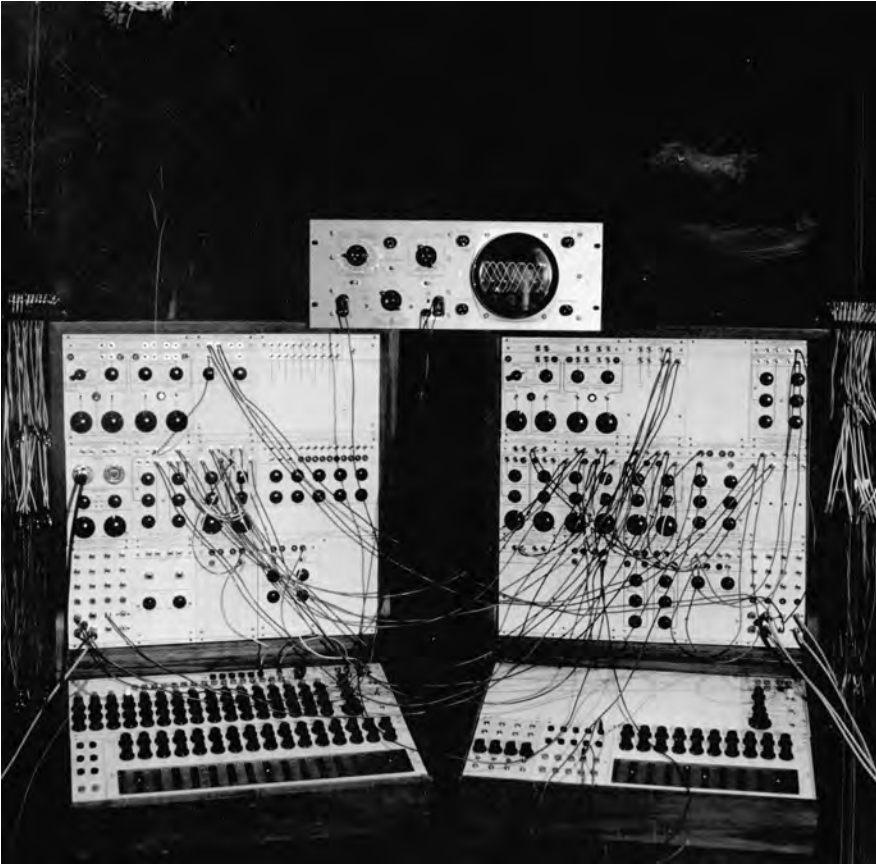


Figure 2.6 Electronic Music Laboratory of Mexico’s National Music Conservatory, 1971. Courtesy of Paulina Lavista.

interruption.¹³⁷ The piece was first performed at a memorable event intended primarily for the private companies that funded the laboratory’s expensive equipment, held in the Conservatory’s main hall on September 8, 1971. This was the first music event that featured composers manipulating the novel synthesizer in real time.¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Mario Lavista, “*Alme*,” in Cortez, *Mario Lavista*, 93. There is no commercial recording of *Alme*. The electronic piece has recently been digitalized by the staff of the Fonoteca Nacional. It was performed during an event honoring what would have been Lavista’s 79th birthday organized by Theo Hernández. For the occasion, Juan Arturo Brennan, Hebert Vázquez, and myself provided remarks. See Fonoteca Nacional de México, “¡Feliz Cumpleaños, Mario Lavista!” YouTube video, 1:29:10, April 5, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mmnD7FH61qo>, accessed June 24, 2023.

¹³⁸ The event was titled “Concierto de electrónica en vivo: Con el sintetizador del Taller de composición.” Presented by the director of the Conservatory at the time, Simón Tapia Colman, the program included Héctor Quintanar’s *Sideral III*, Manuel Jorge de Elías’s *Parámetros I*, Mario Lavista’s *Alme*, and concluded with Quintanar’s *Mezcla*. The program for this event is located in Lavista’s personal archive at El Colegio Nacional.

In her review of the concert, Pulido—founder and director of the music journal *Heterofonía*—wrote that *Alme*'s contrasting sonorities and Lavista's live interventions delighted the packed audience.¹³⁹

In addition to his experience with the technology available at the Conservatory, Lavista had the opportunity to work in the prestigious Laboratory of Electronic Music of the Japanese Broadcasting Corporation, Nippon Hoso Kyokai (NHK) in Tokyo, after receiving funding from the network. Founded in 1955, the NHK was pivotal for the development of electronic and *concrète* music in Japan. Directed by Wataru Uenami, the laboratory was devoted not only to avant-garde music, but also to radio dramas, spots for TV broadcast, and film music.¹⁴⁰ Lavista must have learned about this electronic laboratory while he was in Europe through Stockhausen, who was seminal in the creation of NHK and had visited and worked there in 1966. However, it was Japanese composer Joji Yuasa (b. 1929) who informed Lavista about the possibility of obtaining financial support from NHK to work there.

During his four-month stay in Japan working at NHK (from late 1971 to early 1972), Lavista created the sixteen-minute electronic piece *Contrapunto*.¹⁴¹ Compared to *Alme*, *Contrapunto* presents a complex manipulation of diverse sonic elements and sources, a collage of “found sounds” (sampling) and electronically generated sounds. The piece includes a conglomeration of elements as disparate as Gustav Mahler's Ninth Symphony, excerpts of songs by The Beatles and the Rolling Stones, the national anthems of Mexico, the United States, and Japan, *Gagaku* music from the imperial Japanese court, and sounds from the Noh theater tradition. Some of these elements are electronically manipulated to such a degree that they are not easily recognizable. Others are presented almost intact, though in a fragmented way.

While the inclusion of disparate elements and sources was prevalent in the electronic music of the 1960s and 1970s, *Contrapunto* is the only piece from Lavista's oeuvre in which he explicitly uses sonic materials outside of the Western art tradition that can be easily recognized by the listener. The combination of selected sources is quite puzzling. The piece presents a succession of patriotic, classical, religious, traditional, and rock fragments treated equally, abruptly, and ironically. In the program note, Lavista does not offer an explanation of his choices and provides only a partial list of the sampled sources. He does not address any compositional intention other than experimenting with the concept of creating a counterpoint with the diverse “and perhaps contradictory” material.¹⁴² If *Contrapunto* is distinctive among the composer's oeuvre in its blunt incorporation of excerpts from sonic materials outside the classical music tradition, the question is: what made Lavista take such liberties?

¹³⁹ Esperanza Pulido, “Música electrónica en el Conservatorio,” *Heterofonía* 4, no. 21 (1971): 14.

¹⁴⁰ See Emmanuelle Loubet, “The Beginnings of Electronic Music in Japan, with a Focus on the NHK Studio: The 1950s and 1960s,” trans. Curtis Roads and Brigitte Robindoré, *Computer Music Journal* 21, no. 4 (1997): 18; Emmanuelle Loubet, “The Beginnings of Electronic Music in Japan, with a Focus on the NHK Studio: The 1970s,” *Computer Music Journal* 22, no. 1 (1998): 49–55.

¹⁴¹ *Contrapunto* is the only electronic piece by Lavista that has been commercially released. It was included in Manuel Rocha Iturbide's compilation *Mexico Electroacústico (1960–2007)*.

¹⁴² Mario Lavista, “*Contrapunto*,” in Cortez, *Mario Lavista*, 93.

The answer to this question may be found in the references Lavista might have made when immersing himself in the creation of electroacoustic music. To my ear, the manner in which Lavista uses disparate materials from outside the Western concert music tradition is similar to Stockhausen's. Concretely, I maintain that Lavista modeled *Contrapunto* after Stockhausen's *Telemusik* and *Hymnen*, and, in doing so, he aligned himself with an aesthetic of global cosmopolitanism and neocolonial longing present in the central European avant-garde of the 1960s. *Telemusik* (1966) is an electronic piece that Stockhausen created while working in NHK and illustrates a significant shift in his posture regarding the use of preexisting music. While earlier he had purposefully avoided the use of *objets trouvés* ("found sound objects"), in the mid- to late 1960s he began to incorporate all kinds of preexisting material.

As Björn Heile has demonstrated, this shift also coincided with Stockhausen's embrace of the concept of *Weltmusik* (world music), a fascination for non-Western musics and philosophies prevalent among avant-garde European and U.S.-American composers from the late 1960s and to the early 1980s.¹⁴³ *Weltmusik's* precedents are found in the exoticism and orientalism prevalent in French music at the turn of the century (best exemplified by Debussy).¹⁴⁴ The universality that it promotes, which ultimately poses the dissolution of individual cultures, is rooted in colonialist projects.¹⁴⁵ Stockhausen states that the piece functions as a space for including disparate elements to exist in a polyphony of styles; a universality of present, past, future, countries, and races. He expresses the conviction that through electronic communication the world's cultures will become "more and more homogeneous." According to Heile, therefore, *Telemusik* is a demonstration of this homogenizing process, one that reflects Stockhausen's idea that "the whole globe [is] one village."¹⁴⁶ In a very similar vein, Lavista explains that the juxtaposition of the diverse fragments he uses in *Contrapunto* follows a "contrapuntal game" that results in a desirable polyphonic texture.¹⁴⁷ Given that Lavista is using similar compositional techniques as those used by Stockhausen in *Telemusik* in treating disparate musical excerpts, *Contrapunto* could also be read also as a homogenizing project.

While in *Telemusik* Stockhausen sampled a great variety of "ethnic" musics from multiple geographic areas, in *Hymnen* (1966–1967) he employed a wide selection of national anthems. In this work, which has been regarded as Stockhausen's most

¹⁴³ Björn Heile, "Weltmusik and the Globalization of New Music," in *The Modernist Legacy. Essays on New Music*, ed. Björn Heile (New York: Ashgate, 2009), 101–20.

¹⁴⁴ See Edward W. Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1985).

¹⁴⁵ According to Heile, Stockhausen associates the concept with Marshall McLuhan's idea of "the global village," which was widely influential throughout the 1960s. Having the intention of writing not his own music but the music of the whole earth, in *Telemusik* Stockhausen incorporates fragments of "mostly ritual or folk dance music" from a great variety of regions across the world. Ed Chang, "Telemusik," *Stockhausen: Sounds in Space* (blog) <http://stockhausenspace.blogspot.com/2015/02/telemusik.html>, accessed June 21, 2023.

¹⁴⁶ Heile, "Weltmusik," 105. Heile notes that Stockhausen is influenced by McLuhan's ideas of "the global village."

¹⁴⁷ Lavista, "Contrapunto," 93.

influential electronic music project, the use of anthems is meant to be conceived purely to convey a sonic architecture. Stockhausen integrates “familiar” preexisting music with “unfamiliar” electronically generated sounds in order to create a sense of detachment that will grant listeners a “cosmic” perspective.¹⁴⁸ Apart from national anthems, Stockhausen also incorporates excerpts from traditional songs and field recordings. Through sound manipulation, distortion, and superimposition of materials, Stockhausen provides a utopian vision of human unity. While *Hymnen* includes a compendium of forty national anthems, *Contrapunto* only samples fragments from anthems of three nation-states: Japan, the United States, and Mexico (in that order). Lavista’s featuring of patriotic emblems of both Japan and Mexico might be somewhat predictable (a Mexican composer working in Japan), but where does the U.S. national anthem fit in this equation?

Before sampling the beginning of the “Star-Spangled Banner,” the track introduces an announcement from a male radio host of the American Forces Network. Throughout the tape piece, there are various samples of both English and Japanese spoken text. Could it be that the sampling of these two languages represents the sonic reality in which Lavista was immersed? After all, he was living in a country where the language in which he would communicate was most likely English. Lavista’s easily recognizable samples of preexisting material come largely from U.S., U.K., and Japanese sources. The absence of Mexican samples—or Spanish-spoken text in general—is intriguing. While Latin American composers working abroad feel the pressure to emulate the sonic markers of national origin, Lavista avoided allusions to any sense of perceived Mexicanness. Lavista’s employment of similar sampling techniques found in electroacoustic pieces by Stockhausen communicated a clear affiliation with the European avant-garde. Moreover, the use of preexisting U.S. selections (the national anthem and excerpts from songs by Crosby, Stills, Nash, & Young) communicated to the intended audience—Japanese avant-garde composers working at the NHK—that he was, after all, an American composer, that is, from the American continent.

The impetus to assimilate the sampling techniques present in the electronic works of European composers could also be read as yet another way in which Lavista embraced a cosmopolitan ideal. This ideal, rooted in a modernist ideology, allowed the composer to navigate the world of sounds without feeling compelled to explain the social, political, or ethical ramifications of his musical borrowings. On one hand, this posture exemplifies the modernist notion of working with sound for sound’s sake. On the other, it reflects the modernist practice of using preexisting music with complete disregard of its context. Because these postures were prevalent in the avant-garde scenes of the Euro-American center, composers in the periphery might have felt compelled to take them as model. For Lavista—and for other Mexican composers who were pioneers in electroacoustic experimentation—what mattered most was to create an audience for this new vein of music composition. To do so, it was necessary

¹⁴⁸ Trevor Wishart, “Sound Symbols and Landscapes,” in *The Language of Electroacoustic Music*, ed. Simon Emmerson (London: Macmillan, 1986), 47.

to validate the use of (expensive) technology and to explain the compositional techniques available through that technology. The social, political, or ethical ramifications of the preexisting material utilized were, therefore, easily dismissed.

In his 1974 essay, “Creation and Interpretation in Electronic Music,” Lavista addressed the challenges posed by electronic composition (versus acoustic) and offered an explanation of the procedures and possibilities of the different techniques used in tape music, such as montage, mixing, and looping. Ultimately, he concluded that, by employing the techniques of montage and mixing, composers could establish new relations between the diverse sound materials used, such as “rock music, Buddhist chants, a waltz from J. Strauss, and the Mexican national anthem”—some of the sources he sampled in *Contrapunto*.¹⁴⁹ Lavista’s explicit intention of composing with both electronic media and *musique concrète* was to work with sound for sound’s sake. “In both, the composer works with sounds. . . . Sound does not intervene to define another sound. Its presence, now, is sufficient to define itself.”¹⁵⁰ This statement might remind the reader of John Cage’s writings. As will be discussed in the next chapter, Lavista’s aesthetics will be heavily influenced by Cage, whose presence (as a cultural and aesthetic symbol) will accompany his works for the decades to come.

The problematic avant-garde practice of using non-Western music for the sake of sound allowed composers to justify their processes of Othering. Being able to create sounds through electronic means granted composers immense possibilities of fabricating convincing “others.” This is what happened when Lavista was tasked to create the music for a (silent) documentary of a ritual from an indigenous community from western Mexico. After his return from Japan, once he resumed his teaching post at the Conservatory, Lavista was asked to provide music for his friend Nicolás Echevarría’s very first film project.

Echevarría, who had been Lavista’s former student and one of los Quantas, had just returned from an extended stay in New York where he became acquainted—through casually looking at pictures published in a magazine—with the Holy Week rituals practiced by the Cora people from a small town located in the western state of Nayarit. Given that Echevarría was born in Tepic (Nayarit’s capital), he felt compelled to return to Mexico to film the festivities of his “neighbors.”¹⁵¹ Using a Bolex 16 mm movie camera, he traveled to the remote community of Santa Teresa and filmed the four-day ritual of *Judea* or *Sumu’uavika*. The festivity takes place during Holy Week and incorporates both Catholic and Cora beliefs. The celebration involves dancing, music, fighting, and body painting, while being under the psychoactive effects of

¹⁴⁹ Mario Lavista, “Creación e interpretación en la música electrónica,” *Diálogos: Artes, Letras, Ciencias Humanas* 10, no. 5 (1974): 18.

¹⁵⁰ Mario Lavista, “El proceso creador en la improvisación musical,” in Cortez, *Mario Lavista*, 122. Text originally written in 1971. [En ambas, el compositor, como he dicho antes, trabaja con sonidos. . . . El sonido no interviene ya para definir a otro. Su presencia, ahora, es suficiente para definirse a sí mismo.]

¹⁵¹ Nicolás Echevarría, in discussion with Mario Lavista, in El Colegio Nacional, “Judea: Semana Santa entre los Coras,” streamed live on June 25, 2020, YouTube video, 1:19:15, <https://colnal.mx/agenda/judea-semana-santa-entre-los-coras-1973/>, accessed June 21, 2023.

peyote (*Lophophora williamsii*).¹⁵² Retrospectively, Echevarría admits that, being young and inexperienced, he did not do any preliminary research into the Cora culture and did not intend for this film to portray an accurate representation of the ritual. He treated the images for their theatrical and performative potential, disregarding the structure of the Cora ritual. Calling the result, a “cinematographic essay,” he admits that what drove the making of the film was a sense of “musical drama.”¹⁵³ “It’s one of the riskiest projects of my career”—he explained—“what is risky is that I tell the story as if I were composing a piece in sonata form.”¹⁵⁴

Echevarría filmed multiple moments throughout the week—just images, no sound. He had neither the recording equipment nor the funds to hire a sound technician. However, through a French tourist, he was able to obtain a few sound samples of the ritual, which he then gave to Lavista to use as a primary source for his film score. The tourist provided two main musical excerpts: one was purely instrumental (presumably a Cora musician playing an indigenous flute), and the second was choral (unison singing presumably by male Coras). With very limited source material, Lavista was tasked to create the soundscape for a 24-minute film depicting the Cora ritual, for which he used the Conservatory’s Buchla synthesizer. Many deemed the outcome successful, providing a pioneering example of cutting-edge multidisciplinary experimental collaboration. As sociologist and film scholar Adriana Estrada Álvarez states:

The free, irregular, and indirect approximation to the cinematographic essay transcends the register to reach a filmic symphony.... With precise intuition, Echevarría develops the ability of weaving the filmed images ... into Lavista’s sound composition.... It is not music which is to follow the image, as in current cinema, but an organic experience that in the span of 20 minutes disrupts and excites our senses.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² The text that introduces the film reads as follows: “La Judea es la representación de la Pasión de Cristo que celebran los indios Coras durante la Semana Santa. Tiene lugar en el poblado de Santa Teresa, Nayarit, enclavado en la Sierra Madre Occidental, México. La Judea involucra tanto a las autoridades civiles y religiosas. Sobre todo, congrega a los varones para que, en el rito iniciático de ‘borrarse’ (pintarse de negro el cuerpo semidesnudo), se conviertan en soldados bajo las órdenes de capitanes. Esta ceremonia revive la batalla originaria entre los monstruos del caos y los Dioses, quienes triunfan creando el orden del mundo. Esta batalla que tuvo lugar en el cielo, también tiene lugar periódicamente sobre la tierra, encarnada en la Pasión de Cristo.” Nicolás Echevarría, dir., *Judea: Semana Santa entre los coras* (Mexico, 1974), 22 min.

¹⁵³ Nicolás Echevarría, “El quehacer documental en México: Entrevista con Nicolás Echevarría,” interview by Praxedis Razo, *Código: Arte, arquitectura, diseño, cine*, February 23, 2018, <https://revistacodigo.com/entrevista-interiores/entrevista-con-nicolas-echevarria/>, accessed June 21, 2023. [... más que respetar la estructura de la fiesta, lo que riges este ensayo cinematográfico es el drama musical.]

¹⁵⁴ Nicolás Echevarría, “La historia documental de Nicolás Echevarría,” interview by Cristóbal Torres, *20 Minutos*, May 28, 2020, <https://www.20minutos.com.mx/noticia/857114/0/la-historia-documental-de-nicolas-echevarria/>, accessed July 14, 2022. [Es uno de los trabajos más audaces de mi filmografía.... Su parte audaz es que cuento la historia como si estuviera componiendo una pieza en forma de sonata.]

¹⁵⁵ Adriana Estrada-Álvarez, “¿Cine vs. antropología? La difícil relación entre arte y ciencia: *Judea, semana santa entre los coras* (1974) de Nicolás Echevarría,” *Revista Chilena de Antropología Visual* 25 (2015): 153–58, http://www.rchav.cl/2015_25_res02_estrada.html, accessed June 21, 2023. [La libre, irregular e indirecta aproximación en el ensayo cinematográfico, trasciende el registro para organizarse en una sinfonía filmica.... Con intuición precisa, Echevarría desarrolla la destreza de tejer la imagen filmada ... para acuararlo ... por la composición sonora de Lavista ... no es la música que sigue las imágenes,

Given Echevarría's immersion in experimental music scenes through his participation with Quanta and his compositional training at the Conservatory's Taller, he felt compelled to justify this film as a musical (experimental) composition. Doing so allowed him to justify his othering of the Coras, disregarding the ethical ramifications of the liberties he took in presenting the ritual in a nonlinear way. Instead of presenting the scenes in chronological order, he followed a succession in a manner of a dance choreography that, decades later he would criticize as both "naïve" and "very irresponsible."¹⁵⁶ Regardless of its problematic representation of indigenous rituals, as a cultural text, *Judea: Semana Santa entre los coras* has secured a place in the history of Mexican experimentation.¹⁵⁷ It was one of the first films (if not *the* first) scored solely with electronic music. Moreover, the project inaugurated Echevarría's long and fruitful career as a filmmaker. And, lastly, it would be the beginning of a long collaboration between Echevarría and Lavista in producing music for various films and TV programs.¹⁵⁸

Lavista's work with electronic music coincided with a season during which he reflected on the nature of open works, issues of authorship, and the role of the performer. In his writings of the early 1970s, Lavista quotes Cage, along with Umberto Eco and Roland Barthes, showing a willingness to abandon his role as *author* or *logos creador* in order to "give the interpreter a creative function, because the work is being formed in the process of interpretation, and possesses, moreover, an infinity of different versions, for it no longer has—as traditional works do—a single structural path; that is to say, a beginning and end predetermined by the composer."¹⁵⁹ The musical phenomenon is therefore to be considered as a field of possibilities, with the listener at the center:

The listener situates himself voluntarily at the center of an inexhaustible net of relationships in which he chooses his scale of references, a choice that is conditioned by the object that is beheld which, in turn, conditions the ulterior options realized. . . . Just as Roland Barthes has pointed out, the meaning of the work cannot

como en el cine silente, sino una experiencia orgánica, que en poco más de 20 minutos, trastoca, provoca nuestros sentidos.]

¹⁵⁶ Echevarría, in discussion with Lavista, "Judea: Semana Santa entre los Coras."

¹⁵⁷ What I find most problematic about *Judea* is that general audiences continue to read it as a documentary that accurately portrays Cora traditions. This was most evident to me during the Facebook live streaming of the film on June 25, 2020, which was watched by over 7,000 people. Various audience members posted comments on the stream praising the film and thanking Echevarría for allowing them to "learn about the traditions of our Mexico" (María Díaz) and to have "a glimpse of our roots" (Victor Manuel He Ce). The liberties both Echevarría and Lavista took for the sake of experimentation in this film deserve a more critical approach.

¹⁵⁸ Further film projects directed by Echevarría with music by Lavista include *María Sabina, mujer espíritu* (1978), *Niño Fidencio* (1982), *Cabeza de Vaca* (1990), *Vivir mata* (2002), and *Eco de la montaña* (2014).

¹⁵⁹ Lavista, "El proceso creador," 125. [. . . otorgar al intérprete una función creadora, puesto que la obra se está conformando en el proceso mismo de la interpretación y posee, además, una infinidad de versiones diferentes ya que no tiene, como en las obras tradicionales, un único camino estructural, es decir, un principio y un fin determinados de antemano por el compositor.]

be made alone; the author only produces possibilities of meaning, of forms, if you like, and it is the world that fulfills them.¹⁶⁰

Moreover, working with electronic media allowed Lavista to articulate his thoughts on the existence of a continuum between sound and noise.¹⁶¹ To Lavista, the listener is charged with determining whether “noise” and “sound” are musical.¹⁶² Addressing what to listen for in new music, he rephrases Cage’s thoughts by saying that, when approaching new music one needs new ways of listening (*nueva música, nueva audición*): “Cage’s idea implies that the work must be experienced in terms of its situation, in terms of sound. The listener is free to experience his own world in relation to the musical work; therefore, this [work] is no longer the expression of a subjective and imaginary personal world that the listener must experience again.”¹⁶³

Quanta’s collective improvisations, together with Lavista’s experimentation with open forms, noise, and *musique concrète*, were channels for discovering new sounds and new ways of conceptualizing music. Along this path, Lavista surrounded himself with artists who were pursuing the same aesthetic directions. With one such like-minded individual, the visual artist Arnaldo Coen, Lavista began a series of collaborative projects that allowed him to “put into practice” his philosophical ponderings.¹⁶⁴ After his explorations with serialism, electronic music, and improvisation, which can be seen as a product of the time he spent in Europe and in Japan, Lavista returned to using traditional notation and began exploring the use of quotations, as well as the use of extended techniques in traditional instruments.¹⁶⁵ Once he gained a reputation as a composer who could successfully utilize international avant-garde compositional techniques, Lavista turned his attention toward more conservative ways to notate music. He continued to develop a cosmopolitan ideal as a site of negotiation

¹⁶⁰ Mario Lavista, “Nueva música: Nueva audición,” in Cortez, *Mario Lavista*, 116. Text originally written in 1973. [El oyente se sitúa voluntariamente en el centro de una red inagotable de relaciones, entre las cuales él elige su escala de referencias, elección que está condicionada por el objeto que se contempla, el cual, a su vez, condiciona las ulteriores opciones realizadas... Como lo ha señalado Roland Barthes, el sentido de una obra no puede hacerse solo; el autor no produce sino posibilidades de sentido, de formas, si se quiere, y es el mundo quien las llena.]

¹⁶¹ Lavista, “El proceso creador,” 123–24.

¹⁶² An emphasis on Lavista’s use of “noise” resurfaced in a 2014 interview with journalist Paula Mónaco. See Paula Mónaco Felipe, “El defensor del ruido: Entrevista con Mario Lavista,” *La Jornada Semanal*, September 14, 2014, <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2014/09/14/sem-paula.html>, accessed June 21, 2023.

¹⁶³ Lavista, “El proceso creador,” 124. [Este pensamiento de Cage implica que la obra debe ser experimentada en términos de su situación misma, en términos de sonidos. El oyente es libre de experimentar su propio mundo en relación con la obra musical; por consiguiente ésta no es ya la expresión de un mundo subjetivo e imaginario personal que el oyente debe experimentar de nuevo.]

¹⁶⁴ More about Lavista and Coen’s collaboration will be discussed in Chapter 3. See also Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, “Permuting Cage,” in *Brújula: Revista interdisciplinaria sobre estudios latinoamericanos* 6 (2007): 114–23.

¹⁶⁵ In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Lavista worked in close collaboration with performers with whom he explored the extended techniques of traditional instruments. He worked with flutist Marielena Arizpe (flute triptych), bassist Bertram Turetzky (*Dusk*), oboist Leonora Saavedra (*Marsias*), and the string quartet Cuarteto Latinoamericano (*Reflejos de la noche*), among others. These issues will be further discussed in Chapter 4. See Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, “Espacios imaginarios: *Marsias* y *Reflejos de la noche* de Mario Lavista,” *Pauta: Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical* 131–132 (2014): 99–122.



Figure 2.7 Mario Lavista in the early 1970s. From Lavista’s personal archive. Unknown photographer. Courtesy of Mario Lavista.

between the local and the international, now with perhaps less pressure to conform to the ideology of belonging to a “postnational generation” (see Figure 2.7).¹⁶⁶

When asked about his international presence as a “Mexican” composer, Lavista replied, “Mexicanness goes after essential matters which you don’t control but that are part of who you are.”¹⁶⁷ He further remarked, “being Mexican, for me, is being part of the world. I would not consider it any other way. If everything is local, then it would be only understood locally.”¹⁶⁸ Mexican essence, in his view as well as in those who conformed to the predominant aesthetic view of the Mexican avant-garde

¹⁶⁶ At the end of the 1990s, the editorial house, Clío (founded by Emilio Azcárraga Milmo and Enrique Krauze), produced a documentary devoted to Mexican concert music of the second half of the twentieth century. Written by Consuelo Carredano, this documentary includes footage of various events from the Mexican avant-garde scene, as well as excerpts of interviews with various composers, including Lavista and others addressed in this chapter. See Clío, “DOCUMENTAL. Música clásica, capítulo 2. Los nuevos lenguajes 1960–2000,” YouTube video, 43:24, April 15, 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8Fn7wMBnhmo&feature=youtu.be>, accessed June 21, 2023.

¹⁶⁷ Lavista, discussion, August 14, 2004. [Creo que la mexicanidad va por otra parte, creo que va por cosas más esenciales, que uno no controla y que forman parte de uno.]

¹⁶⁸ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, January 10, 2005. [Para mí ser mexicano es ser parte del mundo, yo no lo considero de otra manera. Si todo es local, nada más lo entiende la localidad.]

of the second half of the twentieth century, is cosmopolitan. It is one that aspires to achieve universal status; one that refuses to be tied only to local spaces. As he adamantly declared, “I believe cosmopolitanism is that which allows us to be authentically national.”¹⁶⁹

Lavista’s career was solidified through his adherence to what was recognized as the international avant-garde (mostly Europe and the United States). Through adhering to ideological frames outlined by a very active intellectual elite in Mexico City, he obtained national recognition, not only as a composer but also as an intellectual. He learned to navigate across the expectations placed on him by both national and international scenarios by using cosmopolitanism as a tool. For the next fifty years, this cosmopolitan ideal remained the prevalent ideology for the composer. Moreover, it has become a paradigm for the composers who came after him, those who would not only contest this paradigm, but also refute it and ultimately redefine it.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁹ Lavista, discussion, December 18, 2006. [Yo creo que el cosmopolitismo es aquello que nos permite ser auténticamente nacionales.]

¹⁷⁰ See Vilar-Payá, and Alonso-Minutti, “Estrategias de diferenciación.”

3

Permuting Cage, Permuting Music

signo
si no
una jaula no
una ventana

—Francisco Serrano¹

Within Mexican experimental scenes, visual artists, poets, writers, performers, composers, and dancers alike were fascinated by John Cage's philosophy, which became available in Spanish through myriad translated texts reproduced in newspapers and periodicals beginning in the early 1970s. That Cage (1912–1992) was an influential figure in the avant-garde scene in Mexico might not come as a surprise. The highly extensive research centered on the U.S.-American composer continues to shed light on the key role Cage played in the history of modernist thought as we know it, and a vast number of publications (not limited to the English language) have focused on the range of influence Cage had in multiple art and music scenes across the United States and abroad.² From celebratory writings to severe criticism, Cage-centered research has found a stable place within music studies. Intriguingly, however, in spite of this wide influence, little attention has been paid to Cage in relation to composers from the periphery, that is, composers working outside of the Euro-American center.³

Cage traveled throughout Latin America and fostered friendships with people he met while abroad. From the 1960s into the 1980s, he visited Argentina, Brazil, Cuba, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and Venezuela and, while traveling, he engaged with discourses that advocated for noninterventionism.⁴ As Vaughn Anderson demonstrates, it was precisely Cage's posture against U.S. imperialism that helped shape

¹ Francisco Serrano, first lines of his aleatory reading of his poem, *In / cubaciones*. Francisco Serrano, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, July 28, 2009. [sign / yes no / not a cage / a window]

² The scholarship on Cage is quite exhaustive. For a comprehensive annotated bibliography of sources about Cage, see Sara Haefeli, *John Cage: A Research and Information Guide* (New York: Routledge, 2017).

³ Musicologist Miki Kaneda is currently researching the Japanese avant-garde's engagement with John Cage. Her work explores ways in which "bad" appropriations of Cage's philosophy and aesthetics have granted space for creative possibility.

⁴ Cage had publicly advocated for nonintervention since his youth. His 1927 essay, "Other People Think" which he presented at the Hollywood Bowl, is a precocious critique of U.S. imperialist policies throughout Latin America. See Richard Kostelanetz, ed., *John Cage: An Anthology* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970), 45–49.

his unique reputation as a radical throughout Latin America.⁵ Cage's aesthetics of indeterminacy, according to Anderson, became a model for noninterventionist cultural diplomacy—an idealistic vision of hemispheric relations that sharply contrasted with the long history of U.S. intervention, military and otherwise, throughout Latin America. His reception as a radical, therefore, “stands in stark contrast to his legacy in the United States, where his reliance on chance operations has been interpreted as a symptom of his reticence to comment on current affairs, as well as his apparent disinterest in identity politics.”⁶

Although utopian, Cage's noninterventionist stance, in connection with his aesthetics of indeterminacy, was reinterpreted by Latin Americans as representative of a liberatory worldview. He is famously quoted as adamantly warning a group of composers in Buenos Aires not to work toward a musical revolution but rather a social one. However, Cage failed to address the inherent contradictions between his pronouncements and the privileged platform from which he uttered them.⁷ Throughout Latin America, Cage's work was nevertheless framed within a countercultural position of civil disobedience and anticonsumerism and was associated with political radicalism. Therefore, Cage's music and thought, as they were known and discussed in the region, were embraced by Latin Americans through a process of resignification rooted in anti-imperialism.

Discussions of the influence of a given Euro-American composer on one from the periphery tend to maintain the central status of the former while regarding the latter as at best an echo or at worst a copy. Discourses that assume influence is oriented from the center to the periphery, therefore, tend to reproduce the hegemonic colonial system that sustains the hierarchical relationship of superiority/inferiority. This model has certainly permeated musicological scholarship on classically trained Latin American composers published in English. The first step toward dismantling that colonial model is to examine how peripheral subjects take the subject at the center as a *sign* from which to formulate their own individualities. Throughout Latin America, Cage, the composer, the philosopher—*el bufón* or *el loco*, as he was also known—has been reinterpreted as a revolutionary symbol. And as a symbol, “Cage” has also been transformed into an anti-imperialist strategy.

John Cage was an emblematic figure throughout Mario Lavista's compositional career. Lavista's interest in Cage's work came first through Cage's writings. Lavista recalled that while in Paris during the late 1960s, he was first introduced to Cage's book *Silence* and was immediately attracted to the composer's philosophy of silence,

⁵ Vaughn Anderson, “‘Revision of the Golden Rule’: John Cage, Latin America, and the Poetics of Non-Interventionism,” *Journal of Modern Literature* 41, no. 1 (2017): 59.

⁶ Anderson, “‘Revision of the Golden Rule,’” 59.

⁷ “Your responsibility is not to a revolution of music, but to one of society.” Those were Cage's words according to Gordon Mumma. Most likely, the phrase was directed to individuals associated with the Instituto Di Tella. Mumma calls the group “an aristocracy of artists, uncomfortably aware of their privileged positions in an underprivileged and politically repressed continent.” See Gordon Mumma, “Twenty-Five Minutes with John Cage,” in *Cybernetic Arts Book: Adventures in American New Music*, ed. Michelle Fillion (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2015), 185.

time, and structure. In contrast to Lavista's immersion in what he perceived as a "quite dogmatic" French musical scene, reading Cage was "like a bucket of fresh water."⁸ After *Silence*, Lavista read every text, studied every score, and listened to every recording by Cage he could get a hold of. From that point on, he developed a significant fondness for Cage's pieces for prepared piano and studied them devotedly.⁹ For Lavista, Cage represented much more than a visionary who expanded sound possibilities. Lavista admired Cage's ability to intrinsically integrate his musical practices into poetry, dance, and the visual arts—an aim that was at the core of his own creative trajectory. At an early point in Lavista's career, the figure of Cage was like a trigger that encouraged him to venture outside of the compositional path that had distinguished his career until then. And this *trigger* prompted Lavista to develop conceptual interdisciplinary projects that placed him at the forefront of Mexico's experimental scene.¹⁰ A closer look at Lavista's adoption of Cage's philosophy and music allows us to see that, more than an "influence," Cage became a layered and complex symbol or *signo* (sign) for Lavista.¹¹ In what follows, I examine the ways in which Lavista takes Cage-the-sign as a point of departure to formulate a multidimensional experimental project. Cage becomes an excuse for Lavista to imagine creative possibilities. In a performative translation, Cage becomes a *jaula*, a cage that is to be filled by Lavista. Far from being a restrictive boxlike enclosure, Cage-the-*jaula* allows for multiple permutations. Through performative processes of interpretation and resignification, Lavista's Cage becomes a platform to permute sound, images, words, and ideas.

John Cage's Encounters with Mexico

When Puerto Rican artist Nelson Rivera asked Cage about his exposure to Mexican people and culture while growing up in Los Angeles, Cage responded: "I don't remember any particular connection. I used to go to China Town and began collecting, since high school, Chinese plates and a small teapot. I had a very good Japanese friend in my first or second year of college."¹² In a typical Cagean response, he jumped from addressing one cultural group to another, without pause, and although he did not

⁸ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, August 14, 2004. [Era como leer algo totalmente antidogmático, estando en un medio a veces muy dogmático, el medio francés. . . . Cage era como un balde de agua fresca.]

⁹ Some of Lavista's closest friends from this time say that his performances of Cage's prepared piano pieces were superb. Flutist Marielena Arizpe recalls: "A nadie en mi vida le he escuchado las piezas para piano preparado de John Cage como a Mario. Y es que, no sabes cómo se ponía a preparar el piano. Todo un día buscaba las sonoridades del piano; un día completo." Marielena Arizpe, in discussion with the author, via Zoom, September 3, 2020.

¹⁰ Lavista had been exposed to Cage's philosophy and music for quite some time. In 1968, he took a seminar on Cage's music taught by Henri Pousseur at the Rheinische Musikschule in Cologne, Germany.

¹¹ *Signo* is also the very first word of Francisco Serrano's poem *In / cubaciones* (quoted in the epigraph at the beginning of this chapter).

¹² John Cage, "En y alrededor de Latinoamérica: Una conversación con John Cage," interview by Nelson Rivera, *Boletín Música Casa de las Américas* 40 (2015): 71, 74. Cage's treatment of diverse immigrant groups as exchangeable has racist connotations that should not go unnoticed.

remember being in contact with Mexicans while growing up in L.A., he recalled short trips he made to Baja California while he was in high school. In interviews and published texts, Cage did not provide any further elaboration on his experiences growing up in a city that by the 1930s was deemed the “Mexican capital of the United States,” or on his privileged position of being able to cross the southern border back and forth to vacation in the Baja peninsula during his youth. The first “official” documentation of Cage’s engagement with Mexican music did not happen until the late 1930s when he commissioned Carlos Chávez to write a piece for his percussion ensemble. As a result, Chávez wrote *Toccata*, but Cage’s ensemble did not perform it, presumably because the ensemble lacked the technical ability the work required.¹³

In 1942, Cage wrote a small review of a concert by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra conducted by Chávez.¹⁴ While harshly criticizing the dullness of the other pieces performed that night, Cage singles out Chávez’s *Sinfonía India*. Cage contrasts the insufficient adaptation of national/local subjects by the other featured composers and praises the way Chávez incorporates indigenous melodies. According to Cage, Chávez’s incorporations come from a source that is “essentially musical to begin with.” He elaborates that “it relies completely on musical elements that never call for literary explanations but speak in terms of rhythm and sound, to which everyone responds. Hearing this *Symphony* for the first time, one has the feeling of remembering it. It is the land we all walk on, made audible.”¹⁵ This idyllic quote has been reproduced in multiple performances of *Sinfonía India*, both in Mexico and in the United States ever since.

Little is known about the relationship between Cage and Chávez. But Cage’s interactions with Mexicans were to continue. During an extensive tour with the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, Cage met poet and writer Octavio Paz (1914–1998) in New Delhi, India in 1964—Paz was the Mexican ambassador in that country at the time. According to accounts from both parties, Cage and Paz had an instant connection. During the mid-1960s both were exploring similar treatments of structure, silence, and chance. They began reading each other’s work and soon after wrote poetry about each other in both English and Spanish.¹⁶ They saw each other again in different locations and, while having dinner in New York, arranged to meet in Mexico “a year

¹³ José Antonio Alcaraz, *Hablar de música: Conversaciones con compositores del continente americano* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 1982), 67.

¹⁴ John Cage, “Chavez and the Chicago ‘Drouth,’” *Modern Music* 19, no. 3 (1942): 185–86. This essay was translated to Spanish by Dionisia Urtubees and published in *Pauta* 9 (1984): 42–44.

¹⁵ John Cage, “Chavez and the Chicago ‘Drouth,’” in Kostelanetz, *John Cage: An Anthology*, 64.

¹⁶ Paz’s poem “Lectura de John Cage” includes quotes from John Cage’s books *Silence* and *A Year from Monday*. See Octavio Paz, “Lectura de John Cage,” *Diálogos: Artes, Letras, Ciencias Humanas* 4, no. 2 (1968): 3–6. Cage took some phrases from Paz’s emblematic open poem *Blanco* to write a mesostic poem in Spanish titled “White on Blanco for O.P.” The two poems were later included in an expensive artist’s portfolio with woodcuts and monoprints by Ilse Schreiber-Noll published in 1989. See Ilse Schreiber-Noll, “Reading John Cage by Octavio Paz and ‘White on Blanco’ by John Cage translated by Eliot Weinberger,” Ilse Schreiber-Noll, <http://www.ilseschreibernoll.com/octavio-paz--john-cage.html>, accessed June 22, 2023.

from Monday”—a phrase that became the title of one of Cage’s books.¹⁷ But the plan to meet did not happen, as Cage tells us in the epilogue of *A Year from Monday*: “I was the only one taking the trip to Mexico seriously. I sent a note to Octavio and Marie-José in India . . . asking whether they’d meet me on the 5th in Mexico City: ‘Will that be convenient for you? . . . What a marvelous time we will have!’”¹⁸ Paz replied suggesting a later meeting with Cage, either in Mexico City or New York. Instead, Cage’s encounter with Paz in Mexico would happen almost ten years later, in Cuernavaca, in 1976.

“I don’t know or care to know whether John Cage is a great musician or not”—Paz once expressed. “I know he is a poet, a wise man, and a *clown*” (Paz uses the English word).¹⁹ Cage was the only modernist composer with whom Paz engaged in his writings and letters and whose work Paz widely promoted. While converging in myriad creative interests and aesthetic considerations, Paz and Cage also shared a critical attitude toward U.S. interventionist policies throughout Latin America. As Anderson notes, in the poem he dedicates to his friend, Paz “asserts Cage’s American identity by stressing Cage’s denunciation of US exceptionalism.”²⁰ The lines in question read:

John Cage no es americano
(U.S.A. is determined to keep free the Free World,
U.S.A. determined)
O a la inversa
John Cage es americano
(That the U.S.A. may become
Just another part of the world.)
No more, no less)²¹

Thanks to Paz’s recommendation, the Mexican government, through the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA), extended an invitation to the Cunningham Dance Company to participate in the Cultural Program of the XIX Olympics.²² The

¹⁷ John Cage, *A Year from Monday: New Lectures and Writings* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1967), x. The book was translated and published in Mexico in 1974. John Cage, *Del lunes en un año*, trans. Isabel Fraire (Mexico City: Biblioteca Era), 1974. A second edition was released in 2018 by Alias Editorial.

¹⁸ Cage, *A Year from Monday*, 163.

¹⁹ Octavio Paz, “Poesía, pintura, música, etcétera: Conversación con Manuel Ulacia,” *Vuelta* 155 (1989): 19. [No sé ni me importa saber si John Cage es un gran músico. Sé que es un poeta, un sabio y un *clown*, como aquellos viejos maestros taoístas y budistas de China y Japón.]

²⁰ Anderson, “Revision of the Golden Rule,” 63.

²¹ Paz, “Lectura de John Cage,” 5. Paz’s poem was included in his collection *Ladera este (1962–1984)* (Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 1969). It was later reprinted by Lavista two times in *Pauta* 18 (1986): 24–27, and in *Pauta* 123–124 (2012): 6–9. Lavista often quoted phrases from Paz’s poem in his essays and lectures centered on Cage.

²² Gordon Mumma recalls that, although the Company received financial sponsorship from the U.S. government, Cage and Cunningham returned the money. Mumma, “Twenty-Five Minutes with John Cage,” 185.

company performed several shows at the Palacio de Bellas Artes (Palace of Fine Arts) during the summer of 1968.²³ One Sunday morning, while staying at the Ritz Hotel in Mexico City, Cage and Cunningham met with writer Juan Vicente Melo and translator Beatrice Trueblood for an interview Melo was to publish in *Revista de Bellas Artes*, INBA's main communication outlet. At a time when political unrest and youth discomfort were prevalent in Mexico, it is interesting to note that Melo chose not to ask Cage any overtly political question (or at least, not to include them in the published version of their conversation).²⁴ He chose instead to center on Cage's trajectory as a composer and more so as a writer/philosopher.

While Melo did not include the specific titles of any of Cage's compositions in his interview, he mentioned his book *Silence*, which would be widely circulated among Mexican artistic circles in the decades to come. About Cage's music, Melo made just one enthusiastic remark: "The complete structural liberty allowed in your work is fascinating."²⁵ Although it is hard to ascertain what scores Melo was able to access, it could be assumed that he made this comment in response to 4'33"—Cage's best-known score. However, any initiate in Cage's work knows that, while Cage might have left to chance most musical parameters (pitch, rhythm, timbre, tempo, etc.), he still adhered to structure to a certain degree, with very few exceptions.²⁶ Melo's statement could be understood, therefore, as one of many examples of the ways in which Cage as a symbol was reinterpreted as liberatory within a Latin American context—in this case with regard to musical structure.

During his time in Mexico, Cage took the opportunity to visit U.S.-born composer Conlon Nancarrow (1912–1997) who had been living in the country since 1940 and became a Mexican citizen in 1956.²⁷ It is possible that while in Mexico Cage also met with Chávez, although this cannot be confirmed at present. A photograph made public at a recent exhibition captures a lively conversation between Cage and his new

²³ Alongside John Cage, David Tudor and Gordon Mumma were also part of the traveling cohort. Printed copies of the Cultural Program for the XIX Olympics were part of the art exhibition *Passerby 03: John Cage* at the Museo Jumex in Mexico City (July 7–September 16, 2018). For more information about the exhibition, see "Passerby 03: John Cage," Fundación Jumex Arte Contemporáneo, <https://www.fundacionjumex.org/en/exposiciones/139-pasajeros-03-john-cage>, accessed June 23, 2023.

²⁴ About the political unrest of 1968, see Chapter 2.

²⁵ Juan Vicente Melo, "Conversación con Merce Cunningham y John Cage," *Revista de Bellas Artes* 24 (1968): 88. [Estimo que es fascinante la total libertad que se permite en la estructura de su obra.]

²⁶ Cage's 0'00" (4'33" no. 2), solo for any performer with amplification, or other conceptual text pieces (written instructions), could be seen as places where Cage abandons structure. However, as Sara Haefeli reminded me, the extent to which he actually believed in structure is up for debate. Sara Haefeli, email message to author, December 29, 2020. What is interesting to point out here is that Melo's emphasis on Cage's complete structural liberty was a common reading (or misreading?) of Cage's music.

²⁷ Cage had been very interested in Nancarrow's music (especially that for pianola) long before their encounter in Mexico in 1968 and had used his music for one of Cunningham's choreographies, *Crises*. In a conversation between Cage and Nancarrow at the Telluride Institute and moderated by Charles Amirkhanian in 1989, Cage remarked that he was first introduced to *huítlacoche*, a corn mushroom, at Nancarrow's home. As Cage was to become a mushroom identification expert, this introduction must have been a significant experience for him. A transcription of this interview is available online: "Cage and Nancarrow (1989)," *John Cage Trust* (blog), John Cage Trust, <http://johncagetrust.blogspot.com/2015/06/cage-and-nancarrow-1989.html>, accessed June 23, 2023. Lavista published a Spanish translation of this conversation in *Pauta* 50–51 (1994): 114–39.

Mexican friends around a table—*una sobremesa*—at Café de Tacuba, an emblematic restaurant in downtown Mexico City.²⁸ Through this photograph and other accounts, we know that during the summer of 1968 Cage also met emerging musicians and artists such as composers Eduardo Mata and Raúl Cosío Villegas, writer Ramón Xirau, and architects Eduardo Terrazas and Ruth Rivera.²⁹ It is not hard to imagine Lavista taking part in that emblematic *sobremesa*. However, he was living in Europe at the time. The first encounter between Lavista and Cage was not to happen until eight years later.

Promoting Experimental Practices

After an intense period of collective improvisation with the group Quanta and a phase of exploration with electronic music both at home and in Japan, Lavista was offered a post as head of the Music Department of UNAM's Cultural Division, which he held from 1974 to 1975. This brief administrative position—one that he would regret accepting later in life—granted Lavista the power and resources to organize a series of events to promote new music. For many of these events, he partnered with the Embassy of the United States in Mexico City through its official information center, the Benjamin Franklin Library, which was directed at the time by Donald H. Albright. Thanks to Albright's enthusiasm for the arts and his willingness to host and support young artists, the Benjamin Franklin Library became a venue for new music enterprises, including the first performances of European and U.S. experimental works that were already gaining significant attention among avant-garde scenes across the Atlantic.

The nature of the enterprises that Lavista coordinated as head of the Cultural Division followed his avid interest for the kind of experimental practices promoted by the circle around Cage, aiming to foster a similar experimental atmosphere in Mexico. In a note he included in the program for the Mexican premiere of Erik Satie's *Vexations* in 1974, Lavista states: "Our purpose is to present works which are rarely heard in Mexico; to give musicians the opportunity to perform for audiences in the capital, and to offer the public something different and experimental."³⁰ The impulse behind the organization of this concert is found not so much in Satie's music itself, but in Cage's well-known admiration of the French composer's music and philosophy.

Premiering *Vexations* in Mexico granted Lavista national visibility, and most of the major newspapers published a report on the event. It was certainly a remarkable

²⁸ This photograph was exhibited at Mexico City's Museo Jumex in 2018 and can be accessed here: <https://www.fundacionjumex.org/en/exposiciones/139-pasajeros-03-john-cage>, accessed June 23, 2023.

²⁹ Gabriel Villalobos, "A Year from Monday You Will Hear It," in *Pasajeros: [Passerby]: No. 3 John Cage*, booklet of exhibition of the same title at the Museo Jumex (July 7–September 16, 2018), 20.

³⁰ Mario Lavista, program note for *Vejações*, May 17, 1974. A copy of this program is included in the companion website for this book. [Nuestro propósito es el de presentar obras rara vez escuchadas en México, el de brindar a los músicos la oportunidad de que actúen ante el público de la capital y que se ofrezca al auditorio lo diferente y lo experimental.]

endeavor, for it involved the participation of twenty-four pianists—two of whom did not perform on site. In a pre-Internet era, pianists Alberto Alba and Roger Reynolds participated via telephone in what was indeed a resourceful initiative of transnational collaboration.³¹ The 840 repetitions asked for in Satie's score involved over 16 hours of continuous performance. This sonorous voyage began on Saturday, May 17, 1974, at 8:00 P.M. and ended the following day around noon. According to Sergio Cardona Guzmán, a reporter for the newspaper *El Día*, the audience present at the hall of the Benjamin Franklin Library (which holds about ninety seats) was comprised of mostly young people, and throughout the performance's total duration, approximately twenty people intermittently entered and left the venue.³² Reporter Luis Fernández de Castro stated that only four individuals attended the event in its entirety: Donald H. Albright, Jorge Velazco, Sergio Cardona Guzmán, and Mario Lavista.³³

Behind Lavista's stated objectives in the program notes, which can be perceived as a justification for the magnitude of the enterprise, there was a rebellious anti-establishment stance that was in concordance with what he had previously fostered in Quanta's collective improvisations. Members of the audience—Lavista's colleagues among them—regarded the Mexican premiere of Satie's *Vexations* as charged with a message of transgression. In a narrative he published as a letter addressed to Satie, composer and pianist Federico Ibarra (b. 1946) exclaims: "what greater aggression [could there be] toward audiences of his time than writing a piece for a single instrument to be performed over a span of 16 hours, or for that matter, what an aggression toward the pianist who would like to perform only this work in a concert."³⁴ Cardona Guzmán did not even deem this event a musical concert and instead called it a "chore" (*una tarea*). He concluded his report by stating, "We knew it from the encyclopedias ... now we have proved it: Erik Satie was crazy. What can be said for those who play along with his ideas?"³⁵ For Cardona Guzmán, due to its obsessive repetitions and extreme duration, the performance was an absurdity. Disregarding

³¹ Alberto Alba's performance was transmitted via telephone from Mérida, Yucatán, and Roger Reynolds's from La Jolla, California. Reynolds published an interview with John Cage in 1962, a document that Lavista had most likely read. See "John Cage: Interview with Roger Reynolds," in *Contemporary Composers on Contemporary Music*, eds. Elliott Schwartz, and Barney Childs (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1967), 335–48. Soon after this concert, Lavista invited Reynolds to publish an article in his newly founded music journal, *Talea*. See Roger Reynolds, "Exploraciones en la manipulación sonido-espacio," *Talea* 2–3 (1976): 13–44. A list of the pianists who participated in this enterprise is included in the companion website for this book.

³² Sergio Cardona Guzmán, "Vejeciones, de Satie. El Héroe fue el piano," *El Día*, May 18, 1974. Cardona reports that the event concluded on Sunday May 18, at exactly 12:45:46 hrs.

³³ Luis Fernández de Castro, "Pocas personas resistieron completo el concierto de ultravanguardia, de Satie," *Excelsior*, May 20, 1974. Esperanza Pulido published a short report of the event that concluded with an exclamatory note: "¡Qué 'aguante', señores!" See Esperanza Pulido, "Vejeciones de Satie," *Heterofonía* 37 (1974): 35.

³⁴ Federico Ibarra, "Carta a Erik Satie," *Siempre*, June 1974 (s/f). [... y qué mayor agresión para el público de su tiempo que una obra para un solo instrumento interpretable por espacio de 16 horas, o también, qué agresión para el pianista que quisiese tocar solo su obra en un concierto.]

³⁵ Cardona Guzmán, "Vejeciones, de Satie." [Sabíamos por enciclopedias ... ahora lo hemos comprobado: Erik Satie estaba loco. ¿Qué se puede decir de quienes le hacen el juego?]

the conservative attitude of Cardona Guzmán's review, which was in accordance with the establishment's view on experimental practices, Lavista continued to take audacious risks in his efforts to promote and perform experimental repertoires.

Lavista's labor as a promoter of contemporary music established an important precedent for the avant-garde scene. He organized symposiums where he hosted composers who had gained a significant presence in institutionalized—and quite diverse—avant-garde scenes. Composers associated with the Columbia-Princeton Electronic Music Center such as Milton Babbitt, Vladimir Ussachevsky, and Mario Davidovsky, and those linked to the Darmstadt School, such as Karlheinz Stockhausen and Tomás Marco, visited Mexico for the first time in large part thanks to Lavista's initiative. Lavista also arranged concerts devoted to the music of living composers. A remarkable example was a concert featuring Conlon Nancarrow's music at a time when Nancarrow was still largely ignored by mainstream avant-garde circles.³⁶ For Lavista, having an institutional platform, financial resources, and the support of the Benjamin Franklin Library to foster these enterprises constituted the only advantage of holding a governmental position. Later in life he admitted that he was not interested, nor would he ever be interested, in having the life of a government employee.³⁷

In the 1970s, the number of performers interested in “new music” repertoires in Mexico was very limited. Hence, composers such as Alicia Urreta, Manuel Enríquez, Federico Ibarra, and Mario Lavista often performed each other's music (see Figure 3.1). During his time working at the National University (UNAM), Lavista kept a busy performance schedule featuring new piano music, often playing with pianist Jorge Velazco (1942–2003), who was later to become a renowned orchestra director. On numerous occasions this duo performed works by Cage and other composers associated with the “New York School.”³⁸ In an interview published in 1975, referring to the composers associated with the New York School, Lavista stated that “this group of artists adopts, fundamentally, an attitude of criticism of the musical phenomenon.”³⁹ By promoting the experimental scene associated with Cage, Lavista found a way to publicly promote the use of open forms and indeterminacy as well as his own anti-establishment projects.

³⁶ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, February 22, 2012. Lavista recalled that the concert was a “failure” because there were no musicians in the audience: “Un concierto que fue un fracaso de público, no había músicos. Nancarrow se volvió popular en los ochenta, que es cuando en México surgieron los ‘nancarrowistas.’ No, yo estoy hablando del 75.”

³⁷ Lavista, discussion, February 22, 2012. Throughout his life Lavista was offered various directorships, which he declined.

³⁸ For instance, Lavista gave a concert in homage of Cage on November 19, 1975, at the National Music Conservatory. The pieces performed that night were *Suite for Toy Piano, 4'33"*, *Music for Marcel Duchamp*, and *Variations II*. On January 25, 1975, at the Benjamin Franklin Library, Lavista and Velazco performed Cage's *Suite for Toy Piano*, Morton Feldman's *Two Pieces for Two Pianos*, *Intermission 6*, and *Vertical Thoughts I*, Christian Wolff's *Duo for Pianists*, and Cage's *Music for Amplified Toy Pianos*.

³⁹ “Mario Lavista y Jorge Velazco en la Biblioteca Franklin, Mañana,” *Excelsior*, January 24, 1975. [Este grupo de artistas adopta, fundamentalmente, una actitud de crítica ante el fenómeno musical.]



Figure 3.1 Federico Ibarra and Mario Lavista (ca. mid-1970s). From Lavista's personal archive. Unknown photographer. Courtesy of Mario Lavista.

It was during this time that Lavista founded the music journal *Talea* in order to promote new music and music criticism (see Figure 3.2). Although the journal had only a brief life (1975–1976), its emergence filled a significant gap among music periodicals in the country. By the mid-1970s, the only publication that had remained constant among other transient initiatives was *Heterofonía*, largely due to its editor's private financing.⁴⁰ *Talea*, originally scheduled for publication three times a year, was proposed as a venue for specialized texts intended to attract not only scholars and academics, but also performers, artists, and music lovers in general. The periodical's goal was to expose, across and beyond the borders of the country, the main musical activities developed in Mexico. As head of the editorial board, Lavista opened the first issue of *Talea* with the following statement:

Talea aims to show the capacity and knowledge of the specialized sector of the country. . . . By doing so, artists and readers from abroad will be able to objectively evaluate a synthesis of Mexico's musical endeavors. Mexican readers, for their part,

⁴⁰ Esperanza Pulido was the founder and editor of *Heterofonía* until her death in 1991. Currently, *Heterofonía* is the main publication of the Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información Musical Carlos Chávez (Cenidim), an institution founded by the government in 1974 and now hosted at Mexico City's Centro Nacional de las Artes. To this date, *Heterofonía* is the longest-lived Mexican peer-reviewed music journal and continues to be an important venue for musicological publications, especially those within historical and/or analytical undertakings.

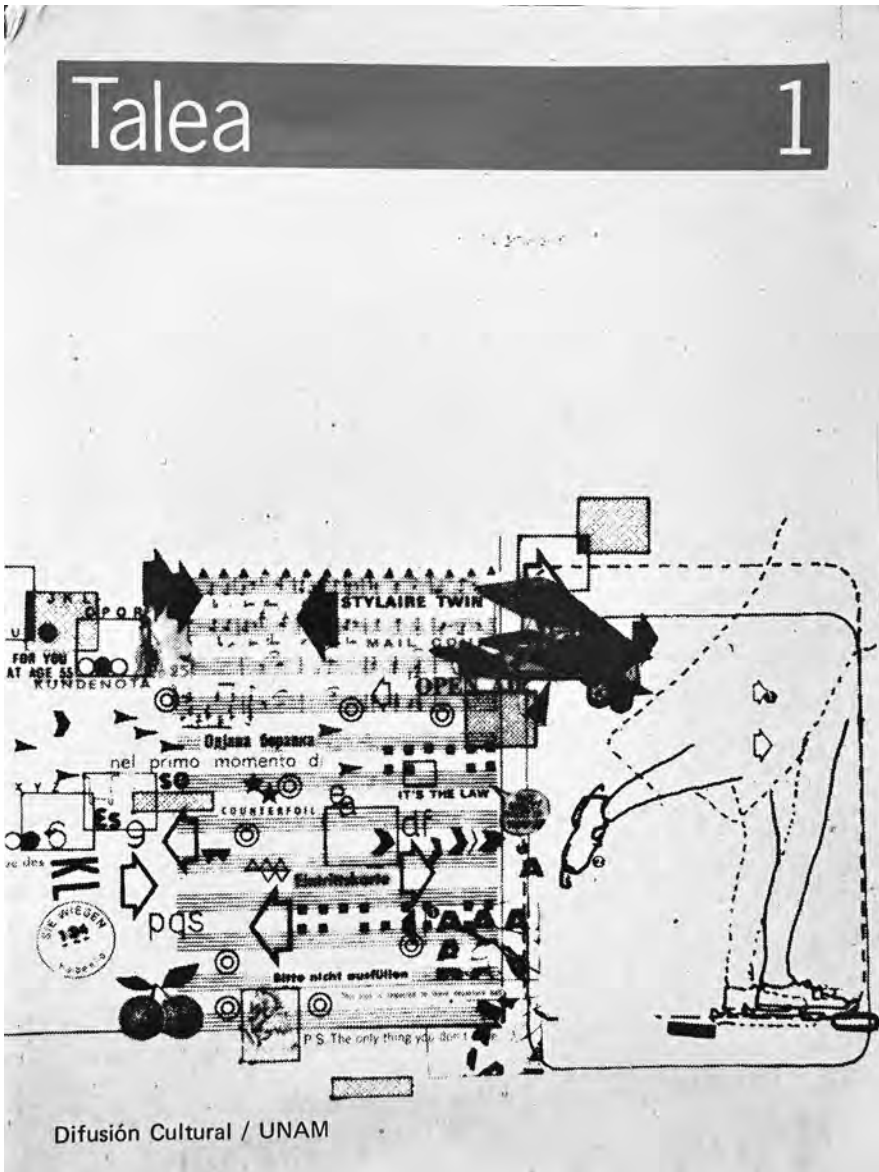


Figure 3.2 Cover of *Talea 1* (1975). Used by permission.

will begin to familiarize themselves (technically, profoundly, and seriously) with the most notable products of musical activity in Mexico and around the world.⁴¹

⁴¹ Mario Lavista, "Presentación," *Talea 1* (1975): 5–6. [*Talea* intenta mostrar la capacidad y los conocimientos del sector especializado del país.... De esta manera, el artista y el lector extranjeros podrán

Although the seven essays that comprise *Talea*'s first issue cover a great variety of subjects, the figure of Cage is noteworthy. To begin with, the journal's cover contains an excerpt of *ANalyse Du Virage* (1967) by Italian artist Gianni-Emilio Simonetti (see Figure 3.2), who dedicated all his graphic scores to Cage.⁴² Moreover, the journal's first entry is a reprint of Cage's text "The Future of Music," presumably the first Spanish translation of the essay.⁴³ A couple of years before, in 1972, Lavista had already published excerpts of Cage's writings in a newspaper article titled "A quien corresponda" ("To Whom It May Concern"), a phrase taken from the dedication page of Cage's book *Silence*. In Lavista's article, the reader is invited to read "without purpose . . . jumping from one place to the other, from one page to another, occasionally inserting other articles."⁴⁴ It includes quotes by Cage, Hegel, Satie, Feldman, Adorno, Borges, and Lewis Carroll, among others. Cage's philosophy, as manifested in his writings, was at the center of Lavista's own editorial operations.

While the figure of Cage is not highly noticeable in the next double issue of *Talea*, the journal presents an emphasis on experimental trends. It opens with a section of essays by contemporary composers writing about their work, including Manuel Enríquez, Roger Reynolds, Cornelius Cardew, David Rosenboom, and Barney Childs. This emphasis on new music distinguished *Talea* from other publications. The transnational networking that Lavista fostered in this periodical was remarkable, and although *Talea*'s life was short, the composer would later permute this editorial project into what became the journal *Pauta: Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical*. Lavista founded *Pauta* in 1982 and acted as its editorial director until his passing. A publication that joined music studies with poetry and visual arts, *Pauta* had a long life and a significant presence throughout Latin America.⁴⁵

A recounting of the projects that Lavista fostered during his short tenure as head of the Music Department of UNAM's Cultural Division exposes his orientation toward the kind of experimentalism practiced by the New York School, which largely formed around Cage. Lavista's promotional activities reached a climax when he invited Cage to visit the country in 1976. Shortly before Cage's visit, the board of the Society of Students of the Conservatory organized a cycle of four lectures/concerts devoted to contemporary music. At the third event, Lavista paid homage to Cage and played the *Suite for Toy Piano* and *Music for Marcel Duchamp*. During his lecture, Lavista quoted

evaluar una síntesis objetiva, real del quehacer musical mexicano. El público de México, por su parte, comenzará a familiarizarse (técnica, profunda, seriamente) con los resultados más notables de la actividad musical de México y el mundo.]

⁴² Udo Kultermann, *The New Painting*, rev. ed., trans. Wesley V. Blomster (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1977), 61.

⁴³ John Cage's text was translated by Manuel Nuñez Nava. This essay was later reprinted in *Pauta* 18 (1986): 6–23.

⁴⁴ Mario Lavista, "A quien corresponda," *La música en México: Suplemento mensual de El Día*, October 1, 1972. [Sin ningún propósito, "saltando" de un lado a otro, de una página otra e intercalando ocasionalmente otros artículos.]

⁴⁵ Lavista coordinated and directed the publication *Pauta* for a total of 147 issues. The last five issues were published posthumously. More about *Pauta* is presented in Chapter 4.

some of Cage's famous proclamations such as, "there is no time to analyze contemporary music; just to listen to it," which might have prepared the way for Cage's music to be heard upon his arrival. Cage's visit to Mexico was possible thanks to Donald H. Albright, who, in his capacity as director of the Benjamin Franklin Library, could finance the endeavor. Albright's enthusiasm to bring Cage to Mexico was fueled by a recommendation he received from his art consultant, visual artist Arnaldo Coen who, coincidentally, had been a long-time friend of the Lavista family.

Adventurous Playfulness: Coen, Lavista, Chance, and Spontaneity

As a visual artist, Arnaldo Coen (b. 1940) has been regarded as a pioneer in experimental multidisciplinary collaborations involving chance (see Figure 3.3). Starting early in his career, he engaged in collaborative projects that involved musicians, dancers, actors, and filmmakers. Coen's experimentation draws from his creative playfulness and sense of humor. In retrospect, he recalls that it was "the game"—*el juego*—or more accurately, "playing," that prompted him to explore ways in which music, painting, and movement could interact: "We would find analogies among the different artistic disciplines. We played a lot and . . . discovered things by chance while



Figure 3.3 Arnaldo Coen, ca. 1970. Photo by Manuel Álvarez Bravo. Used with permission by the Archivo Manuel Álvarez Bravo. Courtesy of Arnaldo Coen.

having fun. We had a lot of fun!”⁴⁶ Coen’s playful experimentation was accompanied by Cage’s philosophy and music. And it was a mutual admiration for Cage’s “boldness” that brought Coen and Lavista together. The motivation behind the series of collaborative efforts that Lavista and Coen initiated was a quest for the conceptual integration of music and image inspired by Cage’s experimental practices.

Music was an integral part of Coen’s upbringing: his grandmother, Fanny Anitúa, was an opera singer who often sang at Teatro alla Scala in Milan, and his father, Arrigo Coen, was a musicologist.⁴⁷ It was through his father that Coen became acquainted with composer Raúl Lavista (1913–1980), Mario Lavista’s uncle.⁴⁸ Coen recalls that he was warmly welcomed and treated like a son from the first time he entered into Raúl and Helen Lavista’s house in 1957. He fondly remembers that, when his mother passed away in 1958, the Lavistas wanted to adopt him.⁴⁹

Raúl and Helen Lavista’s house was a venue for weekly *tertulias*, or private social gatherings of literary and musical interest. These meetings brought together members of the artistic and intellectual elite of Mexico City, especially from the visual arts (Helen was a painter), cinema, and music (Raúl was a renowned film music composer).⁵⁰ During any given session, Raúl would play an LP record from his vast collection of purchases made at Mexico City’s prestigious record store, the Sala Margolín.⁵¹ According to Coen, these listening sessions were held with utmost respect; attendees were expected to refrain from talking or making any audible noise, as if they were sitting in a concert hall.⁵² These rituals were usually followed by conversations during which the guests would connect the music they just heard with larger interdisciplinary matters.⁵³ For a seventeen-year-old young man who aspired to become *un artista*

⁴⁶ Arnaldo Coen, “Arnaldo Coen 80 Aniversario,” recorded online conversation directed by Inti Cordera and produced by La Maroma, 2020. This program was posted as “Conversatorio Arnaldo Coen. Entre amigos,” on the Facebook page of the Museo de Arte Moderno de México, on June 10, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/MuseodeArteModernoMX/videos/2639586769645627/>, accessed June 22, 2023. The conversation was moderated by Pilar García and included Coen, Lourdes Sosa, Mario Lavista, Nicolás Echevarría, Santiago Espinosa de los Monteros, and Salvador Rocha. [Encontrábamos analogías entre las diferentes disciplinas artísticas. Jugábamos mucho ... descubríamos muchas cosas por azar, o por divertirnos. ¡Era muy divertido!]

⁴⁷ Presumably, contralto Fanny Anitúa (1887–1968) was the first Mexican opera singer to perform at Milan’s Teatro alla Scala. See Esperanza Pulido, “Mexican Women in Music,” *Latin American Music Review* 4, no. 1 (1983): 124.

⁴⁸ Arnaldo Coen, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, February 1, 2013. Coen recalls that his father Arrigo Coen and Raúl Lavista studied in a French institution, “with the Marists.” He was probably referring to Colegio Francés Morelos—now Centro Universitario México—which has been an institution operated by the Marist Brothers. More on Raúl Lavista is presented in Chapter 6.

⁴⁹ Coen, discussion, February 1, 2013.

⁵⁰ Coen met writer Salvador Elizondo, filmmaker Luis Buñuel, and pianist Claudio Arrau, among others, in Raúl Lavista’s *tertulias*.

⁵¹ In the 1960s and 1970s, the record store Sala Margolín was known primarily for its collection of *novedades* (new releases). It closed in 2012. See Ángel Vargas, “Sala Margolín, referente cultural, cerrará de manera definitiva,” *La Jornada*, April 18, 2012, <http://www.jornada.unam.mx/2012/04/18/cultura/a03n1cul>, accessed June 22, 2023.

⁵² Coen describes these listening sessions as “rituals.” Coen, discussion, February 1, 2013.

⁵³ Coen also recalls that a wide array of composers (from different time periods) were featured at these *tertulias*. See Arnaldo Coen, “La memoria y el olvido,” *Casa del Tiempo* 86 (2006): 60–61.

plástico (a visual artist), these sessions, apart from being educational, were strategically useful for making the necessary connections for future artistic endeavors.

Around the mid-1960s, Raúl introduced Coen to his nephew Mario, who started to attend the *tertulias*. Soon after, both Coen and Mario were granted scholarships to study in Paris. However, it was not until their return to Mexico that their collaborative endeavors began, when dancer and choreographer Rocío Sagaón invited them to participate in her “unorthodox” experimental project *Danza Hebdomadaria*.⁵⁴ For that enterprise, Coen designed the scenography and Lavista—with Quanta—provided the music. The ultimate goal of the project, Coen recalls, was to engage in a practice of collective improvisation that would allow for each presentation to be different, avoiding repetition.⁵⁵ Due to the project’s low funds, Coen suggested that instead of using costumes, he would paint the dancers’ bodies. Lavista recounts this event as follows:

One of our first collaborations had to do with scores, or better said, with musical graphs that Coen conceived and painted on the bodies of several [female] dancers who danced around a small ensemble of musicians: the improvisation group Quanta, of which I was a member. . . . [In this project] sounds emerged while the performers read the mobile scores made of signs and elements of an eminently pictorial nature. It was as if a visual texture, drawn on bodies in constant movement became a sonorous texture. . . . [T]he pictorial became, in the hands of the musicians, the visual representation of a musical occurrence.⁵⁶

A similar enterprise was devised for *Prometeo: Espectáculo Pop*, presented at the Palace of Fine Arts in 1971, a project Coen envisioned in conjunction with his brothers Aristides and Amilcar Coen—both of whom were very involved in Mexico City’s experimental scene. For this project, Amilcar, who at the time was Lavista’s student at the Conservatory, selected one of Lavista’s electronic pieces as part of the spectacle.⁵⁷ The collaboration between the Coen brothers and Lavista continued in the following years. In 1973, for the inauguration of Arnaldo’s art exhibition at El Club de Industriales, Lavista and Amilcar performed a “Concert of Electroacoustic Music”

⁵⁴ Coen, discussion, February 1, 2013.

⁵⁵ Arnaldo Coen, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, March 20, 2007.

⁵⁶ Mario Lavista, “Respuesta al discurso de ingreso a la Academia de Artes del Maestro Arnaldo Coen,” in *Lo lúdico en lo cotidiano: Discurso de ingreso a la Academia de Artes de Arnaldo Coen*, ed. Louise Noelle (Mexico City: Academia de Artes, 2010), 24. [Una de nuestras primeras colaboraciones tiene que ver con las partituras, o más bien, con las grafías musicales que Arnaldo concibió y pintó en los cuerpos de varias bailarinas que danzaban alrededor de un pequeño ensamble de músicos: el grupo de improvisación musical Quanta, del cual yo era parte. . . . En ella, los sonidos surgían a medida que los intérpretes leían esas partituras móviles hechas de signos y elementos de naturaleza eminentemente pictórica. Era como si una textura visual, trazada en unos cuerpos que se desplazan constantemente se convirtiera en una textura sonora. . . . Lo pictórico se convertía, en manos de los ejecutantes, en la representación visual de un acontecer musical.]

⁵⁷ The electronic piece Amilcar Coen most probably used in *Prometeo: Espectáculo Pop* was *Alme* (1971). For more about Lavista’s electronic pieces, see Chapter 2.

in which they improvised on a prepared piano, a cello with attached microphone, one of Julián Carrillo's microtonal harps, a shortwave radio, and percussion, all while Lavista's electronic piece *Alme* played in the background.⁵⁸

Arnaldo Coen and Lavista's shared interest for experimental projects, collective improvisation, interdisciplinary endeavors, and the work of John Cage culminated in their collaboration on a series of three graphic scores. These scores were physical objects of what had been, up to this point, projects of an ephemeral nature. The first in the series was *Cluster* (1973), a score that consists of a single cluster played by the whole span of both arms of the pianist. The idea is to cover as much of the keyboard's register as possible while holding the sustain pedal down.⁵⁹ According to Lavista, the primary objective for this piece was to use the minimum number of elements and to provide the performer with maximum freedom (see Figure 3.4). The cluster is meant to be performed as loud and as strongly as possible. To that effect, more than one pianist could simultaneously participate. Lavista performed the piece in conjunction with Jorge Velazco on July 5, 1975, in a program that also included works by Cage, Charles Ives, Satie, and Henry Cowell. As reporter Elisa Kahan describes, Lavista and Velazco used the whole length of both arms to forcefully attack the keyboard—an effect that she labeled as “scary”: “Both pianists . . . pounded both arms on the keyboard with such strength and brutal effect that it scared [the audience].”⁶⁰

Coen recalls that the concept of *Cluster* came about during a party. He insists on the playfulness of conceiving projects by recalling that, while at the party he turned to Lavista and said: “Mario, I'm going to play a full sonata in one strike.” Following this statement, he pressed his upper body on the keyboard of a piano placed at the center of the room.⁶¹ He claims this event also responded to the purpose of incorporating mundane actions into their practice—something that both Marcel Duchamp and Cage advocated. Both Coen and Lavista found a path of discovery in the ludic aspects of Dadaism. As Coen describes:

⁵⁸ In the program note for the exhibition, we find the following note: “Los dos elementos que constituyen la base de esta obra son de naturaleza diversa. Ambos aparecen simultáneamente; uno de ellos música electrónica grabada en cinta magnética, carece de interpretación al eliminar al ejecutante. Este elemento posee una sola configuración y su duración es siempre la misma; el otro, improvisación instrumental exige para su realización la presencia del creador-intérprete y su configuración y duración son imprevisibles.” Arnaldo Coen, Galería del Club de Industriales, Mexico City, 1973.

⁵⁹ Using two long pieces of wood to cover both black and white keys is also allowed. *Cluster* was premiered by Kitzia Weiss at UNAM's Facultad de Filosofía y Letras in October, 1973. The piece was later recorded by Alicia Urreta for the series *Voz Viva de México*, Serie Música Nueva, UNAM, 1975, LP. U.S. composer Steve Montagne made a version of the work where, just as the sound of the cluster is about to vanish, a previously recorded version of it is made audible in retrograde motion. See María Ángeles González and Leonora Saavedra, *Música mexicana contemporánea* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1982), 125.

⁶⁰ Elisa Kahan, “Collage, Espectáculo Musical,” *Tiempo*, July 7, 1975. [Ambos pianistas . . . azotaron ambos antebrazos sobre el teclado con tal fuerza que asustó por el brutal efecto.] In a previous event, on February 10, 1975, *Cluster* was simultaneously performed by three pianists: Alicia Urreta, Carlos Cruz de Castro, and César Brito.

⁶¹ Coen, “Arnaldo Coen 80 Aniversario.” [Mario, te voy a tocar una sonata completa de un solo golpe.]

CLUSTER
(1973)
for any number of pianos
and pianists

Ped. do not release the pedal till the sound disappears *

LAVISTA/COEN

Figure 3.4 Mario Lavista and Arnaldo Coen, *Cluster* (1973). Used by permission.

The story of *Cluster* could simply be reduced to that game of being obsessed with something; with a concept. You discover numerous elements in the daily routine that are waiting to be legitimized, or to be appreciated as artworks. . . . [All you have to do is] to be open to that type of sensitivity and to that which is conceptual, and to produce an action that could lead to sonorous or visual results.⁶²

Lavista had already shown a predilection for indeterminacy in his own compositions from the late 1960s and early 1970s. In *Game* (for any number of flutes) and *Pieza*

⁶² Coen, discussion, March 20, 2007. [La historia de *Cluster* fue simplemente este juego de cuando uno está muy clavado en algo, sobre todo en lo conceptual. Uno está descubriendo en lo cotidiano una cantidad de elementos que basta que uno los legitime, o los aprecie como obras. . . . Es estar abierto a esa sensibilidad, estar abierto a la parte conceptual, y a una acción donde el resultado fuera sonoro o visual.]

para un(a) pianista y un piano, both from 1970, Lavista allowed the order of the sections to be decided by the performer (in the manner of Stockhausen's *Klavierstück XI*). Nevertheless, the notation system Lavista used for both scores is precise and detailed. The performer is free to decide the order and number of repetitions of the musical events that are already fully notated.⁶³ In *Pieza para dos pianistas y un piano* (1975), Lavista incorporates a performative theatrical use of silence by asking the second pianist to remain on stage without playing the piano at all. The sole function of the second pianist is to "communicate this silence to the listeners."⁶⁴ As Gerard Béhague observed, "Silence in the Cagean concept—that is, the absence of sounds or noises intentionally made—becomes an integral part of the activity of performers and involves the attention of listeners. Lavista here applies the concept but dramatizes it by demanding an apparent contradiction (performance versus non-performance) in one and the same situation."⁶⁵ Other pieces of this period that present sections to be performed in a flexible order are *Diafonia* (1973), for two pianos and percussion, and *Diálogos* (1974), for violin and piano.

While in his other pieces of the early 1970s Lavista incorporated a certain degree of indeterminacy and nonconventional notation, his collaboration with Coen for *Cluster* was to be the first that most directly alluded to the type of experimentalism inspired by the Dadaist aspects of Cage's philosophy. Both visually and aurally *Cluster* is simple, direct, and austere. That the title, subtitle, and instruction phrase, "do not release the pedal till the sound disappears," included in the graphic score are written in English and *not* in Spanish is indicative of the ways in which their practice was conceived as being in dialogue not solely with Cage but, most generally, with a branch of U.S. experimentalism. *Cluster* not only responds to Dadaism and Cagean aesthetics but also to a long tradition of music produced in the United States that incorporates nonconventional ways of playing piano. As is well known, Cowell's unconventional treatment of performing piano was very influential on Cage's development of the prepared piano. Cowell's experimental music had had a significant presence in Mexico since the 1930s as he had been one of Chávez's collaborators.⁶⁶

The next collaborative endeavor between Coen and Lavista presents an exceptional complexity in that it functions as a three-part counterpoint by integrating drawings, graphic notation, and randomly selected words on the pages of an art catalogue. In

⁶³ At the beginning of *The Open Work*—a book Lavista knew very well—Umberto Eco begins by reflecting on pieces in which composers leave the order of the events to be determined by the performer who must "impose his judgment on the form of the piece, as when he decides how long to hold a note or in what order to group the sounds: all this amounts to an act of improvised creation." Eco continues by explaining that these works offer themselves as open works, "which are brought to their conclusion by the performer at the same time as he experiences them on an aesthetic plane." See Umberto Eco, *The Open Work*, trans. Anna Cancogni (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 1, 3.

⁶⁴ As stated in the introductory note that accompanies the score.

⁶⁵ Gerard Béhague, *Music in Latin America: An Introduction* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1979), 298.

⁶⁶ For more about Chávez and Cowell, see Stephanie N. Stallings, "The Pan/American Modernisms of Carlos Chávez and Henry Cowell," in *Carlos Chávez and His World*, ed. Leonora Saavedra (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 28–45.

1974, Coen asked Lavista to incorporate graphic notation to the catalogue of his art exhibition, *Mutaciones*. Lavista explains: “instead of having an introductory text, as is the norm, [Arnaldo] wanted a graphic score that could work as an introduction [to his paintings]. Hence, I elaborated the graphic score that was published as part of the catalogue, which was meant for the audience to ‘read’ it.”⁶⁷ Coen envisioned Lavista’s graphic intervention as a way to connect his drawings with a series of words that Coen had randomly combined (see Figure 3.5).

Lavista’s musical annotations are integrated with the written text at the bottom of each page of the catalogue. As shown in the catalogue’s cover, the word *mutaciones* could potentially be sung, following certain musical gestures. Dynamics and articulation markings are specified, as well as a general range of pitches that are assigned in a span of 55 minutes, a duration marked on the right side of the score.⁶⁸ The eleven-page catalogue is in fact an exploration of myriad graphic notation gestures, including those used by other composers in particular compositions. For instance, on the third page of the catalogue, Lavista inserts an excerpt of Stockhausen’s *Kurzwellen*, and on the fourth page he includes his own drawing of the *I Ching*’s fifth hexagram, “Sü” or “waiting,” which could be interpreted as an indication of silence of musical sound while the text is recited in the span of 144 minutes (see Figure 3.6).⁶⁹

A more dynamic interaction of Coen’s drawing, text, and musical notation is found on page 8. The drawing shows a central circle from which a multitude of diagonal lines radiate out to the external frame. This is musically interpreted by assigning diagonal lines that depart from what could be a middle C into a total of thirty-eight notes of a wide range. The text that accompanies that page reads as follows: *de los campeones Y SON proscritos por EL DESTINO EL TRIU* (from the champions and are banned by the destination the triu(mph)). The word *destino*, which could be translated as destiny, destination, or fate, is printed in a much bigger (and wider) font. While Coen claims that the selection of the words was random, the placement of that word on this page, which is the only one containing a clear center—a perfect circle—also resonates with the most precise use of music notation, as each pitch is clearly specified. It could be argued that the “fate” of this indeterminate piece is actually meant to be purposefully determined (see Figure 3.7).

The three-part counterpoint between image, notation, and text allows for multiple levels of interpretation and is a prime example of a collaborative graphic score. To my knowledge, *Mutaciones*—as a graphic score—was not premiered until the summer of 2014 at the Museo Universitario de Ciencias y Artes (MUCA Roma) in Mexico City.⁷⁰

⁶⁷ Mario Lavista, email message to author, August 27, 2007. [En lugar de tener un texto de presentación como es lo usual, [Arnaldo] quería una partitura gráfica que funcionara como presentación. Así que realicé la partitura gráfica que se publicó a lo largo del catálogo para que el público la “leyera.”]

⁶⁸ The durations in *Mutaciones* are based on the golden ratio (also known as the golden section or divine proportion), the ratio between two numbers that equals approximately 1.618.

⁶⁹ The *I Ching*, or *Yi-jing*, translated as “Book of Changes,” is an ancient Chinese divination and prophecy text, dating from the fourth century B.C.

⁷⁰ The sonic realization of *Mutaciones* at MUCA was part of a collaborative project between Arnaldo Coen and Carlos Ranc, titled *Sin inscripción previa*.

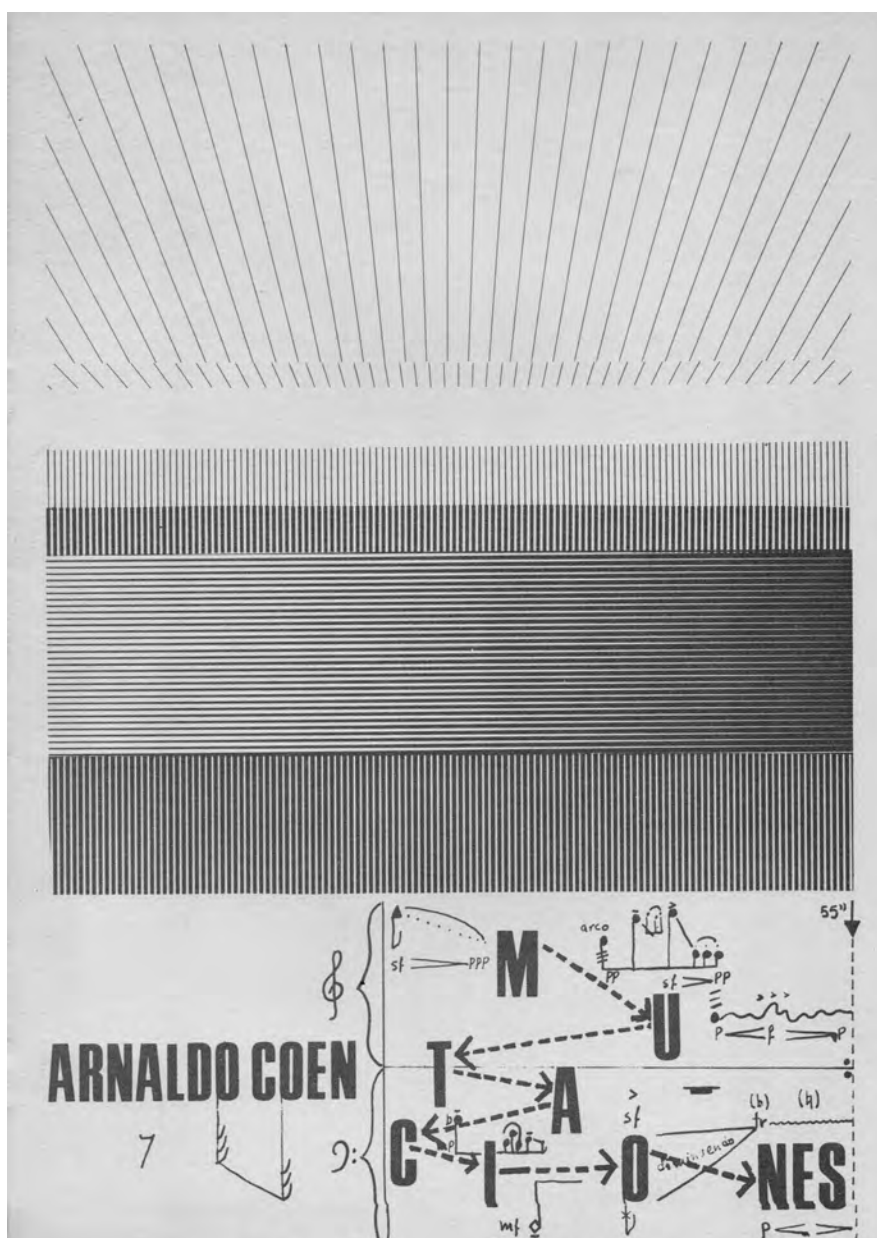


Figure 3.5 Arnaldo Coen and Mario Lavista, cover of the exhibition catalogue *Mutaciones* (1974). Courtesy of Arnaldo Coen.

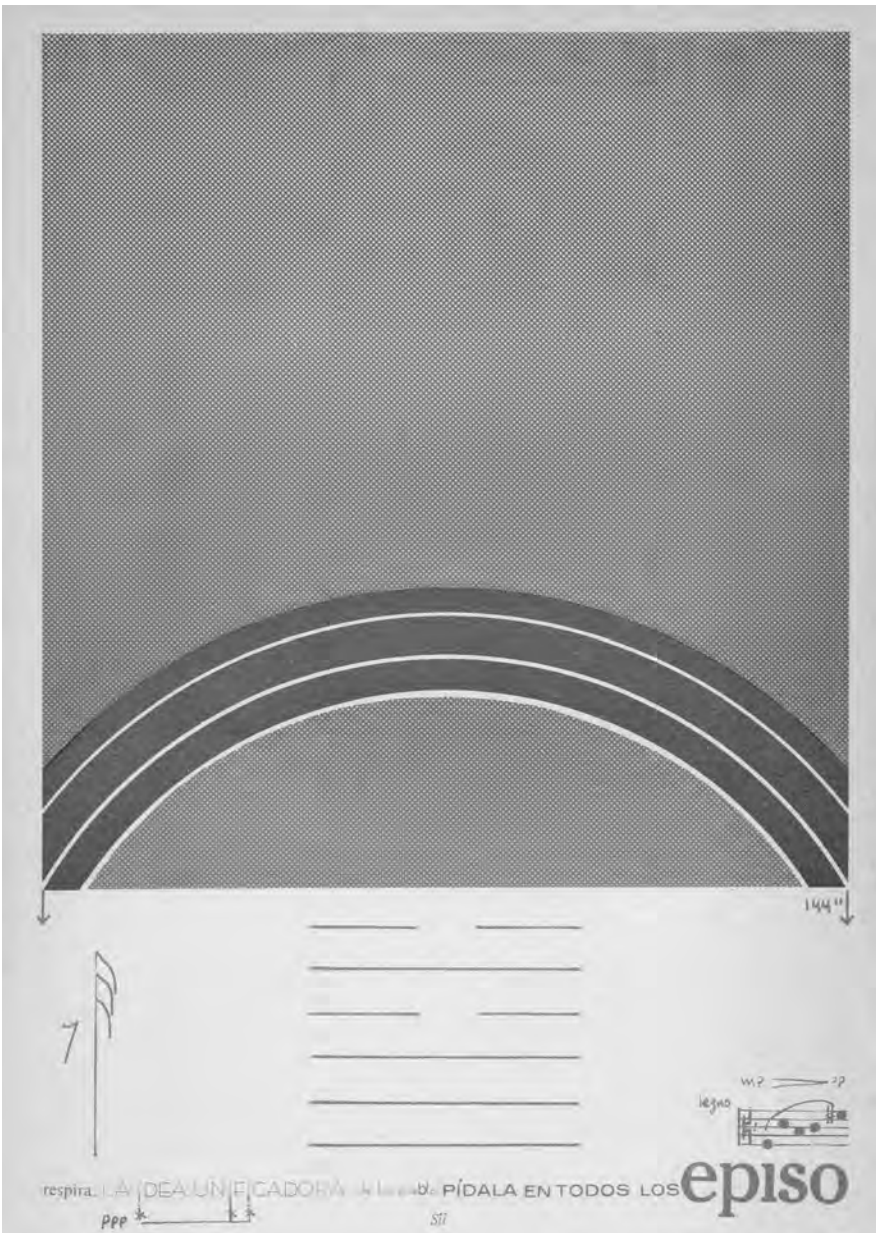


Figure 3.6 Arnaldo Coen and Mario Lavista, page 4 of the exhibition catalogue *Mutaciones* (1974). Courtesy of Arnaldo Coen.

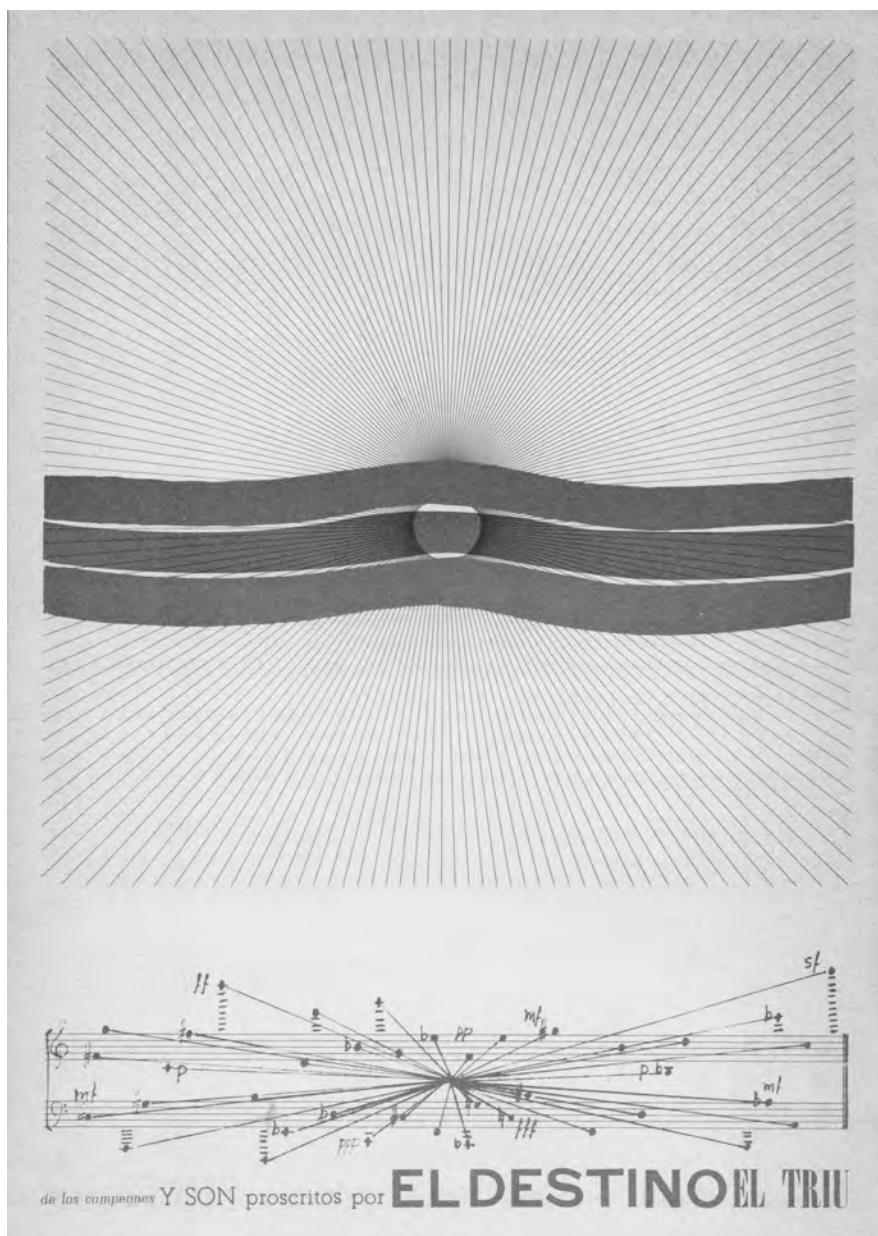


Figure 3.7 Arnaldo Coen and Mario Lavista, page 3 of the exhibition catalogue *Mutaciones* (1974). Courtesy of Arnaldo Coen.

The piece was performed by an ensemble of eight musicians, each representing one of the eight elements of the *I Ching*: heaven (keyboard), earth (piano), water (guitar), fire (electric bass), wind (drums), thunder (trumpet), mountain (double bass), and lake (vibraphone).⁷¹ The experience of collaborating on a piece that amalgamated music and image allowed Lavista and Coen to manifest the concepts that Cage—through his use of the *I Ching*—had inspired in them.⁷²

That Time Cage Came to Mexico in 1976

While Cage's music and philosophy were widely known in Mexico City art circles, his 1976 visit was an incentive for some to fully embrace the approach to music that Cage was promoting in order to create pieces with various levels of indeterminacy and audience participation. Cage arrived in Mexico in February of that year, and, as previously discussed, his visit was made possible by Lavista through UNAM's Cultural Division. Cage's visit involved three public lectures and a concert. Held at the Benjamin Franklin Library, the concert featured the *Etudes Australes* I–VIII (1974–1975) performed by pianist Grete Sultan, who traveled with Cage, and excerpts of *Empty Words* (1974), performed by Cage. Elements of chance and aleatoric procedures in composition were concepts that Cage stressed in his lectures. He explained his use of both the *I Ching* and the star charts of the *Atlas Australis* to compose his *Etudes Australes*. Sultan's performance of this piece, followed by Cage's theatrical reading, caused amusement, surprise, and shock. As musicologist Esperanza Pulido reports, "Cage read the words with his mouth glued to the microphone while drawings by Thoreau were projected on the screen.... It was an impressive spectacle because one could not make sense of what was heard, although Cage's vocal inflections and his staggering dramatism gave meaning to what was seen on screen."⁷³ A musical piece based on chance was perhaps not as shocking as the unintelligibility of language performed by Cage.⁷⁴

⁷¹ The ensemble was directed by Rubén Romero. A short video clip and photographs of the performance can be found in Rubén Romero, "Mutaciones," *Its Mind Project: Investigación plástica de Rubén Romero* (blog), <https://itsmindproject.wordpress.com/proyectos/mutaciones/>, accessed June 22, 2023.

⁷² Most recently, on June 11, 2022, the Ensemble Cepromusic, directed by José Luis Castillo, performed *Mutaciones* at the Blas Galindo Hall of the National Center for the Arts. See Centro Nacional de las Artes, "... todo muta, Mario | Ensemble Cepromusic," YouTube video, 1:50:25, June 11, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HrvVpm6StnM>, accessed June 22, 2023. Also see Juan Arturo Brennan, "Mutación y divertimento," *La Jornada*, June 18, 2022, <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2022/06/18/opinion/a03a1cul>, accessed June 22, 2023.

⁷³ Esperanza Pulido, "John Cage en México," *Heterofonía* 47 (1976): 30. In her short report on this event, Pulido enthusiastically praises Grete Sultan's technique. [Cage las leía con la boca pegada al micrófono y unas transparencias de dibujos de Thoreau, proyectada en la pantalla.... La cosa era impresionante, porque no había sentido alguno en todo lo que se escuchaba, pero en las inflexiones de la voz de Cage y su dramatismo asombroso, se lo daban a aquello que veía uno en la pantalla.]

⁷⁴ As Rebecca Kim argues, beginning in the 1970s, Cage was interested in using his speaking voice as source material to "musicat[e] or 'demilitarize' language of its syntax according to its sounding qualities." Rebecca Kim, "In No Uncertain Musical Terms: The Cultural Politics of John Cage's Indeterminacy" (PhD diss., Columbia University, 2008), 359. I want to thank Sara Haefeli for pointing me to Kim's discussion of the quality of Cage's voice.

Composers in Mexico had been incorporating certain degrees of indeterminacy in their work since the 1960s. Manuel Enríquez was one of the fiercest advocates of open forms. Pieces such as *Reflexiones* and *Ambivalencia* from 1964, as well as his Second String Quartet (1967), *Díptico I*, and *Móvil I* from 1969 were direct antecedents of other indeterminate works composed through the 1970s. Enríquez himself confirmed that his use of chance was informed by Cage: “If you ask me if Cage’s ideas have had an influence on my music, the answer would be: yes, I think so; particularly in terms of the element of chance, and in some aspects of the search for instrumental timbre and color.”⁷⁵ Other Mexican composers recognized Cage as a philosopher, writer, and innovator, but not so much as a composer. Julio Estrada (b. 1943) once said, “It seemed to me that [Cage] was more indecisive than indeterministic. The indeterminacy seemed to be, in his case, not wanting to define things. . . . To some, Cage is a reference.”⁷⁶ Joaquín Gutiérrez Heras (1927–2012), on the other hand, commented that “[a]ctually, I have not heard a single one of his works that I am attracted to as music, or that I would like to listen to again. . . . Cage is one of those composers, perhaps the first one, whose works always have to be preceded by a lecture, and the lecture always turns out to be more interesting than the music itself.”⁷⁷ As these comments illustrate, the reception of Cage’s music in Mexico was similar to that in other parts of the world. Even though this dismissive attitude was shared by many, Cage—as a reference—circulated among experimental music circles across the country.⁷⁸

Cage’s visit to Mexico in 1976 was talked about and reported in newspapers and music and art journals. Little has been documented, however, on other details of his visit. Although Cage never visited the country again—at least not in any official capacity—he continued corresponding with some of the people he met while in the country. He enthusiastically collaborated with *Pauta* by sending some of his writings to be translated into Spanish for the first time.⁷⁹ Moreover, some of the personal

⁷⁵ Eduardo Soto Millán, “36’06” (a cerca de John Cage)” (unpublished essay, 1982), 22. [Si me preguntas si acaso las ideas de Cage han ejercido alguna influencia en mi música, la respuesta sería: sí, pienso que sí. Particularmente en lo que se refiere al uso del elemento del azar y en algunos aspectos de la búsqueda tímbrica y de color en cuanto a los instrumentos.]

⁷⁶ Soto Millán, “36’06” (a cerca de John Cage),” 23–24. [Me pareció que [Cage] era más indeciso que indeterminista. La indeterminación parecería ser en su caso, no querer definir las cosas. . . . Para algunos Cage es una referencia.]

⁷⁷ Joaquín Gutiérrez Heras, quoted in González and Saavedra, *Música mexicana contemporánea*, 66–67, 70. [En realidad, no he oído una sola obra suya que me atraiga como música, o que quisiera volver a oír. . . . Cage es uno de los típicos compositores, quizá el primer compositor, cuyas obras siempre tienen que ir precedidas por una conferencia y la conferencia siempre resulta ser más interesante que la música misma.]

⁷⁸ Composer Manuel Rocha Iturbide (b. 1963) notes that Cage’s experimental attitude, perceived by Mexicans as “liberatory” and rebellious against the norms established by academic institutions, permeated beyond concert music and into pop and alternative scenes. See Manuel Rocha Iturbide, “Arqueología de la música experimental,” in *Ready Media: Hacia una arqueología de los medios y la invención en México* (Mexico City: Laboratorio de Arte Alameda, INBA and Conaculta, 2010), 171. To Rocha Iturbide, Cage was the “prophet” of a new gospel that promoted an integration of social matters to aesthetic realms by incorporating audience’s participation. See Manuel Rocha Iturbide, *El eco está en todas partes* (Mexico City: Alias Editorial, 2013), 142.

⁷⁹ John Cage, “Tema y variaciones: Introducción,” trans. Rafael Vargas, *Pauta: Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical* 18 (1986): 41–59.

correspondence between Cage and Lavista was eventually published in that venue as well.⁸⁰

Permuting Cage

After Cage's departure, Lavista and Coen planned a collaborative score that was meant as a present for Cage on the occasion of his 64th birthday—a symbolic number in the *I Ching* for its total number of sixty-four hexagrams. Hence, this project would take the *I Ching*'s chance procedures as a point of departure. In the span of five years, three artworks resulted from that collaboration: *Trans / mutaciones*, *Jaula*, and *In / cubaciones*—the last including poetry by Francisco Serrano (b. 1949).⁸¹ While the three works are separate entities, each with a life of its own, one could regard them together as a triptych. The three works present unifying physical and conceptual elements, most obviously the set of sixteen layers of concentric cubes.

The design of the set was originally conceived by Coen and titled *Mutaciones* (from early 1976). *Trans / mutaciones* (1976) has the same arrangement of concentric cubes, but each layer is painted with a different color (see Figure 3.8). *Jaula* (1976) is a set of white layers on which Lavista drew silver dots at the edges of the cubes, representing musical notes to be performed by any number of prepared pianos. *In / cubaciones* (1980–1981) is also made up of a set of white sheets onto which Serrano printed text in each of the layers to create a multidirectional poem.

Both *Cluster* and *Jaula* have been recognized as important touchstones in the repertory of graphic scores in Mexico, and they stand out in Lavista's catalogue for their nonconventionality in terms of notation and concept. The idea of *Jaula* originated from an informal conversation between Lavista and Coen about conceptual art, indeterminacy, and the element of chance, all of which were ideas taken directly from Cage's writings and from the lectures he gave in Mexico City. Coen began working with a set of sixteen white sheets cutting windows in the shape of concentric cubes, which resulted in the set *Mutaciones*. Then, he gave Lavista the set, so that he could add some kind of graphic notation. While in Coen's art catalogue Lavista included different graphic styles, this time he limited his intervention by drawing only silver dots into the edges of each layer (see Figure 3.8).

Jaula was first performed in 1977 by Lavista and Ibarra at the Palace of Fine Arts in a version for prepared piano for four hands.⁸² That *Jaula* is written for prepared piano could be seen as an obvious choice: the piece was conceived as an homage to Cage, who is regarded as the “father” of the prepared piano. This, however, was not

⁸⁰ Five letters from Cage addressed to Lavista written from June 1976 to March 1984 were translated by Luis Ignacio Helguera and published in *Pauta* 43 (1992): 26–30.

⁸¹ The English translation of the artworks' titles would be: *Trans / mutations*, *Cage*, *In / cubations*.

⁸² An image of the program for this concert is included in the companion website for this book.

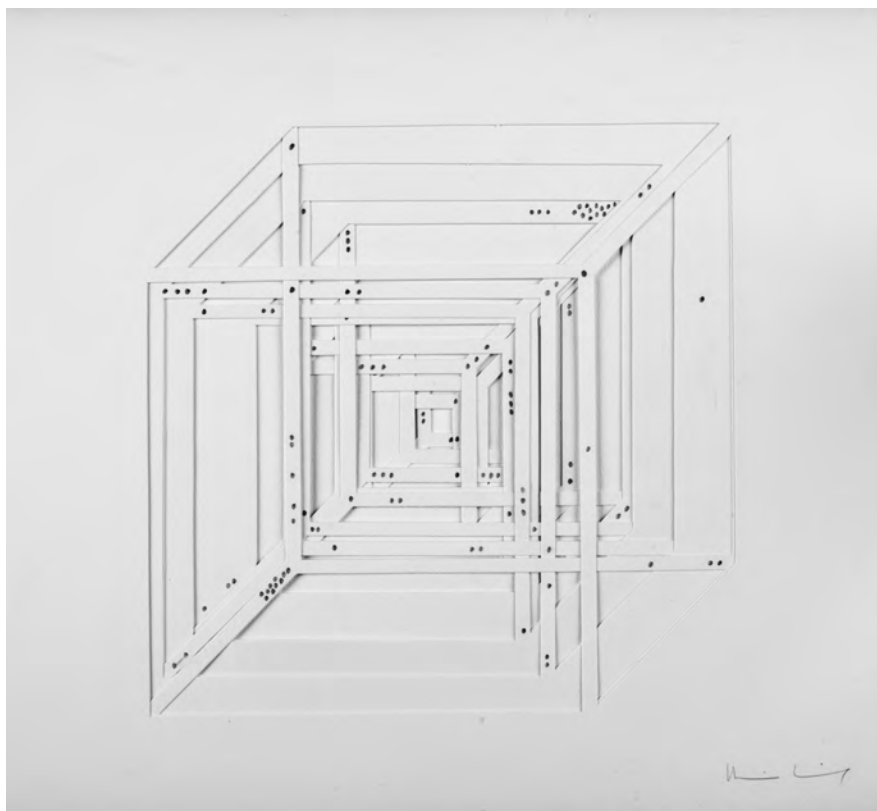


Figure 3.8 Arnaldo Coen and Mario Lavista *Jaula* (1976). Courtesy of Arnaldo Coen.

the first time Lavista used prepared piano in his compositions. *Continuo*, a piece for small orchestra (1971), was written for two prepared pianos with each to be played by two performers: one in charge of the keyboard and the other responsible for playing the strings inside the piano.⁸³ In his introductory notes for *Jaula*, Lavista instructs the pianist to “modify the characteristics of the Cs, As, Gs and Es by placing pieces of rubber, screws, pieces of wood and/or any other material between the strings of said notes.”⁸⁴ He does not specify the exact position of these materials between the piano’s strings; rather, he leaves those decisions to the performer’s discretion: “The exact

⁸³ *Continuo* calls for: four horns, two trumpets, two trombones, one tuba, four percussion, two pianos, and strings. In the score, Lavista prescribes two pieces of eraser or two pieces of soft wood and two metal nails to be placed on specific piano strings: “The only valid criteria on the part of the pianist for the preparation of the pianos should be looking for the best sonorities in each of the strings prepared.” Unpublished score with indications written in English.

⁸⁴ Mario Lavista, instruction note for *Jaula*. [Modificar las características de los do, la, sol y mi por medio de la colocación de pedazos de goma, tornillos, taquetes (pedazos de madera) y/o cualquier otro material entre las cuerdas de dichas notas.]

position and size of the different materials will be determined by experience; always seeking the best sonority.”⁸⁵

In *Jaula*, the realization of the graphic score is limited to the use of only four pitches throughout the keyboard, C, A, G, and E, which allows for a total of thirty sounds distributed throughout the different octaves. Even though the graphic score consists of sixteen separate layers of concentric cubes, Lavista specifies that all the layers must be superimposed and read as a single page. The biggest cube (the first layer) should be divided into three registers of ten sounds each: low register, middle register, and high register. Performers are free to choose every aspect of rhythm and dynamics, although they are required to play with the resonance pedal depressed throughout the entire performance. Lavista purposefully plays with the term *cage* by titling the work *jaula* (the Spanish word for cage), which makes reference to Coen’s cubes, and by delimiting, at least on paper, the use of only four notes that spell out Cage’s name. He ironically adopts the concept of a cage—which evokes enclosure—for the conceptual background of the most open (indeterminate) work in his catalogue.

Jaula is perhaps the utmost example of how Cage—the man—through a creative process of translation and resignification becomes a *signo*; Cage-the-*jaula*. A last name is transformed into sounds coming from a familiar instrument that sounds *different*. In this differentiation strategy, Cage-the-*jaula* alludes to a poetics of a space. Inside the *jaula*, Lavista becomes the protagonist of a type of sound experimentalism in dialogue with other art forms. As Serrano expresses in his poem, this is not *only* a cage; it is, indeed, also a window.

While Lavista was working on *Jaula*, Coen prepared a set of eight colored concentric cubes that he titled *Trans / mutaciones*. As with *Mutaciones* and *Jaula*, each concentric cube is formed by two layers. In this case, each layer is painted with a different color, alternating between warm and cool colors, and arranged from darkest to lightest. As in the previous sets, the distance between the cubes is not consistent, since Coen used aleatoric procedures and relied on certain logarithms to construct the work. The fact that he used colored layers gives the viewer the freedom, in the artist’s words, “to see the landscape or image he desires.”⁸⁶ In keeping with the title, the viewer’s appreciation of the work is “transmuted” or “transformed” by every turn of the page, and, with each iteration, a different perception of the cubes is achieved. The addition of color radically reinvents the work (see Figure 3.9).

Coen also envisioned a version of the work—another “mutation”—that could include written text. He wanted the text to be fragmentary, like a remembrance of pages of a book one once read.⁸⁷ In 1980, he invited Serrano to create a mutable, flexible,

⁸⁵ Lavista, instruction note for *Jaula*. [La exacta posición y tamaño de los diferentes materiales lo determinará la experiencia; buscar siempre la mejor sonoridad.]

⁸⁶ Coen, discussion, March 20, 2007. [La idea de los cubos es . . . que cada quién vaya haciendo su paisaje como quiera.]

⁸⁷ Coen thought of inviting Octavio Paz to collaborate on this project, but he didn’t feel their relationship was strong enough at that point in time. Coen, discussion, March 20, 2007.



Figure 3.9 Arnaldo Coen, *Trans / mutaciones* (1976). Courtesy of Arnaldo Coen.

and fragmentary poem to be inserted in a set of white concentric cubes that could be read in any direction: horizontal, vertical, or diagonal. The result was *In / cubaciones*, and as we can see, the title alludes to the insertion of the text “in” the “cubes” (see Figure 3.10).

“Incubation” also implies the development of something before its full manifestation. In this sense, the poem develops, or emerges, as the layers are superimposed.⁸⁸ Serrano explains that *In / cubaciones* consists of four distinct poems, one for each side of the cubes. The poem developed at the superior column is centered around “a perception from the enclosure, inside the cage, on the exterior world.” The one located in the inferior column alludes to an erotic moment in which geometric bodies are also our human bodies. The poem in the right column is “a series of variations about senses

⁸⁸ Serrano published *In / cubaciones* in the collection *Poemas (1969–2000)* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2003), 87–104. He gave the poem the subtitle “Poema progresivo.”

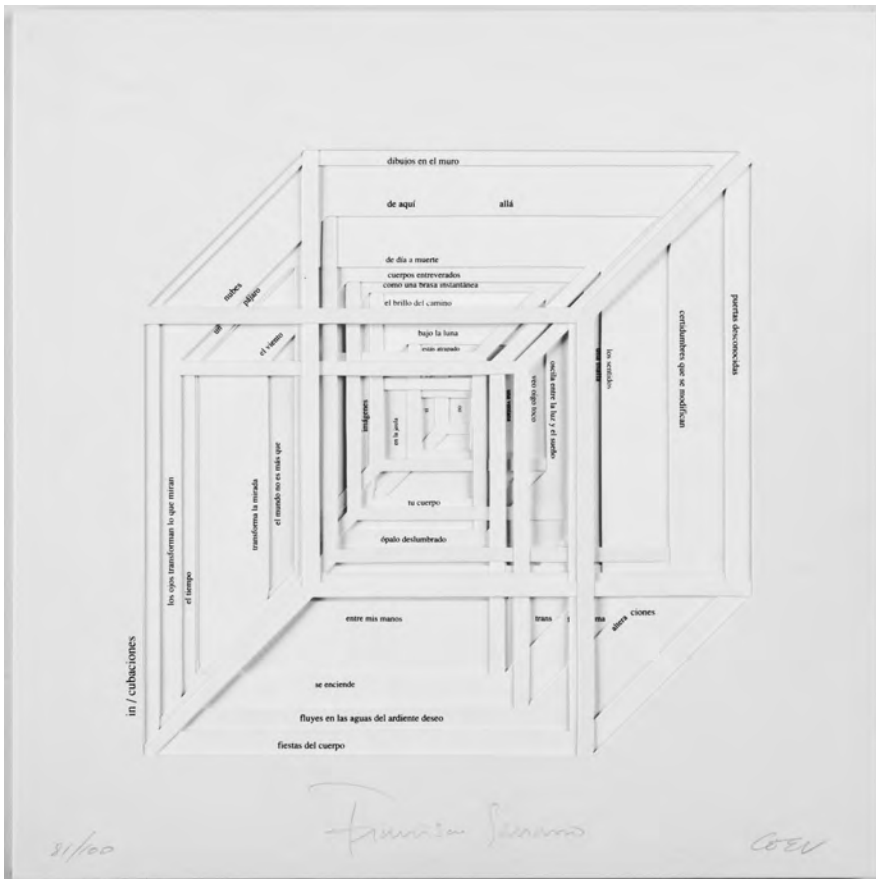


Figure 3.10 Arnaldo Coen and Francisco Serrano, *In / cubaciones*, 1980. Courtesy of Arnaldo Coen.

and sensations,” and lastly, the one on the left is “a poem about time that at the same time reflects on the constitutive process of the piece in its totality.”⁸⁹ The text of the poem grows and permutes as the reader turns each of the sixteen sheets. Some short phrases or words appear while others disappear. Other words mutate. For example, the very first word of the first layer (or sheet) is *signo*. When the reader superimposes the second sheet to the first, the edge of the cube from the second sheet covers the “g” of the first, so the word *signo* transforms into two words, *si-no* (yes–no). The element

⁸⁹ Serrano, discussion. [El poema de la parte superior son una serie de variaciones sobre la percepción. En la jaula, en el encierro, yo ahí tomé la idea de la jaula, de alguien que está encerrado, cómo puede percibir hacia fuera, hacia el mundo exterior, pero también a través de la jaula interna, de los sentidos, cómo se percibe él afuera. El poema que está en la parte inferior es un poema erótico, porque el cuerpo geométrico, el cubo, es también nuestro cuerpo. El poema de la izquierda es una serie del proceso constitutivo de la pieza y el de la derecha tiene que ver con los sentidos y la percepción.]

of repetition is important in the reading of the poem, as some words or phrases percolate through the layers.⁹⁰

Serrano's text also shows the influence of Paz's concrete poetry; the permutation of certain images in *In / cubaciones* resembles Paz's great poem *Blanco* (1967). Both are flexible poems that allow for multiple readings.⁹¹ The six potential readings of *Blanco* parallel the possible readings that emerge from the six sides of each cube in *In / cubaciones*. The format of the original edition of *Blanco* "emphasize(s) not so much the presence of the text but the space that sustains it: that which makes writing and reading possible, that in which all writings and reading end."⁹² As *Blanco* deals deeply with space and text, *In / cubaciones* is a poem in which visual space and text permute to offer endless possibilities to the reader.⁹³

Although conceived as a triptych, this group of artworks (*Trans / mutaciones*, *Jaula*, and *In / cubaciones*) has yet to attract the scholarly attention it deserves.⁹⁴ *Jaula* is known mainly for its title and overall description, and, although it is mentioned in historical narratives of twentieth-century Mexican music, it is not known audibly. The work has traveled overseas to be enjoyed purely as a visual object, not necessarily to be realized musically, and since 1980 it has been exhibited in art galleries and museums.⁹⁵ Only three originals were made: one was presented as a gift to Cage (current location unknown), Coen kept one (which, as the artist recalls, was stolen at an exhibition in California), and one remained in Lavista's possession.⁹⁶

Los sonidos de la jaula

After the premiere of *Jaula* in a version for four-hand prepared piano performed by Lavista and Ibarra, the piece remained unperformed for the next thirty years. Although in the early 1990s Coen obtained funding to reproduce one hundred issues

⁹⁰ This element of repetition is also present in *Jaula*. In his 2007 performance of the piece, Lavista chose to construct the improvisation from repeating one musical motif.

⁹¹ Serrano mentions that, in his youth, Paz's *Blanco* inspired him to experiment with chance procedures ("poesía combinatoria" or "poesía estocástica"). When Paz returned to Mexico, Serrano reached out to him for mentorship. To this day, he considers himself to be a disciple of Paz. Serrano, discussion.

⁹² Eliot Weinberger, ed., *The Collected Poems of Octavio Paz* (New York: New Directions Publishing), 311.

⁹³ Serrano continued collaborating with Coen on projects that involved *I Ching* procedures. In 1982, they created *El cubo de los cambios*, a cube comprised of sixty-four smaller cubes. Each small cube has a poem inscribed on each of its six sides. This sculpture of stochastic poetry has been exhibited in various museums. About the work, Serrano writes: "*El cubo de los cambios* es una pieza de poesía estocástica que permite representar lo que Stephan Mallarmé el poeta francés consideró como la propuesta extrema de su poesía, que era, arrojar los dados, como el pensamiento arroja las estrellas en el firmamento. Y esto constituye una constelación de signos que permiten construir imágenes nuevas casi siempre. Distintas cada vez." Serrano, discussion. A general description of *El cubo de los cambios* is found here: Arnaldo Coen, "El cubo de los cambios," <https://www.arnaldocoen.com/el-cubo-de-los-cambios>, accessed June 22, 2023.

⁹⁴ More images of the triptych can be found here: Arnaldo Coen, "Mutaciones—Transmutaciones—Jaula—In-cubaciones," <https://www.arnaldocoen.com/mutaciones-incubaciones>, accessed June 22, 2023.

⁹⁵ In 1980, *Jaula* was part of the exhibition "Travesía de la escritura" in the Museo Carrillo Gil in Mexico City. According to Coen, a recording of *Jaula* was played during the exhibition.

⁹⁶ Years later, Coen and Lavista made ten additional graphic scores of *Jaula*.



Figure 3.11 Mario Lavista performing *Jaula* at Escuela Superior de Música, 2007. Photo by the author.

of *Mutaciones*, *Trans / mutaciones*, and *In / cubaciones*, the editor in charge refused to edit *Jaula*. This meant that anybody interested in performing the score needed to borrow it directly from Coen or Lavista. In one of my early visits to Lavista's house, back in 2006, I asked him if I could see the score of *Jaula*. He opened a drawer and searched among multiple papers and manuscripts and pulled out a manila envelope with the score inside. He told me that the last time he had pulled it out of the drawer was when he was asked to send the score for an exhibition in London. After knowing that the piece had not been performed since its premiere, I asked him if he would perform it for a short video documentary I wanted to produce.⁹⁷ With a certain degree of hesitation, he accepted, and we filmed a version of the piece at the Escuela Superior de Música on March of 2007, thirty years after *Jaula*'s first public performance at the Palace of Fine Arts (see Figure 3.11).

In Lavista's 2007 rendition of *Jaula*, he did not limit himself to the rules he had stipulated in the score. This time he prepared the piano (using pieces of wood, nails,

⁹⁷ We videotaped Lavista's performance of *Jaula* on March 12, 2007, at the Escuela Superior de Música of the National Center for the Arts in Mexico City. Excerpts of Lavista's performance were used in the documentary I produced. See Ana R. Alonso-Minutti and Antonio Maldonado, directors, "Cubos y permutaciones: Plástica, música y poesía de vanguardia en México," YouTube video, 18:44, March 8, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2NRRsYpbA8Q>, accessed June 22, 2023.

erasers, pieces of plastic, and the like), and instead of just using the four notes (C, A, G, E) he originally indicated, he used all the keys he wanted. When I asked him about this change, he simply responded that the work was so open that it allowed for such liberties. His improvisation, which lasted over ten minutes, was characterized by the repetition of short phrases interspersed with silences.

From the early 1980s and into the mid-2000s *Jaula* was mostly forgotten. Since then, this collaborative project has gathered significant attention both nationally and abroad.⁹⁸ Coen's "cubes" served as a point of departure for the conceptual framing of a multidisciplinary symposium held at SUNY Buffalo in 2008, and the triptych has been exhibited several times in museums and galleries across Mexico. During the event in Buffalo, I presented a preliminary short version of the documentary on the triptych I produced. Later on, Coen used this video as the point of departure for another permutation of the project. Working in conjunction with choreographer Cecilia Lugo and sound designer Roberto Araujo, in 2012 Coen designed a performance in which *Trans / mutaciones* was constructed to human scale so that two dancers could freely move across the sixteen colored layers. Araujo's sound design contained fragments of several recordings, including Lavista's performance of *Jaula* featured in my documentary.⁹⁹

In 2010, Lavista performed *Jaula* at the Museo de Arte Moderno in Mexico City. In contrast to his 2007 version, this time he incorporated fragments from various sources, including Cage's *Music for Marcel Duchamp*.¹⁰⁰ He adopted the same approach years later, in what was to be his last public performance, on January 23, 2019, at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana. This performance was preceded by a conversation in which both Lavista and Coen talked about their collaborative process and Cage's influence.¹⁰¹ Although *Jaula* was the title of both renditions, Lavista did not use the score in any visible way. *Jaula* became an excuse for free improvisational exercises of musical collage (see Figure 3.12). Each sonic rendition of *Jaula* by Lavista could be regarded as yet another transmutation of Cage-the-*jaula*, with its own layers of signification and individual creative agency.

To my knowledge, other than Lavista and Ibarra, the only pianists who have publicly performed *Jaula* are Mauricio Nader, Roberto Hidalgo, and Marc Peloquin.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ Margarita Vargas was the main organizer of the SUNY, Buffalo 2008 Symposium: "Out of the Cube: Aesthetic, Political, Medical and Discursive Approaches to Gendered Identities." During the symposium, I participated in a panel with Arnaldo Coen and with writer Juan Bruce-Novoa (1944–2010).

⁹⁹ Coen's last permutation was his own homage to the centenary of Cage's birth. It was part of the 6th Festival Cultural Ceiba, in the city of Villahermosa, Tabasco. For video footage of the choreography, see Roberto Araujo, "Jaula de Arnaldo Coen," YouTube video, 11:51, July 14, 2013, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dHzwdqyTO5s>, accessed June 22, 2023.

¹⁰⁰ Lavista's performance at the Museo de Arte Moderno can be found here: amigosmam, "JAULA—Mario Lavista," YouTube video, 9:28, April 22, 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uAth4GJdFh8>, accessed June 22, 2023.

¹⁰¹ The event was organized by the Seminario de Cultura Mexicana and the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM). It took place at UAM's Casa del Tiempo. UAMVIDEOS, "JAULA Conversación y Recital en torno a Cage," YouTube video, 1:10:50, January 30, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_MY-6jG3tE, accessed June 22, 2023.

¹⁰² Nader included *Jaula* in his program titled "MAKROpiano 2012—Infinite Sounds from the American Continent," which he presented in various cities across Mexico during 2011–2012. Hidalgo and



Figure 3.12 Mario Lavista performing *Jaula* at Centro Cultural Casa del Tiempo (UAM), 2019. Photo by the author.

For these concerts, they used a printed photocopy of a digital picture of *Jaula* I had previously sent them, as most likely they were not able to borrow the “original” score from either Coen or Lavista. While attending Nader’s concert, I found it interesting that, in contrast to Lavista’s previous renditions of *Jaula* (2007 and 2010), Nader visually engaged with the graphic score while performing it, granting the audience the impression of his playing being a response to a visual stimulation.¹⁰³

In one sense, *Jaula* represents the climax of Lavista’s admiration for the philosophy and music of John Cage. While in its original version *Jaula* included a determined set of rules for its performance, over thirty years later, when Lavista performed it again, he dismissed these limitations, transforming the work into a free improvisation for prepared piano. Drawing silver dots on Coen’s layered cubes might be seen as Lavista’s attempt to engage with the type of purely abstract graphic scores that were being produced by Cage’s disciples—Earle Brown’s *December 1952* comes to mind, for example.

The number of liberties Lavista allowed himself to take while performing *Jaula* reveals that the sonic content of the work is solely defined by the silence that surrounds it. In Lavista’s own words, “In music, silence assumes the functions of a

Peloquin performed *Jaula* in a version for two pianos during a concert in celebration of Lavista’s seventieth birthday (2013) at the Tenri Cultural Institute in New York City.

¹⁰³ Nader’s concert took place at the Capilla del Arte, in downtown Puebla. A recording of this rendition can be found here: Ana Alonso Minutti, “Mario Lavista’s *Jaula* Performed by Pianist Mauricio Nader,” YouTube video, 3:43, May 12, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7mHtvQ2kVE>, accessed June 22, 2023.

border, a silence that is not part of the work, because it is manifested before and after the first and last of the sounds of the composition; that is to say, of the beginning and the end. . . . A musical work, therefore, has no antecedent or consequent: it finds its finality in itself.”¹⁰⁴ In order to effectuate a sonorous rendition of this type of graphic score, Lavista indicates that “the performer must risk all his creative imagination, because the work gives him a great liberty of interpretation, to such a degree that some works demand that there be no rehearsals prior to the performance, to avoid, as much as possible, any previous learning or conditioning on the part of the performer.”¹⁰⁵ Instead of relying on previous planning, Lavista explains that the performer is left to use her/his musical instincts in order to react spontaneously before a poetic or visual stimulus. “The score does not inform the interpreter about the intentions of the composer, but rather becomes a field of creative possibilities for the performer.”¹⁰⁶ Even though later on Lavista would dismiss *Jaula* as merely an experimental exercise, the piece represents the culmination of Lavista’s exploration of open forms and indeterminacy.

After achieving a potential simultaneity between creation and audition, symbiosis between composer and performer, and experiencing sound only within a specific frame of duration, Lavista seemed to have reached a crossroads: one path was to follow the way of experimentation with graphic scores, indeterminacy, and improvisation, and the other was to return to the craft of composition, as he had learned it at the Taller de Composición. What he would do in the short run reflected a combination of these two paths. He returned to the score but allowed his compositional process to be heavily informed by the performers with whom he closely collaborated. In order to reach that point, he also felt the need to incorporate other voices from the past. It was a time of remembering; during the mid-1970s, fragmentary memories began to appear in his compositions in the form of quotations. As he described in an interview from the early 1980s:

I almost quit music at thirty-one. However, it was clear that I loved instruments. During that period I started to write music without worrying about being up to date or not being up to date. . . . I started to believe in consonance again, and in beauty. . . . This is why I believe the avant-garde is closed. . . . In 1979, I started to

¹⁰⁴ Mario Lavista, “El tiempo musical,” in *Mario Lavista: Textos en torno a la música*, ed. Luis Jaime Cortez (Mexico City: Conaculta, INBA, Cenidim, 1990), 113. Text originally written in 1972. [En la música, es el silencio el que asume las funciones de frontera, un silencio que no forma parte de la obra, puesto que se manifiesta antes y después del primero y último sonidos de la composición, es decir, del principio y del final. . . . Una obra musical, por lo tanto, no tiene antecedentes ni consecuentes: encuentra en sí misma su finalidad.]

¹⁰⁵ Mario Lavista, “El proceso creador en la improvisación musical,” in Cortez, *Mario Lavista*, 125. Text originally written in 1971. [El ejecutante debe poner en juego toda su imaginación creadora, puesto que la obra le otorga una gran libertad de interpretación, a tal grado que ciertas obras exigen que no haya ensayos antes de la ejecución para evitar, hasta donde es posible, un aprendizaje o condicionamiento previos por parte del ejecutante.]

¹⁰⁶ Lavista, “El proceso creador,” 126. [La partitura ya no informa al intérprete de las intenciones del compositor, sino que se convierte en un campo de posibilidades creadoras para el ejecutante.]

discover the new expressive means of traditional instruments which is something that is extremely important to me.¹⁰⁷

Permuting Music

The year 1976, in retrospect, could be considered a turning point in Lavista's compositional path. After exploring the limits of indeterminacy and the possibilities of Cage-the-*jaula*, he returned to more "fixed" forms in two subsequent works: *Quotations*, for cello and piano, and his first *Trio* for violin, cello, and piano, both completed in 1976. In these pieces, Lavista carefully details every aspect, being so specific as to indicate a particular mood for certain pitches.

In *Quotations* we can appreciate a delicate exploration of instrumental register and the nuances of dynamics. The piece starts with two piano chords separated by silence (although the sustain pedal is to remain down), one of them to be played *fff* while the other is *p*—these chords represent the superimposition of two perfect fifths linked by a tritone, a sonority that, from this point on, becomes an important pillar of the harmonic construction of many of Lavista's works (see Example 3.1). The interaction between the two instruments in this piece resembles a conversation in the sense that while one instrument "speaks," the other remains silent. We seldom hear simultaneous utterances. The texture, therefore, is very sparse, intimate.¹⁰⁸

A similar atmosphere and harmonic language are present in Lavista's next work, *Trio*. After an introduction of harmonics, the first "real" sonority involves the same fifths that opened *Quotations*: (Bb–F / E–B). The exploration of harmonics in all three instruments is present in the closing section. While *Quotations* ends with a series of

Example 3.1 Lavista, *Quotations*, opening.

The image shows a musical score for the opening of 'Quotations' by Mario Lavista. It consists of two staves: Cello (bass clef) and Piano (treble and bass clefs). The Cello part begins with a 'Static' section at a tempo of approximately 60 (♩ = ca. 60), followed by a 'pizz.' section at a tempo of 72 (♩ = 72). The Piano part starts with a tempo of approximately 60 (♩ = ca. 60) and features a series of chords and single notes, including a section marked 'pp' and another marked 'fff'. The score includes various dynamic markings such as *pp*, *fff*, and *p*, and includes a 'pizz.' instruction for the Cello. The piece concludes with a tempo of approximately 60 (♩ = ca. 60).

¹⁰⁷ Mario Lavista, quoted in Jeannine Wagar, "Stylistic Tendencies in Three Contemporary Mexican Composers: Manuel Enriquez, Mario Lavista and Alicia Urreta" (DMA diss., Stanford University, 1985), 136.

¹⁰⁸ *Quotations* was published by Ediciones Mexicanas de Música in 1976.

rapid arpeggios played “behind the bridge” of the cello and sustained pedal tones in the piano, at the end of *Trío* there is a return to gestures from the beginning of the piece, strongly marked by the piano chords. The rapid arpeggios are also played on the strings, this time on top of the piano’s chords, which creates a stronger sense of circularity to conclude the work.

In both pieces—*Quotations* and *Trío*—Lavista quotes motifs from past composers. In his written description of the piece, he specifies that the cello part in *Quotations* is almost exclusively based on quotes from Maurice Ravel, Claude Debussy, Tomás Marco, George Crumb, Béla Bartók, Anton Webern, Yoji Yuasa, and Johannes Brahms. In *Trío*, Lavista adds to this list by including quotes from Manuel Enríquez, J. S. Bach, and Alban Berg. He warns us that the quotes are so short they lose their “anecdotal quality” (*carácter anecdótico*). Instead of superimposing the quotes, he integrates them to the piece’s melodic-harmonic structure.¹⁰⁹

Lavista had borrowed material from other sources in earlier works—some of which I discussed in the previous chapter (*Monólogo* and *Contrapunto*). Nevertheless, *Quotations* inaugurates a series of compositions in which he incorporates quotes in such a fragmentary way that listeners would know of their existence only if they were informed about them. If the quotes are not there to be “recognizable,” then, why include them at all? While composers such as Berio, Stockhausen, and George Rochberg considered quotation to be a liberating process after the rigidity of serialism, Lavista’s use of “atomized” quotes coincided with a return to using fixed forms. At the same time, this return allowed him to find an individual language while coming to terms with the music of the past. By integrating fragments from different sources into his own compositional palette, Lavista was establishing a certain kind of contemporaneity with older composers.

Quotations is also the first in a series of pieces where Lavista incorporates yet another kind of quote: texts from literary sources in the form of epigraphs placed at the top of the first page of the score. The existence of these textual quotes in the score allows performers and listeners to draw connections between epigraphs and music.¹¹⁰ If using a text had helped Lavista to structure his first “official” pieces (*Monólogo*, *Dos canciones*), here the appearance of a text in the form of an epigraph is meant to create a desirable atmosphere for performance.

Issues of quotation and borrowing become even more apparent in *Lyhannh*, composed for orchestra during the same year (1976).¹¹¹ For this piece Lavista further integrates musical material from the two previous works, *Quotations* and *Trío*.¹¹² In contrast to his previous orchestral piece, *Continuo* (1971), which incorporates a significant degree of indeterminacy, *Lyhannh* is fully notated and presents a careful

¹⁰⁹ Lavista, “*Quotations*,” in Cortez, *Mario Lavista*, 96. [Las citas no se superponen a un texto ya escrito, sino que se integran a la estructura melódico-armónica de la obra.]

¹¹⁰ For more about possible connections between epigraphs and music, see Chapter 4. A complete list of the epigraphs Lavista has included in his scores can be found in the companion website for this book.

¹¹¹ *Lyhannh* has never been commercially recorded. The score was published by UNAM in 1982.

¹¹² Lavista, “*Lyhannh*,” in Cortez, *Mario Lavista*, 97.

orchestration. Musicologist Consuelo Carredano sees *Lyhannh* as “a first pinnacle of [Lavista’s] orchestral writing, for its solidity and delicate balance in the treatment of timbre.”¹¹³ Other critics and musicians, among them Ibarra, marked this work as the beginning of a new “compositional period.”¹¹⁴ However, one cannot overlook the fact that *Lyhannh* is intimately related to *Quotations*, both in its musical material and in its selection of literary references. A more substantial shift in Lavista’s compositional trajectory began in 1979 with the solo flute piece *Canto del alba*, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

Lavista clarified that epigraphs are not meant to be read aloud in live performances. They don’t need to be present in program notes either. He expressed that each epigraph is, first and foremost, a *carta de presentación* (introductory letter) addressed to the performer.¹¹⁵ That, however, is not the only role of epigraphs. In the case of *Quotations* and *Lyhannh*, for example, the textual citations are connected to the musical quotes in more than one way. In *Quotations*, we find the following epigraph:

*Su corazón es un laúd suspendido,
tan pronto se le toca, resuena.*

His heart is a suspended lute;
whenever one touches it, it resounds.

These lines come from the opening page of *The Fall of the House of Usher*—a short story written by Edgar Allan Poe in 1839. Yet these are not Poe’s words. In Poe’s story they appear in their original French:

Son coeur est un luth suspendu;
Sitôt qu’on le touche il résonne.

—De Béranger

Here, Poe quotes French poet and songwriter Pierre-Jean de Béranger (1780–1857), but it is not a literal quote, for Béranger’s original text reads *Mon coeur* (“my heart,” instead of “his/her heart”). Poe was appropriating the quote while transforming it, and when it is then used as an epigraph for a musical score, Lavista gives the credit of authorship to Poe, not to Béranger. This form of textual appropriation is paralleled

¹¹³ Consuelo Carredano, “Lavista Camacho, Mario,” in *Diccionario de la música española e hispanoamericana*, dir. Emilio Casares Rodicio, vol. 6 (Madrid: Sociedad General de Autores y Editores, 2000), 808. [... una primera culminación de su escritura orquestal, por la solidez de escritura y el delicado balance que logra en el manejo del color.]

¹¹⁴ In Ibarra’s opinion, *Quotations* and *Trío* are “transitional” works on the way toward Lavista’s “third compositional period.” He characterizes the first period as “a search for a language,” the second period as a “constant preoccupation with the structural principles that operate in his work,” and the third “[where] all the works are related directly or indirectly with literature.” Federico Ibarra, “Ficciones,” in Cortez, *Mario Lavista*, 52–53.

¹¹⁵ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, July 25, 2005.

in the musical product: the musical material is constructed on quotes from diverse sources—quotes that are transformed in such a way that the listener does not recognize them as quotes at first hearing.

To add yet another dimension to this already complex event (a quotation of a quotation), when talking about this epigraph thirty years after the piece was written, Lavista remembered that when he wrote *Quotations* he was reading *The Fall of the House of Usher*—not Poe’s, but rather Debussy’s libretto for his unfinished opera.

My focus was on Debussy. I asked myself why he wanted to write *The House of Usher*, which unfortunately he never finished. And there I found [Poe’s lines], while I was writing my work for cello. I said to myself, this is what I’m looking for: something that speaks about the fragility of something that, when barely touched, can crumble or resonate, as the image of the suspended lute, as the heart that sings when you touch it.¹¹⁶

If, through Debussy’s unfinished opera via Poe’s short story quoting Béranger, Lavista found a written expression of fragility that resonated with his cello and piano piece, how are we to interpret that *Quotations* functions as the point of departure for a different piece, *Lyhannh*? The literary sources incorporated in the score for *Lyhannh* provide an interesting counterpoint to those in *Quotations*. The piece’s title comes from Jonathan Swift’s *Gulliver Travels*: “the swallow (for so I translate the word *Lyhannh*, although it be a much larger fowl).”¹¹⁷ Apart from the initial reference suggested in the piece’s title, Lavista adds another intertext by including an epigraph at the top of the score in its original English:

If you know Time as well as I do, said the Hatter,
you wouldn’t talk about wasting it. It’s him.

—Lewis Carroll, *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*.

This reflection on time and the specific reference to *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, brings us back to Lavista’s short article, “El tiempo musical,” from 1972, where he reflects on the fact that a piece of music is only conceivable in terms of a particular order of musical events that unfold through time—a time that we define as “musical.” He starts and ends this essay with the suggestion given by the King of Hearts to the white Rabbit: “Begin at the beginning and go on till you come to the end: then stop.”¹¹⁸ Lavista must have been thinking about the unfolding of time when he wrote *Lyhannh*.

¹¹⁶ Lavista, discussion, July 25, 2005. [Estaba concentrado en Debussy, en por qué Debussy quiso escribir *La Casa Usher*, lamentablemente nunca la acabó, y ahí encontré eso mientras componía la obra para cello y dije, esto es lo que estoy buscando: una cosa que hable de la delicadeza de algo que apenas tocas y se puede desmoronar o puede resonar, como la imagen del laúd suspendido, como el corazón que tocas y canta.]

¹¹⁷ Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver’s Travels*, first published in 1726, quoted in “Part IV, Chapter IX. Gulliver’s Travels,” Sparknotes, <https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/gulliver/full-text/part-iv-chapter-ix/>, accessed June 22, 2023.

¹¹⁸ Lavista, “El tiempo musical,” in Cortez, *Mario Lavista*, 110–11.

He created a connection between an epigraph that personifies time and music that plays with the past and the present by incorporating musical material from a previous work.

After introducing this “counterpoint” of music and texts in *Quotations and Lyhannh*, for the following two years Lavista concentrated all his compositional efforts on collaborative projects with other disciplines, mainly theater and cinema. In 1977–1978, he wrote music for the plays *La caída de la Casa Usher*, *Los inocentes* by William Archibald (based on *The Turn of the Screw* by Henry James), *Fue una historia de amor* (a play by Gilbert Léautier), and *Fedra de Racine* (in the version by Hugo Hiriart). During that time, he also composed music for various films. In 1977, he collaborated with his uncle Raúl Lavista in writing music for *Flores de papel*, a film directed by Gabriel Retes. The following year he wrote music for the film *María Sabina, mujer espíritu*, directed by Nicolás Echevarría, with whom he had previously composed electronic music for *Judea: Semana Santa entre los coras*. Collaborating with Echevarría continued. After *María Sabina*, Lavista composed music for Echevarría’s films *Niño Fidencio* (1982), *Cabeza de vaca* (1990), and *Vivir mata* (2002).¹¹⁹

Lavista’s collaborative projects with filmmakers and playwrights in the 1970s are a fertile topic for future discussion. More important for the purposes of this book will be his intense collaborations with performers starting in 1979. Out of these collaborations came some of his most beautiful solo and chamber pieces, which gave him the opportunity to explore sonic worlds that eventually became emblematic of his compositional style.

A Life-Long Affair with the Prepared Piano

After *Jaula*, Lavista did not compose for prepared piano for over two decades. In spite of this long hiatus, his fascination for the sonic possibilities of the prepared piano was a constant throughout his life.¹²⁰ He once asserted: “In my opinion, it was for prepared piano that Cage wrote his most beautiful pages.”¹²¹ At first glance, this appeal might be simply a timbral preference, but a closer look at the pieces Lavista composed for that instrument shows that the sonority of the prepared piano is intrinsically connected with particular rhythmic choices. Similar to Cage’s, Lavista’s prepared piano pieces are characterized by the use of a constant eighth- or sixteenth-note motion with significant motivic repetition, what James Pritchett calls “a kind of *moto perpetuo* style.”¹²² Also, when scoring a piece for prepared piano, Lavista limits himself

¹¹⁹ For more information about Lavista’s music for Echevarría’s films, see Chapter 2. Echevarría also collaborated with Lavista by drawing illustrations that accompanied the pages of the journal *Pauta*. See, for example, *Pauta* 14 (1985).

¹²⁰ Two previous pieces where Lavista used prepared piano are *Continuo* (1971) and *Diafonía* (1973).

¹²¹ Mario Lavista, “Nota preliminar,” *Pauta* 43 (1992): 5. [Para este piano preparado Cage compuso las que son, a mi juicio, sus más bellas páginas.]

¹²² James Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 26.

to preparing just a few pitches. This limitation ensures a textural and timbral simplicity, as the scores do not include playing any “real” notes.

Lavista’s interest in using prepared piano also responded to an attitude of experimental resourcefulness, which was also what drove Cage to envision an alternative use of the piano. Cage placed objects (screws and pieces of felt weather stripping) between the piano strings for the first time in response to a practical matter. Due to a space limitation in the performance venue, Cage could not make use of a percussion battery. The percussive sounds therefore had to come from the only instrument available in the space, the piano. In a similar vein, Lavista adopted an experimental resourcefulness when using the prepared piano as a “miniature percussion orchestra.”¹²³ This would not be the first time Lavista took advantage of instruments and objects at his disposal to create improvisations or compositions of great sonic variety that did not require a financial investment.

The sonic possibilities of the prepared piano go hand in hand with Lavista’s fascination for *ruidos musicales*, unexpected musical “noises” coming from instruments within the Western art music tradition.¹²⁴ While Cage wrote an extensive number of pieces for solo prepared piano, Lavista did not—with the exception of *Jaula*. Lavista instead combines the “altered” sounds of the piano with “altered” sounds coming from other instruments. This approach is exemplified in the piece *Divertimento para una coreografía imaginaria* (2006), for two cellos and prepared piano, in which the two cello parts consist of natural harmonics throughout. In this piece, Lavista takes as a point of departure the micro-macrocosmic structure of Cage’s *A Room* (1943): 4-7-2-5-4-7-2-3-5.

The connection that exists between Cage’s early pieces for prepared piano and dance is also present in Lavista’s. Although not written specifically for dance choreography, Lavista wrote *Divertimento para una coreografía imaginaria* as a work with “a dance character,” hence its title.¹²⁵ A few years later, Lavista picked up the idea of writing a divertimento that included the sonority of prepared piano for a dance choreographed by his daughter, Claudia Lavista. Hence, he composed *Divertimento para una bruja* (2009), for clarinet, viola, cello, contrabass, and prepared piano.¹²⁶ Although scored for a different instrumentation, this piece is based on the material from the previous divertimento.

While Cage’s initial interest for the prepared piano came in part from a desire to evoke an exotic Other (he wanted to reflect the “African” theme of the choreography he was writing music for), Lavista associated the prepared piano, first, with the type

¹²³ Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage*, 23.

¹²⁴ Lavista’s exploration of extended techniques for instruments within the Western art music tradition will be discussed in the next chapter.

¹²⁵ *Divertimento para una coreografía imaginaria* is dedicated to the ensemble Cello Alterno, comprised of cellists Iracema de Andrade and Edgardo Espinosa, and pianist Edith Ruiz. The piece was recorded for the album *Cello Alterno: Música mexicana para dos violoncellos y piano*, Lituus, 2010, compact disc.

¹²⁶ This piece was written in 2011 for an event in honor of Mexican choreographer Guillermina Bravo’s ninetieth birthday at the Palace of Fine Arts featuring Delfos Contemporary Dance Company. For more information about Lavista’s collaboration with his daughter, Claudia Lavista, see Chapter 5.

of experimentalism that Cage represented, and only secondarily, as an abstract evocation of “the Oriental.”¹²⁷ As has been well documented, Cage’s interest in “oriental philosophy” was closely connected to his thoughts on silence and was informed by sources coming from South Asia, East Asia, and early Christian mystical texts. According to Douglas Kahn, “[m]ore precise determinations of what Cage called oriental thought are hard to come by and . . . the restriction to ‘oriental’ itself is not very accurate. The more accurate term at the philosophical locus of his generation of silence would be, if anything, *perennial*.”¹²⁸ In a similar vein, Lavista thought of the Oriental as an abstract evocation that exists in a timeless, spiritual reality.

The Orientalist articulation of Lavista’s prepared piano is best exemplified, for example, in *Kailash*, a piece we will look at with some detail in Chapter 5. Conceived to accompany an art exhibition by Mexican visual artist Ricardo Mazal, *Kailash*’s point of departure is Mazal’s peregrination to Mount Kailash in Tibet. Spirituality, ritual, and a sense of universality accompany Lavista’s articulation of the Oriental, but it is always brought home to his local reality as he conceived this piece in relation to people very close to him. Lavista was driven not only by his friendship with Mazal but, most importantly, he was encouraged by his friend, percussionist Ricardo Gallardo to engage in a collective improvisation with Tambuco Percussion Ensemble. What is interesting to note is that the basis for Lavista’s improvised prepared piano part was, once again, Cage’s music.

The nuanced connection that we find between the Oriental (via Cage) and the local (via Lavista’s friends) is also present in *Pañales y sonajas* (Diapers and Rattles), for mezzo soprano and prepared piano (1999). Lavista composed this piece after receiving a commission from singer Encarnación Vázquez and pianist Alberto Cruzprieto for their project, *Canciones de luna*.¹²⁹ Coincidentally, while working on the piece, Lavista’s daughter gave birth to Elisa Carrum Lavista—his only grandchild and to whom the piece is dedicated. Lavista grants this piece the subtitle “canción de cuna para Elisa” (lullaby for Elisa) and takes as a point of departure the idea of creating nocturnal sounds to put his baby granddaughter to sleep. He chose the sonority of the prepared piano perhaps in connection with Cage, as Cage was the first to use the particular combination of voice and prepared piano for a piece that also alludes to a female sleeping, *She Is Asleep* (1943). Although both works, *She Is Asleep* and *Pañales y sonajas*, are textless, the sonic dimension given to the voice is different in each. While the voice part in Cage’s piece consists of a series of open vocalizations, in *Pañales y sonajas* the singer is asked to produce a series of nasal and guttural effects

¹²⁷ As John Corbett states, Cage and the circle of U.S. composers around him ignored the political consequences of their Orientalism. See John Corbett, “Experimental Oriental: New Music and Other Others,” in *Western Music and Its Others: Difference, Representation, and Appropriation in Music*, ed. Georgina Born and David Hesmondhalgh (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), 163–86.

¹²⁸ Douglas Kahn, “John Cage: Silence and Silencing,” *Musical Quarterly* 81, no. 4 (1997): 562.

¹²⁹ The first volume of *Canciones de luna* was issued in 1999 by Euram Records and reissued as *Canción de cuna* by Tempus Clásico in 2014. Tempus Clásico, “Pañales y Sonajas Mario Lavista, Encarnación Vázquez, Alberto Cruzprieto, Tempus Clásico,” YouTube video, 7:59, June 24, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dD33sXXt-DU>, accessed June 22, 2023.

and no vocal is openly released. The nasal effects were thought of as emulating “the Orient.”

This articulation of Orientalism, however, is rooted in the technical abilities of Encarnación Vázquez, with whom Lavista worked while writing this piece. While to Vázquez the preparation of the piano produced a gamelan-like sound,¹³⁰ Lavista’s intention was for the prepared piano to evoke a music box.¹³¹ When addressing her collaboration with Lavista, Vázquez emphasized the enormous challenges that *Pañales y sonajas* presents to the singer. On one hand, the desired vocal effects demand a significantly high level of practice to control all the nuances while maintaining soft dynamics. On the other, given that the notes written for the piano part are not the ones the singer hears, as they are prepared, she must rely on her internal ear and musical memory to reach the intervals with precision.¹³²

To commemorate the tenth anniversary of Cage’s death in 2002, Lavista wrote *A Cage for Sirius / Una jaula para Sirius* for prepared piano and percussion—a commission he received from the Ensemble Sirius (percussionist Stuart Gerber and pianist Michael Fowler) to be performed at Festival Internacional Cervantino that year. The title of the piece presents a playful use of words. It could be read as a dedication: the piece in question is a “cage”—a structure, a box, a container—for (the ensemble) Sirius. Or, perhaps, the offering to Sirius is not a container, but Lavista’s Cage-the-jaula, the *signo*. A third possibility, based on a phonetic variance, is to be contemplated: the piece is a cage intended for *serious* listeners—a reading Lavista was fond of as it alludes to the playfulness of the piece. When talking about this work, one of the first things Lavista remarked on was its “mechanical” quality: once the structure is set in motion, the piece runs on its own. Lavista decided a priori to limit himself to a given structure, a metric container of sorts, which would grant him the playful challenge of filling it with sounds. This procedure, which he characterized as *mechanical*, was very attractive to Lavista.¹³³

In *A Cage for Sirius* Lavista employed Cage’s “micro-macrocosmic” rhythmic structures (the division of the whole into equal parts) from *Music for Marcel Duchamp* (1947). Cage wrote this piece for a sequence in Hans Richter’s experimental film *Dreams That Money Can Buy* (1944–1946), particularly for a short segment designed

¹³⁰ The association between the sonorities obtained by Lavista’s preparation of the piano and the Indonesian gamelan was something Vázquez talked about during our conversation. Encarnación Vázquez, in discussion with the author, Albuquerque, NM, September 26, 2014.

¹³¹ When talking about this piece in 2007, Lavista lamented that Elisa, who was eight years old at the time, did not enjoy or care for the piece. Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, March 12, 2007. In this regard, he comments: “Creo que a mi nieta nunca le gustó. . . . [Ahora] que tiene ocho años, creo que debería hacérsela escuchar, pero al principio, cuando era muy niña, le tenía absolutamente sin cuidado.”

¹³² Vázquez, discussion. Vázquez explained that working with Lavista on this piece pushed her own boundaries as a singer. She recalls that the most demanding part of performing the piece was to sustain, for over eight minutes, the highest degree of concentration in order to internally hear the pitches and intervals notated on the score. Effects such as placing one or both hands in front of the mouth or covering the nose were therefore notated during rehearsals. The score has yet to be edited, and Vázquez is the only singer who has recorded it.

¹³³ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, June 19, 2012.

by Duchamp himself. Characterized by the prominent use of silences, the piece consists of a repetitive melodic line produced by notes muted by weather stripping. As Pritchett suggests, the cohesion and economy of the piece, as well as the flatness of the sonic palette, provide “the perfect accompaniment for Duchamp’s film sequence, which consists of a series of purely optical images on rotating disks.”¹³⁴

Informed by the limited pitches and materials Cage used to prepare the piano in *Music for Marcel Duchamp*, the type of instruments in the percussion part that Lavista selects for the piece is somewhat limited in terms of number and timbre possibilities—he is going after mostly metallic, resonant sounds: crotales, *Almglocken*, Thai gongs, Chinese gongs, tam-tam, clay pots, and bongos. On the other hand, the type of material Lavista selects to prepare the piano, and the number of notes to be played, are also limited. Weather stripping, rubber, small screws, and pieces of wood alter a total of fifteen keys of the piano. In this regard, although scored for two instruments, the resulting combination gives the impression that the sounds are coming from a single (percussive) source.

The piece provides a listening experience in which rhythm flows seamlessly from one performer to the other. The micro-macrocosmic structure Lavista borrows from Cage’s *Music for Marcel Duchamp* provides him with a rigorous formal plan. He explains:

My work consists of a structure of 121 bars—plus an extension or “coda” of 11 bars—, divided into 11 sections of 11 bars each, and each of these subdivided in 11 sections of small groups of 2, 1, 1, 3, 1, 2 and 1 bars. Therefore, the general form, or the “macro-form,” is articulated unavoidably each 22, 11, 11, 33, 11, 22, and 11 measures.¹³⁵

Although the piece has a single meter signature throughout (3/4) and a fairly constant subdivision of the beat in either eighths or sixteenth-notes, it also presents instances of polyrhythm and metric modulation. As indicated in his analysis, musicologist Hernán Gabriel Vázquez distinguishes eleven rhythmic motives distributed among the materials of both performers (note the predominance of the number 11). Vázquez also makes note of Lavista’s use of canonic textures and altered isorhythmic techniques, or what Vázquez labels “modified reiterations” (*reiteraciones modificadas*).¹³⁶

Cage’s micro-macrocosmic structure, and the timbral possibilities of the prepared piano were perhaps the compositional aspects of the U.S. composer that

¹³⁴ Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage*, 27.

¹³⁵ Program note given by Lavista to the author. [En mi obra se trata de una estructura de 121 compases—más una extensión o “coda” de 11 compases—que se divide en 11 secciones de 11 compases cada una, subdivididas cada una de estas 11 secciones en pequeños grupos de 2, 1, 1, 3, 1, 2, y 1 compases. En consecuencia, la forma general, o “macro-forma,” se articula por fuerza cada 22, 11, 11, 33, 11, 22 y 11 compases.]

¹³⁶ Hernán Gabriel Vázquez, “Discurso e interpretación en *A Cage for Sirius* de Mario Lavista,” *Huellas... Búsquedas en Arte y Diseño* 7 (2010): 83.

interested Lavista the most. In the processes of translation and resignification, it is that “version” of Cage—the one associated with structure and timbre—which made recurrent appearances in Lavista’s trajectory. Not only did Lavista compose and improvise music based on Cage’s music, he also wrote several essays and gave multiple lectures about Cage. Among Mexican composers of his generation, Lavista was arguably the fiercest promoter of Cage’s music and writings. In his role as member of El Colegio Nacional, Lavista organized multiple concerts programming Cage’s music, and during his directorship of the music journal *Pauta*, he oversaw published translations of Cage’s writings and multiple essays centered on Cage’s music and thought (see Figure 3.13).

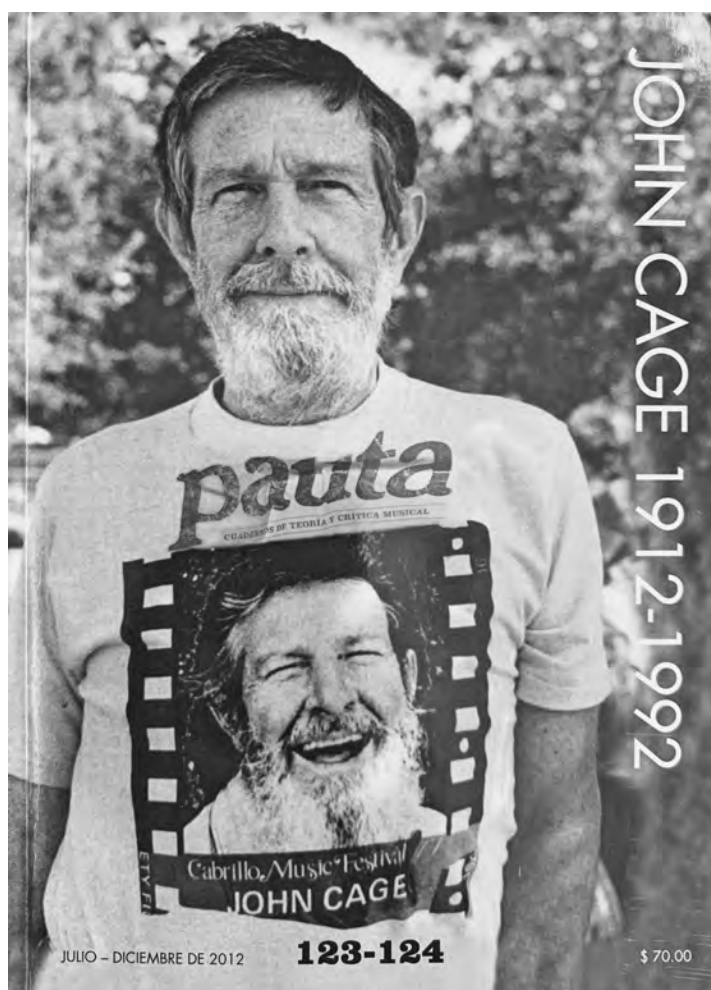


Figure 3.13 Cover of *Pauta*. 123–124 (2012) by Bernardo Recamier. Used by permission.

The Privilege of Silence

Documenting Cage's presence in Mexico—past and present—requires examining the ways in which experimental networks of artists take Cage-the-sign as an excuse to articulate a local experimentalism, experimentalism understood as a practice that reinvents itself from possibilities and realities.¹³⁷ What Cage did not emphasize during his visits to Mexico was the power imbalance that exists in institutionalized experimentalism when seen from a transnational perspective. Coming from and within the United States, Cage's experimentalism (and that of his circle of friends and disciples) was possible due to myriad favorable socioeconomic conditions available to just a few. Institutionalized experimentalism in the United States is possible thanks to private and public funding, and it is made available through academic institutions, musical organizations and ensembles, editorial and recording industries, and distribution platforms. The privileged apparatus of U.S. experimentalism, while desirable, has never been attainable within the context of Mexico.

Poet Augusto de Campos, who brought Cage to Brazil in the 1980s, stated that “silence cannot be totally divorced from power relations.”¹³⁸ Also, being inseparable from its sociocultural context, silence exposes privilege. Silence exposes the location of power. John Cage's silence needed to be resignified in the Mexican context. In a society where economic support for musical and sound experimentation is extremely scarce, and where no solid apparatus of public music education exists, the liberties implied in a piece such as *4'33"* were a luxury inaccessible to Mexican experimentalists. Therefore, in order for Mexican composers to engage in experimental practices, they had to be resourceful. This situation was even more precarious for female composers working in a male-dominated scene. That is perhaps why composer Alicia Urreta (1930–1986) distanced herself from the label *vanguardista*. “It would seem,”—Urreta said—“that being vanguardist means to mistreat the audiences, the instrument, society, and life. To break the mold just to break it.”¹³⁹ Those liberties demanded too high a price.

After being asked about his thoughts on experimentation, Enríquez replied, “Every creator who values creativity has to be an eternal experimentalist.”¹⁴⁰ When examined from the periphery, concepts such as experimentalism, indeterminacy,

¹³⁷ About experimentalism as a practice and about the performative dimension of it, see Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, Eduardo Herrera, and Alejandro L. Madrid, “The Practices of Experimentalism in Latin@ and Latin American Music. An Introduction,” in *Experimentalisms in Practice: Music Perspectives from Latin America*, ed. Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, Eduardo Herrera, and Alejandro L. Madrid (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 1–18.

¹³⁸ Anderson, “‘Revision of the Golden Rule,’” 70.

¹³⁹ Alicia Urreta, quoted in González and Saavedra, *Música mexicana contemporánea*, 104–5. [Parece que ser vanguardista es portarse mal con el público, con el instrumento, con la sociedad, con la vida. Se trata de romper el esquema por romperlo.]

¹⁴⁰ Manuel Enríquez, quoted in González and Saavedra, *Música mexicana contemporánea*, 10. [Todo creador que se precie de tal tiene que ser un eterno experimentador.]

improvisation, musical spontaneity, avant-garde / *vanguardia*, have nuances that are crucial to examine. The processes of resignification, reappropriation, and reinterpretation of Cage-the-sign expose the asymmetries that exist in discourses of the global avant-garde.¹⁴¹ As Benjamin Piekut reminds us, “[e]xperimentalism, like any music-historical entity, was a messy series of encounters and performances; it was made and remade in specific acts of translation (the rendering of differences into equivalences), and these acts were never centrally controlled.”¹⁴² These acts of translation, as performed by and from postcolonial positionalities, allow for dynamic renegotiations of center-periphery relations that invite alternative historiographical readings of subversion. In the case of Lavista, what began as an aesthetic affinity, his fascination for Cage-the-*jaula* became a space of resignification where he was free to play with the boundaries of his own experimentalism. And as a result of engaging creatively with Cage-the-sign, Lavista reached the highest degree of musical freedom as both a composer and a performer.

The rich, multifaceted ways in which Lavista and his collaborators used Cage-the-*jaula* give us a more nuanced understanding of the potential of experimental practices. The sign allowed for mutations, permutations, and incubations of individual creativities, aspirations, and possibilities. Recalling the epigraph that opened this chapter, which comes from Serrano’s poem *In / cubaciones*, “una jaula no, una ventana” (not a cage, a window), the practice of Cage-the-*jaula* ultimately became a window of opportunity for experimental agency, playfulness, and resourcefulness. The processes of resignification of Cage’s music and thought followed by Lavista and his collaborators can be understood as strategies to destabilize paradigms that characterize imperialist discourses coming from the United States. Their performative translation of Cage’s aesthetics encourages us to recognize the complex asymmetries and the shifting conditions of empowerment and disempowerment in experimental practices. Through engaging with processes of cultural crossings and resignifications, Lavista and other composers throughout Latin America shift the center of gravity of modernist discourses and offer counternarratives to the dominant canon, which has been crumbling for quite some time now.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ These asymmetries are also addressed by Miki Kaneda in relation to Japanese experimental practices. Her study shows that the “new transnational avant-garde,” cultivated in Tokyo in the 1960s, challenges the dominance of Western Europe and North America “as the uncontested sites of origin and invention in narratives about experimental practice.” Miki Kaneda, “World Graphic Scores: Between the Notes of a Transpacific Avant-Garde” (lecture given via Zoom, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, February 26, 2021).

¹⁴² Benjamin Piekut, “Indeterminacy, Free Improvisation, and the Mixed Avant-Garde: Experimental Music in London, 1965–1975,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 67, no. 3 (2014): 771.

¹⁴³ This is an example of what Partha Mitter calls a “decentering modernism.” See Partha Mitter, “Decentering Modernism: Art History and Avant-Garde Art from the Periphery,” *The Art Bulletin* 90, no. 4 (2008): 531–48.

4

Poetic Encounters and Instrumental Affairs

Instruments need to be listened to very carefully to discover the voices they hold. This is how astounding worlds of sounds are revealed, and it is up to both imagination and reason to give shape to that new sonic reality.

—Mario Lavista¹

The year 1979 can be seen retrospectively as a turning point in Lavista's compositional career. After spending three years writing music for various plays and films—among them, *Flores de papel* (1978), directed by Gabriel Retes, and *María Sabina, Mujer Espíritu* (1978), directed by Nicolás Echevarría—Lavista turned to writing chamber and solo music. What characterized the series of pieces that followed from this turn was a deeper exploration of instrumental sonic possibilities. However, this exploration did not happen in isolation, but rather in very close collaboration with performers with whom Lavista had already developed closeness. The type of interactive compositional process he was to have with each of them was carried out in a space of creative intimacy where deep affection—both for one another and for sound—drove the process forward (see Figures 4.1a and 4.1b).

While close collaboration with performers is not unusual in the compositional processes of contemporary music, Lavista's collaborations with performers challenged modernist notions of both “the composer” and the composer's “work.” Compositional practices of solo and chamber music (within the Western European tradition) throughout the twentieth century usually emphasized the authority of the composer and the autonomy of the work. The composer, especially in a modernist paradigm, is the one who conceives the idea and designs the outcome, and the work is the result of authorial decisions that occurred mostly in isolation. In contrast, the type of collaborative exchange that Lavista developed with performers overrides this paradigm and proposes an alternative understanding of composition as a process where affection, sensations, fellowship, and laughter are as much a part of the creative

¹ Mario Lavista, *Trece comentarios en torno a la música* (Mexico City: El Colegio Nacional, 2016), n/p. [A los instrumentos hace falta escucharlos con mucha atención para descubrir las voces que aún encierran. Es así como se revelan mundos insólitos de sonidos y corresponde tanto a la imaginación como a la razón darle forma a esa nueva realidad sonora.]

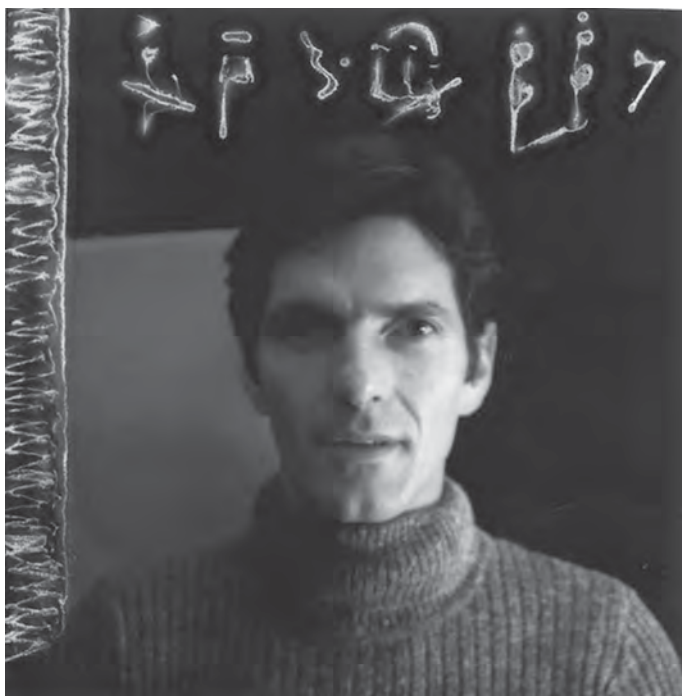


Figure 4.1a Polaroid photo intervened by Mario Lavista ca. 1980–1981. Courtesy of Lourdes Almeida.

activity as pitches, rhythms, and textures. In this alternative process, sound exploration becomes a playful delight carried out in an atmosphere of comfort and trust. The outcome—what would traditionally be called the work—is equally valuable to performer and composer, for it is embraced as an imprint of an affective relationship.

The creative intimacy Lavista promoted with the performers he worked with starting in 1979 and throughout the 1980s can be understood in retrospect as a crucial step in the solidification of his compositional style. The series of pieces that developed from processes of creative intimacy shaped what would be recognized as *el estilo lavistiano*. This repertoire granted Lavista greater national and international visibility as these pieces were and have remained the most frequently performed, the most recorded, and the most programmed among his vast catalogue. Affective relationships, I argue, were at the core of Lavista's creative impetus. Taking the notion of creative intimacy as a point of departure, in this chapter I will discuss two kinds of affective relationships that occurred simultaneously in Lavista's creative process. One kind was his relationship with the musicians he chose as collaborators, and the other was his relationship with certain poetic texts that influenced his creative process.

This interplay of affective relationships is particularly evident in two of the most emblematic pieces of Lavista's catalogue: *Marsias* (1982), for oboe and eight crystal



Figure 4.1b Polaroid photo intervened by Mario Lavista ca. 1980–1981. Courtesy of Lourdes Almeida.

wine glasses, which he envisioned in close collaboration with oboist Leonora Saavedra; and *Reflejos de la noche* (1984), for string quartet, a piece informed by his friendship with Cuarteto Latinoamericano, particularly with violinist Arón Bitrán. A series of conversations with the musicians Lavista worked with while composing *Marsias* and *Reflejos de la noche*, and close music and text analysis are the backbone of this chapter. It is important to note that the interpretive observations I provide regarding the intertextual webs in these pieces are not meant to be understood as a key to unlocking the “hidden meaning” behind them. Analysis is an interpretive act rooted in subjectivity and is thus the outcome of a creative and affective engagement with the object of analysis—in this case, music. Those of us who perform analysis bring our own memories, assumptions, preconceptions, sentiments and expectations to our listening practice.² As a listener, I locate my own subjectivity at the core of my remarks, and the music analysis I conduct is the result of the affective relationships I have developed with the pieces. By exploring the intertextuality in *Marsias* and *Reflejos de la noche*, my goal is to craft a hermeneutic narrative that delves into

² Matthew D. Morrison, “Race, Blacksound, and the (Re)Making of Musicological Discourse,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 72, no. 3 (2019): 786.

possible encounters between composer and performer on one hand, and text and sound on the other, to inform the listener's construction of musical meaning.

While musical scores are platforms from which to explore how the two kinds of affective relationships—with performers and with poetic texts—operated within Lavista's creative process, they do not tell the whole story. As seen in previous chapters, Lavista characterized himself as a composer who was very close to the literary arts, especially poetry. Although he did not write poetry (with a couple of exceptions), writing music-centered texts was a constant in his career. Whether from his pen or from the pen of others, producing and promoting texts centered around music was another manifestation of his creativity. This manifestation was best seen in his involvement as founder and director of the music journal *Pauta: Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical*. Similarly to the intimate collaborative processes Lavista undertook with performers while creating music, *Pauta* was also a project born from affective relationships with the same performers with whom he was writing music. Therefore, the journal *Pauta* may be viewed as yet another venue from which Lavista sought to explore the processes of creative intimacy and affective relationships with musicians and with the literary arts. This aspect of Lavista's creativity will be covered in the last part of the chapter.

Creative Intimacy

Working closely with a performer sets certain a priori parameters that shape, to a certain extent, the outcome of a musical composition. These parameters could include the performer's dexterity, her physical movements, and her repertoire and technique—in short, what we label a “performance style.” The more composers know about performers, the more nuances they are able to incorporate into a composition. The atmosphere of creative intimacy that Lavista developed with his collaborators allowed them not only to reproduce something that had already been written, but also to suggest some sonorities and to discover others. The process was more of a creative exchange than a one-way communication. In fact, this reciprocal relationship between composer and performer went beyond writing the music, extending into editing and preparing the score for publication (see Figure 4.2).

“Through my solo and chamber pieces,” Lavista wrote, “I have wanted to prompt an encounter [and] to set up an affective—even amorous—relationship between the performer and the instrument. I aspire for the work to configure a space inside of which an intimate conversation among them can occur.”³ Although Lavista here emphasizes the affective relationship he attempted to facilitate between performer

³ Lavista, *Trece comentarios*. [A través de mis obras para instrumentos solos y pequeños grupos de cámara, he querido provocar un encuentro, establecer una relación profundamente afectuosa—incluso amorosa—entre el instrumentista y su instrumento. Aspiro a que la obra configure un espacio dentro del cual se suscite un íntimo coloquio entre ellos.]



Figure 4.2 Mario Lavista and Ricardo Gallardo working on score revisions for *Danza isorrítmica*, ca. 2005. From Tambuco photo archive. Courtesy of Ricardo Gallardo.

and instrument, a close look at *who* he chose to work with reveals that developing an affective relationship with the *person* performing the piece was imperative for the compositional process to be successful. Moreover, a close look at Lavista's scores reveals that the amorous relationship he wanted to create between performer and instrument occurred through the process of producing alternative sonorities.

From very early on in his compositional trajectory, Lavista began to incorporate nontraditional sonorities, the so-called extended techniques.⁴ In his solo and chamber scores from the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, Lavista integrated a variety of instrumental effects that were in vogue among experimental and avant-garde circles. For instance, in *Game* (1970), Lavista employed some of the most common extended techniques for the flute, such as flutter-tonguing, microtones, harmonics, and keyclicks. In a subsequent score for violin and piano, *Diálogos* (1974), Lavista included the use of *col legno tratto*, Bartók pizzicato, harmonics, and *sul ponticello* for the violin part, and clusters and harmonics for the piano. A more adventurous

⁴ The expansion of instrumental capabilities and techniques has been a constant throughout the history of the Western art music tradition. Historians remark, however, that beginning in the mid-twentieth century, this expansion reached unprecedented levels. What has been labeled "extended techniques," therefore, corresponds to a series of timbral effects and performing techniques that require the use of alternative notation.

use of extended techniques for the piano is found in *Pieza para dos pianistas y un piano* (1975), in which Lavista asks the second pianist to employ objects such as coins and erasers to play the strings inside the piano box. Even though Lavista had comfortably used these sonic effects in his compositions, the timbral exploration he employed from 1979 onward was intrinsically connected to a kind of poetical rhetoric he drew from literary sources. Thanks to the technical abilities of his collaborators, Lavista was able to integrate those alternative sonorities into the aesthetic sensibility that characterizes his work.

The piece that marked a turning point in Lavista's compositional trajectory is *Canto del alba*, for amplified flute (1979). Characterizing this piece is the exquisite gamut of sonorities obtained through extended techniques. Multiphonics, microtones, harmonics, whistled tones, and other effects are delicately woven in a musico-poetic rhetoric of rich intertextual overtones. Lavista became aware of the vast sonic possibilities of the flute through flutist Marielena Arizpe (b. 1952), who at the time had just returned from an extended stay in Europe. While in Europe, she had met with flutist Robert Dick, with whom she exchanged many ideas and multiphonic techniques (see Figure 4.3).⁵ It was Dick who encouraged her to spend time in Paris, where both took a seminar taught by Pierre Boulez.⁶ Even before her time in Europe, Arizpe had been working to publish her own performance manual in Spanish.⁷ During the mid-1970s and throughout the 1980s, she was one of the very few flute players in Mexico—arguably the only one—who had a great command of extended techniques for the instrument. Accordingly, a significant number of pieces by multiple composers were written specifically for her.⁸

The musical partnership between Lavista and Arizpe was enriched by the fact that they had been romantic partners first. Their amorous relationship had started soon after first meeting each other at the National Music Conservatory in 1972, and they had been living together in the Edificio Condesa when the idea of writing a piece for solo flute emerged. When Arizpe and Lavista reminisced about that period, they concurred that their working sessions were very stimulating and not schedule-bound; they would work long hours into the night, for they preferred taking as much time as necessary for uninterrupted creativity. Both shared significant aesthetic affinities and interests: they shared a fascination for sound itself and for sound exploration, an obsession with the rhythmic innovations and polyphony of fourteenth-century

⁵ Since the mid-1970s, Marielena Arizpe had been working on a range of extended techniques for the flute. She met up with Robert Dick in London while studying with Elena Durán, among others, and working with contemporary composers.

⁶ Dick spent some time at the Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Musique (IRCAM) working to create a flute with a new fingering system.

⁷ Arizpe published what would be a very influential text on extended techniques for the flute in *Pauta*. See Marielena Arizpe, "Las voces de la flauta: Nuevas técnicas instrumentales," *Pauta: Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical* 5 (1983): 84–106. This essay was later reproduced in the collection *Nuevas técnicas instrumentales*, ed. Mario Lavista (Mexico City: UAM Iztapalapa, 1984; Cenidim, 1989).

⁸ In 1984, Arizpe released the recording *Voces de la flauta*, which included a group of pieces written for and with her: Lavista's *Lamento* and *Nocturno*, Gerhart Muench's *Poema alado*, and Antonio Russek's *Summermood*.



Figure 4.3 Marielena Aripze, ca. 1983–1985. Courtesy of Paulina Lavista.

French Ars Nova—especially the work of Guillaume de Machaut, and a deep interest in the music and philosophy of John Cage. Moreover, both were avid readers. It was their shared interest in medieval music and poetry that prompted them to collectively choose the piece’s title, *Canto del alba*, “song of the dawn,” which was meant to allude to the medieval erotic poetic genre, “alba.”

As explained in the thirteenth-century treatise *De doctrina de compondre dictats*, “An *alba* is so called because the song takes its name from the hour at which it is sung and because the *alba* is better sung at dawn than during the day.”⁹ Scholars concur that what characterizes the surviving examples of this Provençal genre is, on one hand, a

⁹ *De doctrina de compondre dictats*, 26, ed. P. Meyer, Rom., VI, 353ff, trans. B. Woledge, quoted in Arthur T. Hatto, ed., *Eos: Inquiry into the Theme of Lovers’ Meetings and Partings at Dawn in Poetry* (The Hague: Mouton, 1965), 379. Hatto adds that “the title of the work itself seems to be corrupt and *compondre dictats* should read *compondre dictats*.”

symbolic emphasis on the dawn as a symbol of redemption and awakening, and on the other, a concern with the parting of lovers at daybreak. The evocative image of a song emerging at dawn sung by two lovers encapsules the real-life story behind *Canto del alba*.

While the term *song* is commonly used when referring to setting words to music, and *singing* as the act of delivering a song, Arizpe always preferred the verb “to sing” when describing her flute playing. “I don’t even like the verb ‘to play.’ [To describe] what one does with the flute, I like the verb ‘to sing.’ You are singing. It is like a song. A song that, if coming from the soul, touches the heart of whoever is listening.”¹⁰ In 2008, thirty years after the collaboration for *Canto del alba* began, Arizpe stated that she remembered the creative process “as if it was yesterday.” She elaborated: “I remember the birth of every note, every gesture, and every pause. I never used the score because I learned to sing it by memory during the creative process.”¹¹ For many years Arizpe performed *Canto del alba* numerous times and for diverse audiences across the world, at times in small venues, and at other times in spaces holding up to four thousand people. Her words to describe her embodied experience performing the piece are charged with emotional power: “I can still savor the sensation of its enveloping, almost immobile atmosphere . . . fresh, present, peaceful, silent, pink, happy.”¹²

While Arizpe did not need the score at any point to perform the piece, she assisted Lavista in developing it.¹³ In this sense, describing *Canto del alba* as merely a collaboration between composer and performer is to understate its significance for both of them. The piece was born out of an embodied experience and an intimate connection between two lovers. Their intimate relationship and their shared living space allowed for optimal creative conditions. They would try out sonorities and explore possibilities together as late into the night as they wished. Arizpe recalls, “Mario’s creative process is at its best at night, at dawn.”¹⁴ From “the

¹⁰ Marielena Arizpe, in discussion with the author, via Zoom, September 3, 2020. [Ni siquiera me gusta la palabra “tocar.” Me gusta, con la flauta, la palabra “cantar.” Estás cantando. Es como un canto. Un canto que, si sale del alma, toca el corazón de quien la escucha.]

¹¹ Marielena Arizpe, email message to author, April 28, 2008. [Recuerdo el proceso de creación de *Canto del alba*, como si fuera ayer . . . recuerdo el nacimiento de cada nota, cada gesto y cada pausa. Nunca usé la partitura, aprendí a “cantarla” de memoria durante el proceso creativo.]

¹² Arizpe, email message to author, April 18, 2008. [Aun puedo saborear la sensación de su atmósfera envolvente, casi inmóvil . . . fresca, presente, pacífica, silenciosa, rosa, contenta.] Arizpe continued performing *Canto del alba* throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s. After suffering a terrible accident in 1996, Arizpe stopped performing altogether. See Pablo Espinosa, “La flautista Arizpe sigue inhabilitada; su percañe, por un acto desorganizado,” *La Jornada*, May 31, 1997, <https://www.jornada.com.mx/1997/05/31/rizpe.html>, accessed June 22, 2023; Pablo Espinosa, “Extraño el sonido de la flauta en mi cuerpo: Marielena Arizpe,” *La Jornada*, June 1, 1997, <https://jornada.com.mx/1997/06/01/rizpe.html>, accessed July 22, 2023.

¹³ To notate multiphonics in *Canto del alba*, Arizpe followed Dick’s 1975 book *The Other Flute: A Performance Manual of Contemporary Techniques* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

¹⁴ Arizpe, email message to author, April 18, 2008. [La noche, alba es el mejor momento creativo de Lavista.] Lavista was apparently a “night owl.” In an interview with Luis Ignacio Helguera, Lavista remarked: “Soy muy noctámbulo. Necesito sentirme totalmente aislado en el estudio, como en una especie de huevo, un espacio en el cual nadie va a entrar. Eso me da mucha tranquilidad, mucha calma. Tal vez sea una cosa muy neurótica, pero es inevitable.” Luis Ignacio Helguera, “El compositor en su estudio: Conversación con Mario Lavista,” (*Paréntesis*) 1, no. 11 (2001): 69.

deepest silence and from the darkest hour of the night,” the song of the dawn emerged.¹⁵

Retrospectively, after more than forty years, Arizpe regards *Canto del alba* as the piece that best embodies the creative intimacy she shared with Lavista, and also as a composition intrinsically connected to her heart. With the same commitment to their conjoined creative process, they envisioned two other pieces, each for a different flute: *Lamento* (1981), for bass flute, and *Nocturno* (1982), for alto flute.¹⁶ Together with *Canto del alba* they form a triptych that has gathered a prominent place in the Latin American flute repertoire.¹⁷ Moreover, Arizpe played a crucial role in creating the contemporary music ensemble Da Capo, which also coincided with the foundation of the journal *Pauta*.¹⁸

The late 1970s and early 1980s were productive periods for experimental and avant-garde music in Mexico. In 1978 (the year Carlos Chávez died), composer Manuel Enríquez became director of the Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información Musical Carlos Chávez (National Music Research Center, Cenidim)—a state-sponsored institution. Enríquez envisioned the Center becoming a leading platform for new music projects. To that end, for example, he relocated the Electronic Music Laboratory from the National Conservatory to the Cenidim, and, most importantly, he created what would become Mexico’s first annual contemporary music festival, the Foro Internacional de Música Nueva (International Forum for New Music).¹⁹ It was during the Foro’s very first iteration, at one of the evening concerts at the Pinacoteca Virreinal on April 28, 1979, that Arizpe premiered *Canto del alba* to great acclaim.²⁰

A significant precedent for establishing the Foro was the Festival Hispano Mexicano de Música Contemporánea, founded and co-coordinated by Mexican composer Alicia Urreta and Spanish composer Carlos Cruz de Castro. As Marta Cureses documents, during its decade of existence (1973–1983), the Festival Hispano Mexicano functioned as a platform to strengthen binational musical exchanges between Mexico and Spain and achieved wider exposure for Spanish music in the American continent and vice versa (the festival was celebrated in both countries).²¹ During the festival’s

¹⁵ Arizpe, discussion, September 3, 2020. [... como algo que surge desde el silencio más profundo y desde la negrura de la noche.]

¹⁶ Arizpe notes that, from the beginning, Lavista’s idea was to collaborate with her in writing a triptych for flute. Marielena Arizpe, in discussion with the author, via phone, September 27, 2020. More about *Lamento* will be explored in Chapter 6.

¹⁷ While each piece was first published separately by Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, they were grouped as a triptych in an edition published by Sonic Art Editions in 2007.

¹⁸ More information about *Pauta* and Da Capo will be explored later in the chapter.

¹⁹ For more information about the history of the Foro, see Iracema de Andrade, *El Foro Internacional de Música Nueva (1979–1994): 16 años de música electroacústica, multimedia e interdisciplina en México* (Mexico City: INBA, Cenidim, forthcoming).

²⁰ Arizpe fondly remembers the overwhelming reception of the piece and recalls that Luciano Berio, among others, was in attendance. Arizpe, discussion, September 3, 2020.

²¹ Marta Cureses, “Aportaciones al estudio de la música española en la década de los setenta: En el camino hacia Europa,” in *Miscel·lània Oriol Martorell*, ed. Xosé Aviñoa Pérez (Barcelona: Universitat de Barcelona, 1998), 216. Also see Marta Cureses, “Cruz de Castro: Travesía hacia México,” *Música Oral del Sur: Revista Internacional* 9 (2012): 472–511.

sixth iteration, on October 18, 1979—a few months after the Foro's first iteration—Arizpe performed *Canto del alba*. Both the Festival Hispano Mexicano and the Foro Internacional de Música Nueva were great incentives for the creation and performance of new music. While Lavista did not have a leadership role in the organization of either, he was very much a part of the same community that organized them.

During such an ebullient season, it was at Lavista's house where Arizpe and oboist Leonora Saavedra, in conversation with Lavista, decided to form a professional new music ensemble, Da Capo. The conversations about forming Da Capo also went hand in hand with the idea of founding a music journal. Their enthusiasm for the creation, performance, and promotion of new Mexican music was fueled and supported by their friendship. And navigating among the activities pertaining to the creation, performance, and promotion of new music became a lifestyle.

It is in the context of an intimate community devoted to new music gathered in Lavista's house that Leonora Saavedra (b. 1956) and Lavista began collaborating on *Marsias* for oboe and eight crystal wine glasses. She had returned from an extended period in Europe, where she had studied at the Cologne University of Music and the Sorbonne in Paris.²² As soon as she was back in Mexico, she became part of the thriving new music scene where she played a leadership role not only as a performer, but also as a promoter, organizer, researcher, and writer (see Figure 4.4).

For Lavista, composing a piece for oboe was never merely an abstract undertaking. He and Saavedra had developed a very close friendship, and, together with Arizpe, were very active working on various projects. Given that they were already creating a music journal, *Pauta*, which was born in conjunction with the music ensemble Da Capo, the collaboration between Lavista and Saavedra in creating a piece for oboe was an "obvious" undertaking.²³ In an interview published in 1980, Lavista revealed that he intended to title his composition "Leonora no. 4" in her honor.²⁴ Saavedra recalls that whenever she met with Lavista to work on *Marsias*, they would hold wide-ranging conversations not necessarily limited to the musical material in question. Saavedra premiered *Marsias* on August 26, 1982, at the Museo Nacional de Arte (MUNAL) during one of Da Capo's monographic concerts—this one in particular being dedicated solely to Mario Lavista's music.

I spoke with Saavedra in 2005 about her experience collaborating with Lavista, and like Arizpe, she remembered that period very fondly. The early 1980s was a period when they were all equally excited about making music, spending time together, and embarking on new projects collectively. More than anything, it was their friendship

²² Saavedra had studied oboe with Gys de Graaf and Robert Fisher at Mexico's National Music Conservatory, and with Helmut Hucke at Cologne's Musikhochschule. At Paris's Sorbonne she completed a master's degree in musicology in 1979 (her focus was the music of Manuel Enríquez).

²³ Leonora Saavedra, in discussion with the author, Washington, DC, October 29, 2005.

²⁴ María Ángeles González and Leonora Saavedra, *Música mexicana contemporánea* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1982), 138. The title *Leonora* no. 4 also alludes to Beethoven's opera, *Fidelio*, which was originally titled *Leonore, oder Der Triumph der ehelichen Liebe*, and the subsequent overtures he wrote for the opera, *Leonore* no. 2, and *Leonore* no. 3.



Figure 4.4 Leonora Saavedra, ca. 1982–1983. Courtesy of Juan Arturo Brennan.

that laid the foundation for any possible collaboration. “In this marvelous transition between the intimate quotidian and the spiritual artistic,” Saavedra remarked, “there was no distinction. We would go from eating together, to improvising together, to [working on] *Pauta*, and Da Capo ... [we were forming] a kind of community. It was very pleasurable.”²⁵

Saavedra recalled that the musical collaborations between herself and Lavista took place as a natural succession of interpersonal events: first, supper, along with Arizpe (Lavista’s partner at the time); next, the endless conversations that usually happen at the table after supper; and finally, the transition from the dining room to the studio, where the piano was. She fondly remembered that the studio was filled with conversation and music. As Arizpe also pointed out in our conversation, Saavedra noted that Lavista chose to work with performers with whom he had already established a significant connection. In Saavedra’s words: “Mario is the kind of person who establishes spiritual relationships with the people around him. There are certain indispensable

²⁵ Leonora Saavedra, in discussion with the author, Washington, DC, October 30, 2005. [En esta maravillosa transición entre lo cotidiano íntimo y lo espiritual artístico, que siempre era un continuo... No pensábamos en una obra para oboe, sino era un momento de intimidad, creando esos fundamentos de intimidad con sus amigos y con sus intérpretes potenciales que ... sentaron esas bases de la posible colaboración entre Mario y yo, que simultáneamente también se dio con *Pauta*, con el oboe, con un montón de proyectos que no había distinción, íbamos de la comida a la improvisación, a *Pauta*, a Da Capo, una especie de comunidad, muy a gusto.]

conditions he is looking for in his muses, such as an intellectual, spiritual, and physical. When he does not find that affinity, he does not write.”²⁶

Saavedra recalls that their working sessions took place at the composer’s home studio, a peaceful and comfortable space. Through the decades, people close to Lavista noted the tranquil atmosphere of his home, which remained open to weekly social gatherings, or *tertulias*. With regard to this subject, composer and critic Luis Jaime Cortez once wrote that “it is not possible to love Lavista’s music without imagining his house” because it “serves as a bridge between his music and us. . . . Being in it, one understands why a house is one of the greatest powers for the integration of one’s thoughts, memories, and dreams . . . [where] time seems to have stopped.”²⁷ Saavedra describes Lavista’s home as “a place of great serenity. It has a dining room, his piano, [and] photos of his musical heroes. Lavista lived in the basement of the Edificio Condesa for many years, a dark place, but one of great serenity”²⁸ (see Figure 4.5).

Initially, Lavista would give Saavedra some sketches or a couple of measures. She would play what was written on the staff paper, and both would comment on what to add or to take out, and which extended techniques or other effects worked for the oboe and which did not. Much like Arizpe, Saavedra remembers that, when working with Lavista, composer and performer would establish a communication system that was not bound to the authorial hierarchy prevalent in concert music. What mattered was the conviction that the project was fully shared and that both were working for a common goal. Saavedra commented:

Mario treated the performer with great respect. . . . More than merely obtaining help from performers, those were moments of communion in a mutual project, . . . a search process where the performer provides emotional support. Their communication results in a sonorous embodiment. [As a performer one becomes] a *sounding board*, a reverberating chamber where the composer throws in his ideas and the performer bounces them back to him.²⁹

²⁶ Saavedra, discussion, October 30, 2005. [Mario es una persona que establece relaciones espirituales con la gente a su alrededor. Condiciones indispensables para él, busca afinidad intelectual, espiritual, física con sus musas, entonces hay producción. Cuando no encuentra esa afinidad, no escribe.]

²⁷ Luis Jaime Cortez, “Mario Lavista,” in *Mario Lavista: Textos en torno a la música*, ed. Luis Jaime Cortez (Mexico City: Conaculta, INBA, Cendim, 1988), 31–32. [No es posible amar la música de Mario Lavista sin imaginar su casa . . . sirve de puente entre su música y nosotros. . . . Al estar en ella se entiende por qué la casa es uno de los mayores poderes de integración para los pensamientos, los recuerdos y los sueños del hombre. . . . El tiempo parece detenido.]

²⁸ Saavedra, discussion, October 30, 2005. [Es un espacio que respira Mario Lavista . . . todo lo que decide se decide en ese espacio. Es un espacio de gran serenidad. Tiene su comedor, su piano, las fotos de sus héroes musicales. En el sótano del edificio Condesa, ahí vivió años Lavista, un espacio oscuro, pero de gran serenidad.]

²⁹ Saavedra, discussion, October 30, 2005. [Con Mario, el respeto al intérprete era muy grande. . . . Pero más que dar una ayuda, esos eran momentos de comunión en un proyecto, . . . se da un proceso de búsqueda en donde el intérprete está de soporte emocional y en el que hay una comunicación que da por resultado una encarnación sonora. [Como intérprete te vuelves] un *sounding board*, una cámara de reverberaciones en donde él echa a andar sus ideas, tú como intérprete las rebotas y él las recibe.]



Figure 4.5 Mario Lavista's music studio while living at Edificios Condesa, ca. 1991. Courtesy of Paulina Lavista.

While Saavedra was recalling the co-creative process of *Marsias* more than twenty years after it happened, she vividly remembered certain aspects of Lavista's studio and the atmosphere of camaraderie, friendship, and mutual respect. She stated that the collaborative process Lavista established with the performers he wrote with was developed under "a mutual understanding and emotional intimacy." If this understanding and intimacy were not present, then the collaboration would likely not happen.³⁰

When Lavista collaborated with a chamber ensemble, he often arranged one-on-one sessions with individual members. This was the case, for instance, when he worked with Cuarteto Latinoamericano for *Reflejos de la noche*—the first of several quartets Lavista wrote for the ensemble. Although Lavista was and remained very close to all the members of the quartet—Saul Bitrán, Arón Bitrán, Javier Montiel, and Álvaro Bitrán—he had multiple individual collaborative sessions with Arón Bitrán, second violinist and one of Lavista's closest friends.³¹ Arón recalls, "Lavista came to

³⁰ Saavedra, discussion, October 30, 2005. [Si Mario no hubiera sentido una afinidad espiritual con el intérprete, no hubiera escrito la pieza. Hay cierta complicidad, intimidad emocional que él establece con sus intérpretes. El tiene que sentir que hay cierta comprensión, grado de contacto.]

³¹ Saúl Bitrán, first violinist of Cuarteto Latinoamericano, became a member of the ensemble in 1986, being preceded by Uruguayan Jorge Rissi. Saúl, Arón, and Álvaro Bitrán are brothers. Throughout the rest of this section, I use first names to avoid confusion.



Figure 4.6 Cuarteto Latinoamericano (from left to right: Javier Montiel, Saúl Bitrán, Álvaro Bitrán, and Arón Bitrán), ca. 1999. Courtesy of Paulina Lavista.

me and said ‘Please, show me everything you can do with these harmonics.’ He took notes discreetly, went home with his ‘alphabet,’ and began to create the work.”³² When writing this piece, both Arón and Lavista were living in the Edificio Condesa, which facilitated the frequency of Lavista’s visits. This proximity allowed the composer to consult his *vecino de arriba* (upstairs neighbor) on all sorts of technical matters (see Figure 4.6).

Lavista was interested in exploring the instrumental possibilities of the string quartet by studying the performers’ individual abilities. All the members of Cuarteto Latinoamericano agree that working in collaboration with Lavista was an exceptional experience because of the composer’s openness in exchanging ideas. First violinist Saúl remembers that Lavista used to come to them with a series of specific questions, often asking them, “how would this be better?”³³ Arón emphasizes Lavista’s willingness to meet the performer’s needs, “which is a great virtue, not all composers are that way.”³⁴

³² Arón Bitrán, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, August 30, 2004. [Lavista viene y me dice: “Muéstrame todo lo que se puede hacer con estos armónicos.” Él toma nota discretamente, se lleva ese “alfabeto” y después construye la obra.]

³³ Saúl Bitrán, in discussion with the author, San Diego, CA, June 3, 2006.

³⁴ A. Bitrán, discussion, August 30, 2004. [... lo cual es una gran virtud, no todos los compositores lo son].

Álvaro considered the daily rehearsal time with the composer to be a beneficial opportunity to clarify the use and scope of unconventional string effects. He recalls that, although Lavista carefully prepared his compositions, the ensemble was able to offer him useful suggestions, “for instance, about which harmonics would be easier to play or how they could be notated.”³⁵ In this sense, the work—as text—is also the result of a collaborative effort. In addition to embracing the quartet’s suggestions, Lavista welcomed their input about other aspects of the piece, such as its length. In this regard, Javier Montiel observed that the composer “gladly accepted the ‘criticism’ that the work was a little longer than it should be, and he accepted a couple of cuts that we suggested.”³⁶

Before *Reflejos de la noche*, Lavista had composed *Diacronía*, for string quartet (1969). In Consuelo Carredano’s opinion, the fifteen-year gap between *Diacronía* and *Reflejos de la noche* could be explained by noting that no particular string quartet had stimulated the composer until he met Cuarteto Latinoamericano: “Lavista is a composer who has always been close to the Cuarteto from the beginning.”³⁷ In fact, this fortunate encounter between composer and ensemble, which led to other fruitful collaborations, might have been the cause of the piece’s success, both nationally and abroad. As Carredano points out, *Reflejos de la noche* has remained one of Lavista’s best-known works. Thanks to the collaboration between composer and performers, the score is carefully notated, which facilitated the piece’s international circulation. Montiel attributes the piece’s popularity in part to the fact that, after its successful premiere, Cuarteto Latinoamericano continued to include it in its programs, making the work known throughout Mexico and abroad.³⁸ Saúl suggests that one reason why *Reflejos* has remained a central work in his ensemble’s repertoire is the contrast it provides with other works written exclusively for them, some of which include complex rhythms and fast tempi.³⁹ This contrast is most obvious in the fact that this piece is written entirely for string harmonics.

The fruitful collaboration between Lavista and Cuarteto Latinoamericano during the composition of *Reflejos de la noche* resulted in subsequent projects.⁴⁰ While *Música para mi vecino* (1995) was commissioned by the Kronos Quartet, its title

³⁵ Álvaro Bitrán, in discussion with the author, San Diego, CA, June 3, 2006. [... para que él pudiera preguntarnos muchas dudas de cosas que se podían hacer o no. Como es un compositor muy serio y muy preparado, obviamente sabía lo que se podía o no se podía hacer, pero de todas maneras nosotros le dimos muchas sugerencias de que tal o cual armónico fuera más fácil de tocar o de escribir.]

³⁶ Javier Montiel, in discussion with the author, San Diego, CA, June 3, 2006. [Él con mucho gusto aceptó nuestra “crítica” de que la obra se pasaba un poquito de tamaño y aceptó un par de cortes que le sugerimos.]

³⁷ Consuelo Carredano, *Cuerdas Revueltas: Cuarteto Latinoamericano, veinte años de música* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2003), 125. [... no se sintió estimulado por ningún grupo hasta que se integró el Cuarteto Latinoamericano. Lavista es uno de los compositores que han estado siempre cercanos al Cuarteto desde sus inicios.]

³⁸ Montiel, discussion. [... pasó la prueba de los veinte años.]

³⁹ S. Bitrán, discussion. [... es algo totalmente diferente, pero es algo tan nuestro como todo lo demás.]

⁴⁰ Exploring Lavista’s string quartets provides a good overview of Lavista’s compositional trajectory. See Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, “Contrapunto a cuatro: Una mirada a la trayectoria de Mario Lavista desde sus cuartetos de cuerdas,” *Pauta: Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical* 121 (2012): 89–97.

alludes, on one hand, to the “neighbor from the North,” the United States (home of the Kronos Quartet), and on the other hand, to Arón, who was Lavista’s upstairs neighbor at the time. Later string quartets written by Lavista in collaboration with Cuarteto Latinoamericano include *Sinfonías* (1996), *Siete invenciones* (1998), and *Suite en cinco partes* (1999). Years later Lavista wrote two additional quartets: *Adagio para cuarteto de cuerdas* (2015), commissioned by the Spanish bank BBVA and dedicated to the Venezuelan quartet Simón Bolívar, and *Toque de silencio* (2017), commissioned by and dedicated to Cuarteto José White.⁴¹

When *Canto del alba*, *Marsias*, and *Reflejos de la noche* are performed, the acoustic quality of the physical venue (whether a concert hall, a church, or any other space) has to allow for a high degree of reverberation. Arizpe was able to play *Canto del alba* in a variety of places because the flute was amplified, and she recalls that audiences tended to be mostly silent. In the case of *Marsias*, the delicate timbre of the wine glasses could get lost in an open environment. Anticipating variations in the acoustic space, Lavista indicated in the score of *Marsias* that “the number of glasses might be doubled or tripled, and so the number of performers.”⁴² A similar resonance is necessary for a satisfactory performance of *Reflejos de la noche*, one that allows the string harmonics to be heard. In this regard, Saúl explains: “The sound of *Reflejos* is very fragile. . . . It is one thing to produce the harmonics with the left hand, but it is quite another and more difficult to find the right pressure of the bow in order not to kill the vibration of the harmonic. This aspect depends greatly on the acoustics.”⁴³

With the intention of providing an alternative version, Lavista arranged *Reflejos de la noche* for chamber orchestra in 1986. The added sonority of the double basses gives the arrangement a voluminous sound. In the case of *Marsias*, the position of the performer on stage in relation to the glasses was a matter of utmost consideration. Saavedra remembers that in the first performances of the work, Lavista preferred the glasses to be off stage, as “he did not want the glasses to be a prominent visual element.”⁴⁴ At the premiere of the work, the glasses remained in the orchestra pit, a factor that accentuates their symbolically divine (or simply mysterious) sound quality. Nevertheless, in the performance history of *Marsias*, the crystal glasses have usually been located on the stage, opposite the soloist. The acoustic result is a sonic

⁴¹ In 2011 Cuarteto Latinoamericano released the recording *Mario Lavista Complete String Quartets* for the independent British label Toccata Classics, which included the six aforementioned quartets. The entire cycle of Lavista’s eight quartets was first performed in a series of three consecutive concerts given by Cuarteto Latinoamericano and Cuarteto José White on June 3–5, 2022, at the Sala Manuel M. Ponce of the Palace of Fine Arts.

⁴² Mario Lavista, *Marsias* (Mexico City: Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, 1985). Performance indications are included in English and Spanish.

⁴³ S. Bitrán, discussion. [El sonido en *Reflejos* es muy frágil. . . . Una cosa es producir los armónicos en la mano izquierda, pero otra cosa aún más difícil es encontrar la presión correcta del arco para no matar la vibración del armónico, lo cual depende muchísimo de la acústica.]

⁴⁴ Saavedra, discussion, October 30, 2005. [. . . quería visualmente que las copas no fueran un elemento prominente.]

sphere that allows the oboe to come in and out of it. The three pieces call for a space that allows for intimacy, which parallels the intimacy that developed during the compositional process.

In his 1998 acceptance speech at El Colegio Nacional titled “The Musician’s Language,” Lavista devoted considerable time to elaborating on his interest in using extended techniques. He saw in them a continuation and renovation of musical virtuosity, born in the exceptional abilities of performers.⁴⁵ For Lavista, both composers and performers have historically contributed to the transformation of instrumental techniques.⁴⁶ The goal for a composer is to assimilate the instrumental possibilities into an individual compositional style.⁴⁷ Following his collaboration with Arizpe, Lavista continued working closely with other performers. In 1980, he collaborated with double bass player Bertram Turetzky while composing *Dusk*, and with the guitar duo Castañón-Bañuelos for *Cante*. This intense period resulted in the 1984 publication of a small compilation of essays about extended techniques written by Lavista’s collaborators titled *Nuevas técnicas instrumentales*.⁴⁸ Its second edition (1989) included essays that focus on the exploration of extended techniques for other instruments: clarinet, strings, and harp. Although both publications are out of print, they remain essential texts for contemporary music circles throughout Latin America.⁴⁹

Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Lavista continued an intense labor of collaborations that resulted in a body of solo and chamber pieces that became emblematic of *el estilo lavistiano*: with clarinetist Luis Humberto Ramos in *Madrigal* (1985), with recorder player Horacio Franco in *Ofrenda* (1986), with bassoonist Wendy Holdaway in *Responsorio* (1988), and with violist Omar Hernández in *Cuaderno de viaje* (1989). Two emblematic recordings came out of these collaborations. The first, released on LP and titled *Mario Lavista: Reflejos de la noche*, was the first monographic album of Lavista’s music (see Figure 4.7).⁵⁰

This recording was followed by the CD *Mario Lavista: Cuaderno de viaje*, which was released in 1994 by the label Quindecim. All the pieces it includes were the result

⁴⁵ Mario Lavista, *El lenguaje del músico* (Mexico City: El Colegio Nacional, 1999), 30.

⁴⁶ Lavista, *El lenguaje del músico*, 34. In this regard, Lavista states: “De esta forma, participamos y contribuimos a esa lenta y digna transformación que los instrumentos y su técnica han experimentado a través de los siglos. Y son el compositor y el intérprete los que contribuyen a ella tratando de comprender la naturaleza compleja de esas alteraciones, de esas innovaciones cuya razón de ser reside, en gran medida, en el conflicto que surge entre la idea musical y la técnica de ejecución.”

⁴⁷ Lavista, *El lenguaje del músico*, 35. In Lavista’s words: “[T]odas estas ‘delicias sonoras’, como las llama . . . Bertram Turetzky, no tienen sentido ni interés alguno, a menos que se conviertan en parte esencial del vocabulario individual del compositor y funcionen entonces como un elemento auténtico y significativo de su música.”

⁴⁸ Mario Lavista, ed., *Nuevas técnicas instrumentales: Flauta, oboe, clarinete, cuerdas, contrabajo, arpa, guitarra*, 2nd ed. (Mexico City: Conaculta, INBA, Cenidim, 1989).

⁴⁹ More about *Nuevas técnicas instrumentales* will be explored later in the chapter.

⁵⁰ This recording includes *Madrigal* (performed by Luis Humberto Ramos), *Ofrenda* (performed by Horacio Franco), *Cuicani* (performed by Arizpe and Ramos), and *Reflejos de la noche* (performed by Cuarteto Latinoamericano). *Mario Lavista: Reflejos de la noche*, Serie Siglo XX, vol. IV, SEP, INBA, Cenidim, SACM, 1988, LP.



Figure 4.7 Back cover of LP, *Mario Lavista: Reflejos de la noche* (1988).

of close collaborations between composer and performers.⁵¹ Subsequent collaborations from the 1990s include projects with Trío Neos for *Las músicas dormidas* (1990), with the Quinteto de Alientos de la Ciudad de México for *Cinco danzas breves* for wind quintet (1994), with Tambuco Percussion Ensemble for *Danza isorritmica* (1996), with guitarist Marco Antonio Anguiano for *Natarayah* (1997), and with organist Gustavo Delgado for *Mater dolorosa* (2000).⁵²

⁵¹ *Mario Lavista: Cuaderno de viaje*, Siglo XX, vol. XII, Conaculta, INBA, Cenidim, UNAM, 1994, compact disc. It includes *Madrical*, *Marsias*, *Lamento* (a la memoria de Raúl Lavista), *Cuaderno de viaje* (viola), *Cuicani*, *Cante*, and *Responsorio* (in memoriam Rodolfo Halffter).

⁵² Trío Neos is comprised of clarinetist Fernando Domínguez, bassoonist Wendy Holdaway, and pianist Ana María Tradatti. Quinteto de Alientos de la Ciudad de México is comprised of flutist Asako Arai, oboist Joseph Shalita, clarinetist Fernando Domínguez, bassoonist Wendy Holdaway, and hornist Paul Miller. Tambuco Percussion Ensemble is comprised of Ricardo Gallardo, Alfredo Bringas, Raúl Tudón, and Iván Manzanilla (who was later replaced by Miguel González).

Texts as Pretexts: Musico-Poetic Imaginations

It is not unusual to find in Lavista's scores epigraphs chosen from a wide variety of sources: ancient Chinese poets from the Tang Dynasty, seventeenth-century Spanish poet Francisco de Quevedo, twentieth-century U.S. writer Ezra Pound, and many others.⁵³ The epigraphs not only reveal the composer's literary tastes, but also some of his aesthetic ponderings. At times, Lavista felt encouraged to compose while reading certain literary sources, as they stimulated his creativity. In his own words, "texts become a 'pretext' ... to unleash my imagination."⁵⁴ Other times, however, while immersed in composing a piece, or just after completing it, Lavista would remember certain literary texts that seemed to capture the precise mood he was also exploring sonically. That his scores contain a series of literary references, whether in their titles or included as epigraphs, might explain why many critics and composers describe his music as "poetic." Composer Ana Lara (b. 1959), who studied with Lavista, expressed: "to me Mario Lavista is a composer who is also a great poet. The care with which he envelops sound is one of his essential traits."⁵⁵

Using the analogy of twin sisters to describe the intricate connection between music and poetry, Lavista explained that "the two artistic disciplines discover and explore their own mysteries."⁵⁶ He once went so far as to reference a biblical verse (St. John 1:1) to justify this alliance: "If it's true that in the beginning there was the word, there was singing as well. Word and music, syllable and sound, were simultaneously born in the heart of man."⁵⁷ To Lavista, the union between music and poetry opens an imaginative dialogue that belongs to the realm of human imagination. Lavista concluded that the space where the dialogue between music and poetry can be found is illustrated by the refrain of one of José Gorostiza's poems, "*No es agua ni arena / la orilla del mar*" (It is neither water nor sand / the ocean's shore).⁵⁸ In his 2002 essay "Dialogue between Music and Poetry," Lavista explained that the goal of exploring connections between music and poetry was to open the interpretive fields of a poem by "illuminating certain aspects, emphasizing some images,

⁵³ A complete list of the epigraphs included in Lavista's scores can be found in the companion website for this book.

⁵⁴ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, July 25, 2005. [Los textos estimulan mi imaginación musical; se vuelven un "pretexto"—valga la palabra, que no es exactamente lo que quiero decir—para que desaten mi imaginación.]

⁵⁵ Ana Lara, in *La escritura musical: 70 años de Mario Lavista*, directed by Paulina Lavista (Mexico City: TV UNAM, 2013), DVD. [Para mí es un compositor que además es un gran poeta. El cuidado que él tiene para envolver el sonido es una de sus características fundamentales.]

⁵⁶ Mario Lavista, "El sonido y la palabra," *Quodlibet: Revista de la Academia de Música del Palacio de Minería* 26 (2017): 22. [... esta relación tan intensa ilustra la manera en que dos disciplinas artísticas descubren y exploran sus mutuos misterios.]

⁵⁷ Mario Lavista, "El canto coral: Los BBC Singers," in *Memoria de El Colegio Nacional 2006*, ed. Ramón Xirau, 219. [Si en verdad en un principio fue el verbo, luego entonces también lo fue el canto. La palabra y la música, la sílaba y el sonido, nacieron simultáneamente del corazón del hombre.]

⁵⁸ Lavista, "El canto coral," 219.

or establishing relationships or structural connections.”⁵⁹ These interpretive fields are also meant to be brought together by the audience during the listening experience.

In both interviews and published essays, Lavista regularly used these quotes or analogies to address the role of poetry in his music, without further explaining what compositional strategies he employed to sonically construct the musico-poetic connection he so praised. Therefore, I offer possible interpretations of the musico-poetic dimensions I have gathered from my affective listening of Lavista’s music. My remarks are informed, in part, by the conversations I had with both Lavista and the performers who collaborated with him, and by the intertextual networks I have been able to draw through my own listening experience and subjective musical analysis.

Arizpe believes that the purpose of the epigraph found in *Canto del alba* is to offer poetic imagery that sets the tone for the performer. The author of the poem is Wang Wei (701–61 CE), one of China’s most revered poets.

<i>Sentado solo, entre los bambúes,</i>	I sit alone in the dark bamboo,
<i>toco el laúd, y silbo, silbo, silbo.</i>	I play my lute and sing, sing, sing.
<i>Nadie me oye en el inmenso bosque,</i>	Deep in the woods where no one hears me,
<i>pero la blanca luna me ilumina.</i> ⁶⁰	but the bright moon comes and shines on me there. ⁶¹

This would be the first of several times Lavista included epigraphs drawn from Chinese poetry. Throughout the 1960s, the Spanish translations by writer Marcela de Juan granted wider access to this body of poetry. She published three anthologies of Chinese poetry that circulated within the Spanish-speaking world. Writers and poets with whom Lavista had a very close relationship, including Octavio Paz and José Emilio Pacheco, were heavily influenced by Chinese poetry and had also begun to incorporate De Juan’s translations in their work.⁶² De Juan’s anthologies fueled a fascination with the “Orient” prevalent among Mexican *Modernista* poets, in both

⁵⁹ Mario Lavista, “Diálogo entre música y poesía,” in *Memoria de El Colegio Nacional 2002*, ed. Ramón Xirau (Mexico City: El Colegio Nacional, 2002), 87. [... iluminando ciertos aspectos, enfatizando algunas imágenes o estableciendo relaciones o conexiones estructurales.]

⁶⁰ Marcela de Juan, trans., *Segunda antología de la poesía china* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1962), 66.

⁶¹ This is the translation provided in the score edition published by Sonic Art Editions (2007). No translator is named. However, this particular translation is heavily indebted to the one by G. W. Robinson: “I sit alone in the dark bamboos / Play my lute and sing and sing / Deep in the woods where no one knows I am / But the bright moon comes and shines on me there.” G. W. Robinson, trans., *Poems of Wang Wei* (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1973), 31. In another translation by David Hinton, the phrase “breath chants” is used to describe the sonic dimension of the performer: “Sitting alone in silent bamboo dark, / I play a *ch’in*, settle into breath chants. / In these forest depths no one knows / this moon come bathing me in light.” See David Hinton, trans., *The Selected Poems of Wang Wei* (New York: New Directions, 2006), 49.

⁶² As an example, see José Emilio Pacheco’s collection, *No me preguntes cómo pasa el tiempo (poemas, 1964–1968)* (Mexico City: Joaquín Mortiz, 1969). The title comes from one of the poems translated by Marcela de Juan that she attributes to Li Kiu Ling. See Anthony Stanton, “José Emilio Pacheco, poeta elegiaco,” in *José Emilio Pacheco: Reescritura en movimiento*, ed. Yvette Jiménez de Báez (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2014): 98.



Figure 4.8 Cover of Mario Lavista's score *Canto del alba*. Artwork by Raúl Herrera. D.R. © Mario Lavista Camacho and Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, A.C., 2003. Used by permission.

literature and the visual art of the second half of the twentieth century.⁶³ As Rubén Gallo points out, in contrast with European Orientalism, which was embedded in imperialist projects, Mexican representations of the Orient have more to do with the authors' cultural fantasies than with a real place.⁶⁴ In the case of Lavista, opting for Asian references allowed him to articulate a timeless poetic cosmopolitanism. Although Wang Wei's verse was added to *Canto del alba* once the sonic dimension of the piece was completed, it encapsulates a fantasy in which the "breath chant" of the flute is transformed into a polyphonic zither under a bright moon.

This nocturnal atmosphere is also captured in the artwork that accompanies the cover of the score published by Ediciones Mexicanas de Música. This drawing was a gift Lavista received from Raúl Herrera (b. 1941), an artist who had explored Oriental subjects in his work since the mid-1960s using Chinese ink (or so-called Indian ink) for his drawings (see Figure 4.8).

⁶³ The fascination for the "Orient" as a mythical construct in the work of Mexican artists and writers is explored by Rubén Gallo. See Rubén Gallo, "Mexican Orientalism," *Review: Literature and Arts of the Americas* 39, no. 1 (2006): 60–73.

⁶⁴ Gallo, "Mexican Orientalism," 62.

To Argentinean flutist and scholar Beatriz Plana, who conducted a multiyear research study on Lavista's music for flute, the programmatic dimension of *Canto del alba* allows her to understand individual sonic events as derived from the images of Wang Wei's poem. She observes that

Lavista's music combines sections clearly marked by polyphony, through applying multiphonics that suggest the idea of the lute (a polyphonic instrument), and monody, through applying harmonics, diffused tones, *glissandi*, or whisper tones linked to the idea of the whistle [*silbo*]. [All these elements are treated] with an extremely slow treatment of tempo, where the diverse sonic events are marked by what Lavista calls, "a marvelous slowness" when referring to Oriental art in particular.⁶⁵

Lavista's polyphonic treatment of the flute, not only in *Canto del alba*, but also in his subsequent solo flute pieces, *Lamento* and *Nocturno*, constitutes the main focus of the study by Argentinean flutist and conductor Sebastián Tellado. He notes that Lavista "treats the flute directly as a polyphonic instrument capable of creating different musical textures. This has allowed him to employ diverse types of writing: from monodic to contrapuntal."⁶⁶ The kind of versatility evidenced in the different writing styles for the flute (and for other instruments) has been referred to as a *renacimiento instrumental* (instrumental renaissance). Although Lavista did not coin this phrase, it appears in many of his writings and interviews when he is explaining the purpose and goal of employing extended techniques.⁶⁷ Lavista mentioned multiple times that the real protagonists of the instrumental renaissance are the virtuoso performers who have extraordinary command of instrumental techniques. To flutist Alejandro Escuer, instrumental renaissance constitutes a common denominator that can be found throughout Lavista's works. Escuer defines the term as "a deliberate use of

⁶⁵ Beatriz Plana, "Tres propuestas de aplicación de técnicas extendidas en la flauta contemporánea en Latinoamérica: Mario Lavista, Adina Izarra y Diego Luzuriaga," *Huellas... Búsquedas de Arte y Diseño* 6 (2008): 167. [La música de Lavista va combinando secciones signadas claramente por la polifonía, mediante la aplicación de multifónicos, con los que sugiere la idea del laúd (instrumento polifónico), así como otras en las que la música es netamente monódica, con la aplicación de armónicos, tonos difusos, *glissandi* o *whisper tones*, que se vinculan a la idea del silbo, junto a un tratamiento del tempo extremadamente lento, donde los diversos acontecimientos sonoros están marcados por lo que Lavista llama "una lentitud maravillosa," cuando habla precisamente del arte oriental.]

⁶⁶ Sebastián Tellado, "Bajo el signo de Bach. La ilusión polifónica de la Partita BWV 1013," Diplomatura Superior en Música Contemporánea, <https://sites.google.com/view/dsmc/publicaciones-contenidos/bajo-el-signo-de-bach-sebastian-tellado>, accessed June 22, 2023. Tellado's text was the culmination of a Contemporary Music Certificate conducted at the Conservatorio Superior de Música "Manuel de Falla" in Buenos Aires, Argentina, completed in 2016. [... en *Tríptico* la flauta es tratada directamente como un instrumento polifónico capaz de crear diferentes texturas musicales, lo que le ha permitido emplear diversos tipos de escritura: desde la monofónica hasta la contrapuntística.]

⁶⁷ Gerardo Diríé points out that Lavista's "instrumental renaissance" finds a parallel in Italy, where composers such as Salvatore Sciarrino explored similar types of instrumental virtuosity alongside performers by writing pieces for solo instruments, such as his 1976 *Capricci*, written for Salvatore Accardo. See Gerardo Diríé, "Reflejos de la noche de Mario Lavista: Un análisis musical," trans. Dana Gelinás, *Pauta: Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical* 42 (1992): 79–80.

acoustical resources such as extended techniques (as opposed to the use of electronic means).⁶⁸

The slow tempo indicated at the beginning of *Canto del alba* (MM quarter note = ca. 30) allows for each sonority to emerge without being rushed. Each sonic gesture requires utmost precision. The metronome marking is accompanied by the following indication: *Lontano. Come 'la luce incerta e grigia che precede l'alba.'* (As from a distance. 'Like the grey, uncertain light of the hour before dawn'). The quotation inside the phrase comes from Giacomo Puccini's *Tosca*. This moment, which happens during the first scene of Act III, describes the singing of a shepherd:

<i>lo de' sospiri.</i>	The wind hears my sorrows
<i>Ve ne rimanno tanti</i>	and my sighs
<i>pe' quante foje</i>	like the leaves of autumn
<i>ne smoveno li venti.</i>	that fade, fall and die. ⁶⁹

Recalling some of the features of the medieval poetic *alba*, the parting of the lovers, which coincides with the dawn, is often announced by a watchman. The inclusion of the scene description from *Tosca* in *Canto del alba* is an intertextual reference that provides further contextualization of what is about to be heard: a song of the dawn that carries sighs, as many as there are leaves driven by the wind. While neither Arizpe nor Lavista mentioned this operatic reference in the conversations I had with them, when describing how the piece emerged, Arizpe's response was like a paraphrase of the libretto line. She said that *Canto del alba* was "like a luminous song that gradually emerges from the quiet darkness."⁷⁰

Given the great gamut of colors achieved by the extended techniques employed by the performer, *Canto del alba* has become not only a favorite among contemporary flute works, but also a piece that recently became part of the required repertoire for participants in the 2020 international flute competition, La Flauta Latinoamericana.⁷¹ Moreover, among Lavista's oeuvre, this piece in particular has gathered scholarly attention from various flutists who have integrated it into their academic research projects. Several commercial recordings that include *Canto del alba* have been released in the past two decades.⁷²

⁶⁸ Alejandro Sánchez Escuer, "The Interpretation of Selected Extended Techniques in Flute Solo Compositions by Mexican Composers: An Analysis and Performance Recommendations" (PhD diss., New York University, 1995), 38.

⁶⁹ Burton D. Fisher, *Puccini's Tosca Libretto*, Opera Journeys Libretto Series (Miami: Opera Journeys Pub., 2006), 47. The libretto was written by Giuseppe Giacosa and Luigi Illica.

⁷⁰ Marielena Arizpe, email message to author, April 18, 2008. [Es como un canto luminoso que surge sutilmente desde la oscuridad silenciosa.]

⁷¹ The competition La Flauta Latinoamericana is organized by a group of flute professors from various Colombian universities. The assigned repertoire for the contestants consists of thirty pieces for solo flute written by Latin American composers. See La Flauta Latinoamericana Concurso Internacional, <https://lafalautalatinamericana.com>, accessed June 22, 2023.

⁷² Arizpe first recorded *Canto del alba* in 1981, for the album *Música nueva latinoamericana* released in Montevideo, Uruguay. In 1984, she recorded the triptych (*Canto del alba*, *Lamento*, and *Nocturno*) for

Even thirty years later, when recalling the creative process behind *Canto del alba*, Arizpe was emotionally affected by the experience. Out of the repertory she has performed throughout her career, Arizpe says *Canto del alba* is the piece that remains closest to her: “I always performed it from memory, and I always performed it from the soul. It became a part of me, completely.”⁷³ She describes it as a piece that “generates a sensation of unity between flute, performer, music, and listener. Some used to say that it secretly sounded like Mexico, others [say it sounds like] the soul, [or] like an uplifting song born from the depths.”⁷⁴

While Lavista drew from Chinese poetry for the epigraphs included in the flute triptych, the text he selected to accompany *Marsyas* is a fragment of a short story by Spanish writer Luis Cernuda (1902–1963) based on the story of the satyr Marsyas from Greek mythology. Saavedra recalls that, when working on the piece, Lavista was immersed in reading Greek mythology (more specifically, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*). Therefore, she suggested that he look into the ancient Greek aulos, which is regarded as the oboe’s ancestor.

According to the myth, as narrated by Cernuda, the aulos was abandoned by the goddess Minerva after she saw her face reflected in the water while she was playing and was displeased to see her cheeks widened as she sought to blow through the reeds. Marsyas found the aulos and began to play it until he perfected it. The relationship he developed with the instrument was so deep that the sound of his playing was none other than “the secret voice of his heart.” Marsyas became an expert on the aulos. Intrepid and naïve, he challenged Apollo, the god of music, to a musical duel. As expected, though exceptionally talented, Marsyas could never surpass Apollo’s divine lyre playing. The muses, who were acting as jury, pronounced the inevitable triumph of the god. As punishment for his arrogance, Marsyas was skinned alive.⁷⁵

Lavista explicitly assigned musical symbolism to certain elements of the story. The oboe represents the satyr, while the crystal glasses symbolize the world of Apollo and offer “a harmonic field based on perfect fifths, that is to say, intervals of perfect consonance, generally associated with divinity. . . . Throughout the work the glasses produce a harmonic bubble or a sphere, inside of which the oboe moves.”⁷⁶ The composer,

the album *Voces de la flauta*, released in Mexico. Both recordings were released on LP format. Alejandro Escuer (who studied under Arizpe) recently released a video recording of *Canto del alba* from Mexico’s Palace of Fine Arts. Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, “Canto del Alba / Homenaje a Mario Lavista,” YouTube video, 9:34, May 12, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYPhJMM_0-I, accessed June 22, 2023.

⁷³ Arizpe, discussion, September 3, 2020. [Siempre la toqué de memoria, la toqué desde el alma. Se hizo parte de mí, totalmente.]

⁷⁴ Arizpe, email message to author, April 18, 2008. [Es una obra muy íntima que genera una sensación de unidad entre flauta, intérprete, música y oyente. Algunos decían que . . . sonaba secretamente a México, otros al alma, otros a un canto alentador que nace desde lo más profundo.] The intense, intimate, and incredibly productive co-creative process between Arizpe and Lavista produced two other pieces for solo flute, *Lamento* and *Nocturno*. Although Lavista continued writing pieces for flute, *Nocturno* was the last one he wrote with Arizpe. Their romantic relationship ended in 1982.

⁷⁵ Cernuda’s complete short story was reprinted in *Pauta* 11 (1984): 10–12.

⁷⁶ Lavista, “Diálogo entre música y poesía,” 88–89. [Éstas simbolizan el mundo de Apolo y ofrecen un campo armónico basado en quintas justas, es decir, en intervalos de consonancia perfecta, generalmente

therefore, instituted a symbolism where the instrumental forces represent the characters and certain musical intervals evoke the nature of the characters; the perfect intervals belong to the realm of the divine, the immortal, while the dissonant intervals, such as the augmented fourths or diminished fifths, are considered mortal or imperfect.

Influenced by Luciano Berio's *Sequenza* for oboe (1969), Lavista wanted his work to have a continuous sound—not a single note like the B natural of Berio's work, but harmonies that would gradually transform. He considered using electronic means to produce this sound, but he ultimately dismissed the idea because of the inflexibility of prerecorded sound. Lavista chose to use crystal glasses as the instrumental force to accompany the oboe as a result of his search for an ethereal sound quality. The timbre of the glasses is too ambiguous to be readily identified; the way the sound is produced lacks articulation and is enriched with sympathetic vibrations, perhaps emphasizing the “divine” nature of Apollo. Moreover, Lavista wanted to allow for a certain degree of liberty in the dialogue between oboe and glasses in performance.

The fragment of Cernuda's short story that Lavista chose as an epigraph to the score captures the moment when Marsyas, blowing through the reeds of the aulos, experienced the sensation that what he was hearing was the voice of his own heart:

Marsias alentó, suspiró una y otra vez a través de las cañas enlazadas, obteniendo sonos más y más dulces y misteriosos que eran como la voz secreta de su corazón.

Marsyas inhaled, and sighed time and time again through the intertwined reeds, producing sweeter and more mysterious tones, like the secret voice of his heart.

Marsyas's relationship with the instrument suggests a process of transformation and identification that implies a possible symbiosis between the satyr and the aulos. Cernuda writes, “A previously unknown feeling, a delight at once both physical and spiritual, invaded him when he heard his own voice, which was transformed and estranged, but in which he could recognize himself unmistakably.”⁷⁷ According to Cernuda's story, Marsyas challenged Apollo to a competition because he wanted to catch the attention of those who were indifferent to the music he was creating. Marsyas was convinced of the beauty of his music and believed it had a degree of perfection only present in the divine. The competition was the ideal scenario for him to showcase that level of perfection by emulating divine sounds.

asociados con la divinidad. . . . A lo largo de la obra, el tipo de sonoridad creado por las copas de cristal funciona como una suerte de burbuja, de esfera, dentro de la cual el oboe se mueve en completa libertad.]

⁷⁷ Luis Cernuda, “Marsias,” in *Obra completa II: Prosa I*, ed. Derek Harris and Luis Maristany (Madrid: Ediciones Siruela, 1994), 797. [Un sentimiento desconocido antes, deleite físico y espiritual a un tiempo, le invadió al escuchar así su propia voz, transformada y enajenada, pero en la que se reconocía inconfundiblemente a sí mismo.]

Example 4.1 Lavista, *Marsyas*, opening. D.R. © Mario Lavista Camacho and Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, A.C., 2006. Used by permission.

In my estimation, three main elements in Cernuda's text were of particular importance to Lavista: the symbiosis between Marsyas and the aulos; the human–divine duality present in the myth's characters; and the element of struggle, on the one hand between Marsyas and Apollo, and on the other between the satyr and the instrument. The symbiosis between the sound of the instrument and the voice of Marsyas is made manifest through a process of transformation and identification. We can hear how Marsyas's voice was transformed into the voice of the aulos through the variations of the initial musical gesture throughout the piece.

The oboe begins with a gesture that delineates the interval of an augmented fourth (Ab–D). This beginning is remarkable insofar as, in spite of the ascending interval, the dynamics indicate a diminuendo from *mf* to *pp*. Once the initial phrase arrives at D, the sound of the glasses begins one octave (or two) higher.⁷⁸ The timbre produced by the combination of these two instrumental forces is extraordinary, for in some way the sounds emanating from the glasses can be perceived as an extension—or echo—of the “real” tone played by the oboe. Nevertheless, the perfect interval between the glasses and the oboe is soon distorted by the oboe's microtone. This intervallic deviation could represent the transformation of the melodic voice of the oboe into the more anxious and unsettled voice of the satyr (see Example 4.1).⁷⁹

A final moment of identification between the voice of the oboe (aulos) and that of Marsyas occurs near the end of the piece, when the oboe reintroduces and slows down the ascending gesture of the beginning. The arrival at D is sustained purely, with no microtone deviation. After a brief pause, the D is presented again, this time *espressivo*, and initiates the last segment, the last sigh (see Example 4.2).

The second symbolic element Lavista took from Cernuda is the human–divine duality. As noted earlier, throughout the work the oboe represents Marsyas and the wine glasses represent Apollo. This duality, however, is expressed musically in a complex and ambiguous fashion. On one hand, in the oboe's line there is a recurring attempt to enter the harmonic field of the wine glasses with consonant intervals—for example, the octave. On the other hand, we can interpret the use of multiphonics as an effort

⁷⁸ The exact interval (one or two octaves) cannot be predetermined because the notes produced by the crystal glasses could vary in register.

⁷⁹ The musical excerpts of *Marsyas* come from the third edition of the score prepared by oboist Carmen Thierry in 2005 and published by Ediciones Mexicanas de Música in 2006.

Example 4.2 Lavista, *Marsias*, segment 8. D.R. © Mario Lavista Camacho and Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, A.C., 2006. Used by permission.

Example 4.3 Lavista, *Marsias*, segment 6. D.R. © Mario Lavista Camacho and Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, A.C., 2006. Used by permission.

by the oboe to imitate the polyphonic possibilities of the glasses. Following this line of thought, we can assert that the presence of simultaneous sonorities in the oboe's line represents Marsyas's capability of attaining a level of divinity, an aspect already signaled in Cernuda's story: "Had they perceived, had they perhaps heard the melody through which he [Marsyas], overcoming his mortal limitations, expressed a super-human zeal?"⁸⁰

Even though the harmonic field of the crystal glasses remains in predominantly consonant intervals (especially perfect fourths and fifths), the interval of the tritone is strategically introduced early in the piece (in the second segment or, for the purposes of my analysis, S2).⁸¹ Moreover, in the most intense moment of the work (S6), the two superimposed fifths played by the glasses are connected by a tritone. In this sense, the presence of the tritone could metaphorically symbolize a mortal or human aspect of Apollo, who, while listening to Marsyas, "furiously tore to pieces the bark of the pine tree he was leaning on."⁸² (See Example 4.3.)

⁸⁰ Cernuda, "Marsias," 799. [¿Habían percibido, habían escuchado acaso la melodía con que él [Marsias], venciendo su limitación mortal, expresara un afán sobrehumano?]

⁸¹ The score for *Marsias* lacks any divisions, measures, or rehearsal letters. To facilitate the analytical discussion, I divide the piece into a total of nine segments. These will be indicated with the initial "S" followed by the number of the segment in discussion.

⁸² Cernuda, "Marsias," 799. [... colérico arrancaba a trozos la corteza del pino donde estaba apoyado.]

In both Cernuda's story and Lavista's composition, the element of struggle is an important and compelling thread. In the story, Marsyas undergoes an internal conflict, feeling like the sounds produced by the reeds are controlling him. His struggle is so intense that it carries him to the verge of madness: "Soon the rumor of his madness, which the forests had sheltered before, reached the village, where he [Marsyas] was received with indifference by some [and] with mockery by others. And that which was for Marsyas at first only a hidden delight, later took possession of him and his whole life, which he wanted to communicate to others."⁸³ The satyr goes through such restlessness and desperation that he loses his peace of mind, becoming unable to separate himself from his instrument: "The inner peace of his days disappeared, and a constant uneasiness tormented him. . . . Sometimes he even cursed the evil instrument as the cause of it all. But he could not rid himself of it because it was now part of him, and with his breath he had passed unto it his very spirit."⁸⁴

As mentioned earlier, Marsyas wanted to compete with Apollo to grab the attention of those who had been indifferent to his music. I understand the presence of multiphonics in this piece as representing the conflict of this competition. This conflict is also evident in the stressful gestures in the oboe part following each brief point of consonance with the glasses. It is as if the oboe is attempting, if only vainly, to match the sonority of the glasses. As Cernuda relates, "Marsyas then stood up, for his turn had come and, bringing the reed near to his lips, a pure and mournful melody burst forth with a dark tremor that the god's melody did not have."⁸⁵ Marsyas's frustration is musically illustrated by the multiphonic sonority outlining the ninth B-C, which is present for the first time at the end of S1. This sonority appears nine times, as if Marsyas had attempted nine times to separate himself from the aulos, just as there were nine muses acting as judges. The ninth B-C functions as a point of articulation between S1 and S2, and it is also the catalyzer of the events in S4. It appears several times in S6, highlighting the climax of Marsyas's desperation and signaling acknowledgment of his inevitable defeat. It is again presented as an articulation point between S6 and S7, and finally also at the beginning of S8 in the gesture of the oboe that resembles the opening line, as a prayer or final plea (see Figure 4.9).

While the use of multiphonics in the oboe could be perceived as merely an attempt to grant a polyphonic dimension to a traditionally melodic instrument, they are produced at a high price. The brusque and rough gestures of performing multiphonics stress the impossibility of a fair competition: the ethereal, pristine, and seemingly

⁸³ Cernuda, "Marsias," 798. [Pronto el rumor de su locura, que antes abrigaron los bosques, llegó hasta el poblado donde lo acogieron con indiferencia los unos, con burlas los otros. Y lo que al principio fue para Marsias sólo deleite escondido, luego iba adueñándose de él y de su vida toda, que deseaba comunicar a los demás.]

⁸⁴ Cernuda, "Marsias," 798. [La paz interior de sus días desapareció, y un desasosiego constante le trastornaba. . . . A veces llegó a maldecir al maligno instrumento causa de todo. Pero no podía arrojarlo de sí, porque era ya parte suya, y con su aliento había pasado a él su espíritu mismo.]

⁸⁵ Cernuda, "Marsias," 798. [Marsias se irguió entonces, porque había llegado su turno, y aproximando a sus labios la zampoña brotó la melodía doliente y pura, con un temblor oscuro que la del dios no tenía.]

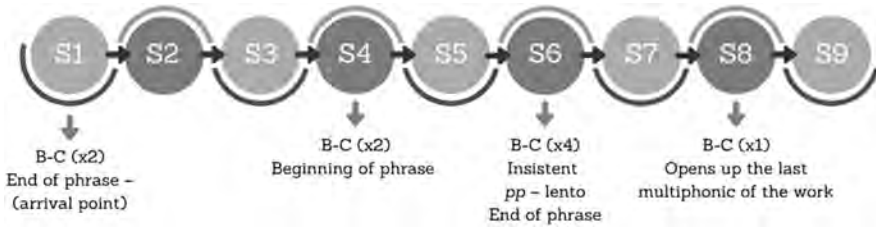


Figure 4.9 Diagram showing the presence of the multiphonic B-C throughout the nine segments of *Marsias*. Designed by Eduardo García.

effortless polyphony of the glasses belong to a different dimension. The oboe's constant failed attempts to sustain polyphony could symbolize Marsyas's frustration at not being able to attain the perfection of Apollo's musicianship, as symbolized by the perfect intervals of the glasses. From the middle of the piece onward, the tension between instrumental forces increases, which could symbolize that of the competition between the two mythological figures. Marsyas's death is foreshadowed toward the end of the piece, when the oboe line finally retreats to silence while the harmony of the glasses remains.

Cernuda concludes his short story with a question and an answer: "What is symbolically expressed in the myth of Marsyas? It is that the poet should know that the whole of creation stands before him in both its divine and human aspects, an enmity so uneven that the poet, if he is truly [a poet], must be defeated and killed."⁸⁶ Perhaps, in a certain sense, Cernuda's narrative allowed Lavista to approach the Greek myth as one in which both poet and composer identify with Marsyas on a personal level. Marsyas's struggle, highlighted by both Cernuda and Lavista, represents for them their own creative struggle. Reading Cernuda's story in this light, Lavista writes: "For Cernuda the satyr symbolizes the poet in his eternal search for the correct and precise word, for the perfect expression. Evidently, this [the perfect word] will always be negated, because perfection is a privilege of the gods alone. The intent of the poet, of the artist to achieve divinity through perfection will always lead to failure."⁸⁷ In this light, the epigraph in this piece indicates Lavista's identification with Marsyas via Cernuda. On one hand, the presence of Cernuda's quote in the score allows listeners to draw programmatic parallels between text and music. On the other, it acts as a reminder of the perfect imperfection of the craft of music composition.

⁸⁶ Cernuda, "Marsias," 800. [¿Qué se cifra simbólicamente en ese mito de Marsias? Que el poeta debe saber cómo tiene frente a sí a toda la creación, tanto en su aspecto divino como en el humano, enemistad bien desigual en la que el poeta, si lo es verdaderamente, ha de quedar vencido y muerto.]

⁸⁷ Lavista, "Diálogo entre música y poesía," 89. [Para Cernuda, el sátiro simboliza al poeta en su búsqueda eterna por la palabra justa, precisa, por la expresión perfecta. Evidentemente, ésta siempre le será negada, ya que la perfección es un privilegio exclusivo de los dioses. El intento del poeta, del artista, de acercarse a lo divino por medio de la perfección, siempre estará destinado al fracaso.]

Addressing the programmatic dimension of *Marsias* while taking into account both Ovid's rendition of the myth and Cernuda's story was the point of departure for Lavista's Zoom lecture organized and hosted by his daughter, choreographer Claudia Lavista, during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. In retrospect, forty years after the piece was composed, it is interesting to notice that Lavista emphatically remarks that, ultimately, the story of the satyr Marsyas, as told by Cernuda, is also the story of every performer. When the performer falls in love with their instrument, they find in their playing nothing other than the secret voice of their own heart. In front of an attentive and mostly young virtual audience, Lavista illuminated certain aspects of the score as representing aspects of the myth and of the circular harmonic design he used in the piece. He emphasized that much of his inspiration came from extramusical sources and that, when writing a piece for oboe, the story of Marsyas opened up his imagination. Therefore, he encouraged his virtual audience (mostly music students) to read both Ovid and Cernuda. He concluded by saying, "I believe that we musicians should fully immerse ourselves in the story of Marsyas, as he is the first performer that ever existed in history, an aulos player."⁸⁸

Here again, we can see that at the core of Lavista's creative and pedagogical endeavor, was—as expressed at the beginning of this chapter—a desire to inspire performers to develop an intimate, affective relationship with their instrument. In this sense, he understood the epigraph as a "detonator" of creative interpretation. Working closely with performers, as he mentioned, allowed him to write idiomatically for diverse instruments. "This is, without a doubt," he remarked, "one of my utmost passions: to become the cause and promoter of an intimate encounter between the performer and their instrument."⁸⁹

While the epigraph from Cernuda's story found in *Marsias* points the listener to a story that includes gods, satyrs, a competition, and ultimate death, the epigraph for *Reflejos de la noche* is of a very different nature. At the top of the score's first page, Lavista includes a brief poem titled "Eco" (Echo) by the Mexican poet Xavier Villaurrutia (1903–1950):

<i>La noche juega con los ruidos copiándolos en sus espejos de sonidos.</i> ⁹⁰	The night plays with the noises copying them in its mirrors of sounds.
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⁸⁸ Mario Lavista, in Cultura CMA, "Líneas musicales en línea," Facebook Watch video, 1:09:08, May 21, 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/263606753663946/videos/675942099893251>, accessed June 22, 2023. The Centro Municipal de Artes is a music school in Mazatlán, Mexico. [Creo que los músicos debemos estar muy empapados de la historia de Marsias porque es el primer intérprete de la historia, el intérprete del aulós.]

⁸⁹ Mario Lavista, "Encuentros: Mario Lavista, 'La curiosidad es lo que me mueve como músico,'" interview by David Rodríguez Cerdán, *Scherzo: Revista de música* 30, no. 309 (2015): 90. [Esto me ha permitido componer idiomáticamente y contribuir a generar una relación amorosa entre el músico y su instrumento. Ésta, sin duda es una de las razones musicales que más me apasionan: el convertirme en causa y promotor de ese acercamiento íntimo entre el intérprete y su herramienta.]

⁹⁰ Xavier Villaurrutia, "Eco," in *Obras: Poesía, teatro, prosas varias, críticas*, 2nd ed., Miguel Capistrán, Alí Chumacero, and Luis Mario Schneider, eds. (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1966), 42.

This poem suggests myriad considerations when appreciated in relation to the score. The phrase “reflejos de la noche” synthesizes two of the most important elements of Villaurrutia’s poetry: reflection as an optical phenomenon usually (but not exclusively) associated with mirrors, and the night as the poem’s setting. While engaging in an interpretive listening, my initial considerations were to identify elements in the poem that could suggest musical parallels and to explore ways in which musical elements—such as texture, harmonic language, and structure—could suggest the atmosphere of Villaurrutia’s poem. By closely exploring the poem’s phonological dimension in collaboration with poet and linguist Juan Manuel Portillo, we were able to draw formal parallels between the musical score and the poem. The intertextual analysis Portillo and I undertook shows that the presence of the poem in the score not only provides metaphorical parallels between poetic imagery and musical gestures, but that, coincidentally, both poem and music are connected at the structural level.⁹¹

“Eco” belongs to a series of poems titled “Suite del insomnio” (“Suite of insomnia”), which forms part of Villaurrutia’s first book of poetry, *Reflejos* (1926). The fact that Lavista named his composition *Reflejos de la noche*, instead of “Eco” or “Suite del insomnio,” could be seen as an allusion to Villaurrutia’s fascination with the night. Therefore, Lavista’s affinities are true not only to a particular poem by Villaurrutia, but also to the poet’s aesthetic explorations of “the night” and “the nocturne,” which took him years to develop.

Lavista included Villaurrutia’s poem as an epigraph for *Reflejos de la noche* after the composition was complete and not as a source of inspiration, as had been the case in *Marsias*. Although the text informs the music in retrospect, we can still associate certain elements in *Reflejos de la noche* with elements in Villaurrutia’s poem. To begin with, one could regard the timbre of the string harmonics throughout the piece as a metaphorical representation of noises being *copied* in mirrors of sounds. In Lavista’s words: “To use harmonics is, in some way, to work with reflected sounds; each one of them is produced or generated by a fundamental sound that we never get to hear: we only perceive its harmonics, its sound-reflection.”⁹² Even though Lavista made these comments a posteriori, a comparison between text and music shows certain affinities between poem and composition at a structural level.

The overall structure of *Reflejos de la noche* is ternary [ABA’ or A(a–b) B(c–d) A’(b–a)]. The first section of the work (A) is divided into two subsections (a–b) and is characterized by sextuplets that never abandon the texture (oscillating between the pitches D–G) creating a sense of immobility. The initial indication on the score calls for “great rhythmic precision” and a delicate texture: only the second violin is active during the first two measures. Gradually, the sextuplets weave a harmonic tapestry,

⁹¹ Juan Manuel Portillo and I worked together in this musico-poetic analysis of Lavista’s *Reflejos de la noche* while we were both PhD students at the University of California, Davis. I extend my deepest gratitude to Portillo for his invaluable remarks.

⁹² Lavista, *El lenguaje del músico*, 37. [Usar armónicos es, en un cierto sentido, trabajar con sonidos reflejados, ya que cada uno es producido por un generador o sonido fundamental, que nunca escuchamos: sólo percibimos sus armónicos, sus sonidos-reflejo.]

Example 4.4 Lavista, *Reflejos de la noche*, mm. 12–17.

with an unfolding of the perfect fourth D–G. The glissandi introduced in measure 14 serve as a point of articulation and, at the same time, add color to the texture without breaking the sense of stasis (see Example 4.4).

The harmonic continuity of the piece is achieved through using consonant intervals of perfect fourths and fifths, having D as a pitch center. Although precise, the rhythmic pace seems to be stripped of a strong pulse, which evokes a floating atmosphere. The change of harmony in measure 16 coincides with the entrance of arpeggios that accelerate the rhythmic pace. In measure 19, the texture of the very first section comes back, along with a strong emphasis on the perfect fifth. The sextuplets remain constant during this section. Ricochet bowing suggests both the bouncing of Villaurrutia's sounds and, like the work's many glissandi, a notion of musical "noises" that are indefinite in pitch.

The central section of the piece (B) includes a dialogue based on intervals of perfect fourths and fifths between two of the four instruments, while the other two sustain harmonic pedals. Toward the middle of the section the tempo accelerates, and arpeggios temporarily introduce unstable harmonies. Even though this section of the work could be perceived as its most forceful, it is also where the strings present a defined melody (marked *cantabile*; see Example 4.5).

Example 4.5 Lavista, *Reflejos de la noche*, mm. 87–93.

The third section of the piece (A'), which mirrors the first, inverts the order of the material (b–a instead of a–b), and there is a final return to the initial texture, drawing the interval of the perfect fourth with the dyad D–G (see Figure 4.10).

When considering the poem's structure, we notice that the second verse is strikingly different from the poem's other two verses. Each of the three verses is composed of one sentence with two clauses, a main clause and an adverbial subordinate clause (the main clause forms the first line, and the subordinate one forms lines two and three). The first line resembles the third in that it is unmarked. Although it is composed of three closed syllables, two of them occur in monosyllabic words that are normally unstressed and have a very weak semantic weight, and the other closed syllable is due to the plural in *ruidos* ("noises").⁹³ Phonologically, the second line is clearly distinct from the lines that precede and follow it: of the four voiceless stops of the poem, three belong to this second line. The other one is part of a prosodic weak word: the unstressed preposition *con* ("with") of the first line. The second voiceless stop, a bilabial consonant, forms the onset of the stressed syllable of *copiándolos* ("copying them"), the verb of the subordinate clause. This syllable is by far the strongest of the entire poem in terms of sonority. The fact that the next syllable starts

⁹³ Another remark about the rhythm of the poem: there are only trochaic feet. This is, again, an unmarked feature that helps unify the three lines.

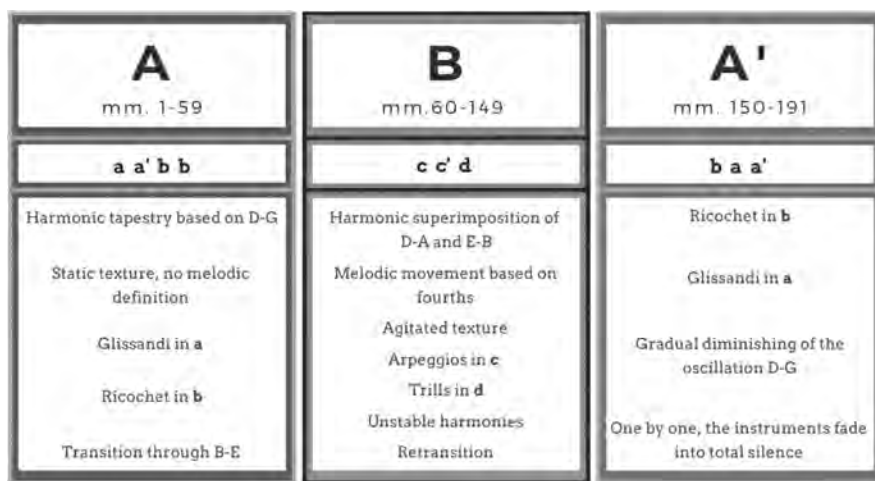


Figure 4.10 Diagram showing the ternary structure of *Reflejos de la noche* and outlining the salient characteristics of each section. Designed by Eduardo García.

with a voiced stop, *do*, denies any possibility of resyllabification; therefore, the overall effect of this syllable within the verse is that of a syncopated strike, which, along with the presence of the other two voiceless stops—one of them in *espejos* (“mirrors”) as the onset of a stressed syllable—provides this second line with very sharp phonological contours.

In contrast, the contours of the third line are very weak. Of its five consonants, one is a nasal, two are fricatives, and the other two are voiced stops, one of which also becomes a fricative in most of the Spanish dialects spoken in Mexico. All consonants share the same place of articulation, which creates a sense of stasis. Also, with the exception of the final “s” of the line, all syllables are open, so they represent the unmarked case in terms of syllabic structure.

Whereas the second line is marked in several aspects, the third is nearly unmarked—a contrast that is significant because both lines belong to the same clause. Overall, we can outline a structural analogy between the poem and the composition: the first and third lines of the poem can be equated with parts A and A' of the string quartet, since they present an atmosphere that could be described as static, whereas the second line corresponds to section B, with its contrasting vigor and strength.

Even though the listener may not be familiar with Villaurrutia's poem, some musical elements of *Reflejos de la noche* point to the genre of the nocturne: the quiet and careful use of dynamics (*piano*) that permeates the piece, the use of string harmonics—which might suggest the search for a delicate texture, and the use of instrumental devices such as glissandi, ricochet, and portamento, as resources that bridge the notions of “musical noise” and “musical sound.” These devices (glissandi, ricochet) could be thought of as a means of representing the natural sounds of the

night, a common procedure in the genre of the nocturne, or in Béla Bartók's famous "night music" style. Composers have used unconventional bowing techniques, as well as glissandi to convey the sounds of nature. Henry Cowell, for instance, stated: "Instead of trying to imitate the sounds of nature by using musical scales, which are based on steady pitches hardly to be found in nature . . . a composer would build perhaps abstract music out of sounds of the same category as nature sounds—that is, sliding pitches."⁹⁴ Quite aware of such conventions, Lavista positioned himself as belonging to a particular tradition of composers who have attempted to represent the atmosphere of the night in music. And it is the image of the night that metaphorically connects Villaurrutia's poem with Lavista's score.

Since its inception, and throughout the following decades, *Reflejos de la noche* has retained a significant place in the repertoire of twentieth-century string quartets. Not only has it been one of the most frequently performed pieces among Lavista's catalogue of works, but it has also been featured at ceremonies recognizing Lavista's compositional career. *Reflejos de la noche* was performed when he was admitted to the Academia de las Artes in 1987 and at his induction ceremony to El Colegio Nacional, in 1998. Moreover, both *Marsias* and *Reflejos de la noche* were performed when Lavista received the Premio Iberoamericano de la Música Tomás Luis de Victoria at the Real Academia Española (RAE) in Madrid in 2013. Notably, he was the first Mexican recipient of this prize.

The prominence of *Reflejos de la noche* in Lavista's career and creative trajectory is due to more than its sonic qualities. Certain characteristics present in this piece encapsulate what was at the core of Lavista's aesthetic and compositional identity: a fascination for discovering new sonorities in acoustic instruments in collaboration with performers; a multisensorial creative process—from the eye to the ear back to the eye—that is generated by the images he gathers from extra musical sources; a predilection for consonant, delicate, and utterly precise sonorities; and a dedication to impressionistic atmospheres where nothing is obvious, or overtly stated, but rather where musical images are suggested and reflected back to the listener as in a mirror. Moreover, the piece's intertextual dimension and the idea of mirrors and reflections are at the core of Lavista's work (hence, the title of this book). The nocturnal atmosphere evoked by Villaurrutia's poem is a lens through which we can appreciate the lifestyle of a composer whose creativity was at its peak during the long hours of the night. It was at night when Lavista played with noises and copied them in mirrors of sound. The copied noises were those produced in processes and relations of creative intimacy with performers. The resulting mirrors of sound reflect the voices of his collaborators as well as the voices of the poets and writers with whom he continued to engage. Poetic encounters and instrumental affairs were central to Lavista's compositional trajectory and do not simply constitute a part of his professional career, but rather were integral to his daily routine.

⁹⁴ Henry Cowell, *New Musical Resources* (New York: Something Else Press, 1969), 20.

“*Pauta* Is Mario Lavista”

During a conversation with musicologist Consuelo Carredano, at the very beginning of my research into Lavista’s music, I asked her thoughts about the ways in which the journal *Pauta* connected with Lavista’s compositional trajectory. Her response was: “*Pauta* es Mario Lavista.”⁹⁵ Although I couldn’t grasp it at the time, Carredano’s answer encapsulates a profound symbiosis between composer and journal that took me years to unpack. This symbiosis hints at one of Lavista’s deepest passions: poetry. When asked about his interest in poetry during a 2019 interview, Lavista responded by addressing his goal of founding the journal *Pauta: Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical*. He remarked, “The goal of this publication was to join music and poetry; to make known what great writers and poets have thought about the musical art. I’ve always seen poetry and music as two superior arts. Two arts that can pierce the deepest parts of human beings, the soul, and the spirit.”⁹⁶ Apart from his overtly enthusiastic opinion about the power of poetry and music—without granting specifics about *what kind* of music and poetry he was referring to—what is interesting about his answer is that, when addressing the role poetry had in his compositional work, he talked about *Pauta*. In this light *Pauta* could be seen as a creative venue where Lavista was able to further explore his interest in poetry. And, if this is so, a broad exploration of the history and the content of the journal could provide a more nuanced idea of *what kind* of music and poetry Lavista found deserving of such a preeminent place.

When addressing the importance of poetry to his creative journey, Lavista cited Ezra Pound, who once said that whenever he wanted to learn more about poetry he would listen to Stravinsky.⁹⁷ “In the same way”—Lavista said—“we, musicians, should get close to poets and poetry to learn more about our art, craft, and the nature of music.”⁹⁸ From a very young age, Lavista was an avid reader of poetry and surrounded himself with poets with whom he developed very close friendships. Álvaro Mutis (1923–2013), Tomás Segovia (1927–2011), Juan Vicente Melo (1932–1996), and other writers associated with Casa del Lago in the 1960s became Lavista’s mentors and friends. And younger poets, such as Antonio Deltoro (b. 1947), José Luis Rivas (b. 1950), Eusebio Ruvalcaba (1951–2017), Francisco Serrano (b. 1949), Alberto Blanco

⁹⁵ Consuelo Carredano, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, August 14, 2004.

⁹⁶ Mario Lavista, “La poética en Mario Lavista,” interview by Saúl Rodríguez, *Siglo nuevo*, December 19, 2019, <https://siglonuevo.mx/nota/2002.la-poetica-en-mario-lavista>, accessed June 22, 2023. [La finalidad de esta publicación era tratar de unir tanto la música como la poesía, para dar a conocer lo que han pensado los grandes escritores y los grandes poetas acerca del arte musical. Siempre he visto a la poesía y a la música como dos artes superiores. Dos artes que son capaces de penetrar en lo más profundo del ser humano, del alma, del espíritu del hombre.]

⁹⁷ Mario Lavista and Luis Ignacio Helguera, Preface to Consuelo Carredano, *Pauta: Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical. Índices de los números 1 al 80, 1982–2001* (Mexico City: INBA, Conaculta, 2003), 13. [Ezra Pound solía decir que cuando quería aprender de su oficio recurría a Stravinsky.]

⁹⁸ Lavista, “Diálogo entre música y poesía,” 92. [De la misma manera, nosotros, músicos, debemos acercarnos a los poetas y a la poesía, para aprender más de nuestro arte, de nuestro oficio, de la esencia y naturaleza de la música misma.]

(b. 1951), Aurelio Asiain (b. 1960), and María Baranda (b. 1962), are just a few of the numerous poets whom Lavista befriended and whose poetry he admired.

Founded in 1982 and directed by Lavista until his death, *Pauta* could be regarded as a creative outlet through which the composer attempted to forge connections among music, literature, and the visual arts. *Pauta* was not Lavista's first effort to start a music journal; as discussed in Chapter 3, he had founded *Talea* in the mid-1970s. *Talea* was one of the projects Lavista launched as Music Department head of UNAM's Cultural Division. At that time, his editor-in-chief was writer and dance critic Alberto Dallal, and *Talea*'s editorial board included composers Rodolfo Halffter and Manuel Enríquez, music historian Gloria Carmona, writer Juan Vicente Melo, harpsichordist Enrique Aracil, and pianist and conductor Jorge Velazco. *Talea*'s first issue was successfully published in 1975. A second issue was ready to go to print when Lavista decided to quit his position at UNAM. He was hoping that, once *Talea* had been launched, the project would be continued by his successor. However, after he prepared a double issue that was published in 1976 (*Talea* 2–3), the journal ceased operations.⁹⁹

Lavista had thought of launching a journal while still a student at the Conservatory's Taller de Composición. He asked his teacher Carlos Chávez about the lack of journals devoted to new music. Chávez replied with a task: "If music journals don't exist, then, create one! That is what you have to do."¹⁰⁰ Chávez's relentless energy for starting new projects left a deep impression on his student. Although other music journals were in circulation—*Heterofonía* being the most notable—Lavista saw the need for a different kind of journal, one that would prioritize contemporary Latin American music. In the early 1980s, Lavista was surrounded by a group of performers and writers eager to support such a project, including Arizpe, Saavedra, guitarist Federico Bañuelos, and writers Guillermo Sheridan and Francisco Hinojosa.

It was in conversations with them that *Pauta* emerged. The title of the journal has multiple meanings; in a musical context, *pauta* means staff, but more generally, it also means example, model, or guide. Lavista recalls that it was Halffter who suggested the name.¹⁰¹ Excited about the word's multiple meanings, Halffter noted: "[The word] 'pauta' is the music staff but it also has another meaning when used to set the tone."¹⁰² Additionally, although the subtitle of the journal is "cuadernos de teoría y

⁹⁹ In spite of having coordinated and prepared all materials included in *Talea*'s double issue, Lavista's name was removed from the credits and Dallal's name was replaced by that of José Antonio Alcaraz as *jefe de redacción* (editor-in-chief).

¹⁰⁰ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, August 27, 2004. [Si no hay revistas musicales, forme una. Eso es lo que le toca.]

¹⁰¹ Halffter was very involved in the creation of *Pauta* and led its first editorial board. See Consuelo Carredano and Victoria Eli, "Las movilizaciones de la izquierda musical," in *Historia de la música en España e Hispanoamérica*, vol. 8, *La música en Hispanoamérica en el siglo XX*, ed. Consuelo Carredano and Victoria Eli (Madrid: Fondo de Cultura Económica de España, 2015), 247.

¹⁰² La redacción, "Canto Rodado: 20 años de la revista *Pauta*," *Proceso*, January 23, 2002, <https://www.proceso.com.mx/239494/canto-rodado-20-anos-de-la-revista-pauta>, accessed June 22, 2023. ["Pauta" es el pentagrama pero también tiene otro sentido al marcar la pauta.]

crítica musical” (notebooks of music theory and music criticism), editors-in-chief Luis Ignacio Helguera and Luigi Amara agreed that, when considering the significant literary content included in each issue, the journal was a publication not merely about music theory and criticism but also about the convergence between music and literature. Amara notes that a more suitable subtitle for *Pauta*, therefore, could be *cuadernos de música literaria* (notebooks of literary music).¹⁰³

Along with Sheridan, in 1981 Lavista introduced the project of *Pauta* to Ignacio Toscano (1951–2020), who was then the head of cultural activities at the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana.¹⁰⁴ Toscano was enthusiastic about the project and supported the launching of the journal as a publication hosted by the University. The first issue of *Pauta*, which was to be a quarterly publication, was printed by UAM in early 1982. Toscano’s own musical background (he had formally studied music at UNAM’s School of Music) and his interest in promoting concert music led him not only to fund *Pauta*, but also to find the means to support the newly created chamber ensemble dedicated to new music, Grupo Da Capo (see Figure 4.11). This chamber group was first constituted by Arizpe (flute), Saavedra (oboe), Álvaro Bitrán (cello), and Lilia Vázquez (piano). A concert that took place on January 27, 1982 at UAM’s Galería Metropolitana marked the inauguration of both projects: a new music journal and a professional chamber ensemble dedicated to new music.¹⁰⁵ The simultaneous creation of *Pauta* and Da Capo was possible thanks to a group of individuals who were fully committed to promoting repertoires of new music, primarily, from Mexico.

The launching of both *Pauta* and Da Capo was accompanied by myriad events and projects—ranging from lectures to concerts and recordings—that instigated a thrilling movement within Mexican contemporary music. Both projects acted as catalysts for the emergence of new repertoires and new ways of engaging with music through literary and visual arts. In a UAM press release announcing the launching of *Pauta* and Da Capo, both Lavista and Saavedra stated that *Pauta* was responding to an urgent need for texts in Spanish about contemporary music. Lavista emphasized that, contrary to what editorial houses contended, the Mexican general public was interested in learning more about contemporary music. He remarked: “There is an audience interested in that kind of material; an audience that should be able to consult books written

¹⁰³ Luigi Amara, “Presentación: Cuentos con música,” *Pauta: Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical* 119–120 (2011): 4.

¹⁰⁴ Beginning in the early 1980s and throughout his life, Ignacio “Nacho” Toscano was one of the most prolific cultural and arts administrators in Mexico. Among the many administrative positions Toscano held, he directed both Opera and Dance at INBA and was later the institute’s director as well. He created numerous regional and national artistic projects. One of them, *Instrumenta*, had significant repercussions in the area of music education. The very first iteration of *Instrumenta*, held in Puebla in 2003, included a concert in honor of Lavista’s sixtieth birthday. For more about the relationship between Lavista and Toscano, see “Memoria de Ignacio Toscano: Conversación con Mario Lavista,” interview by Jorge Torres Sáenz, *Casa del Tiempo* 7, no. 62 (May–June 2020): 5–8.

¹⁰⁵ Leonora Saavedra, “Actividades de Da Capo,” *Pauta: Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical* 3 (1982): 119. The concert performed by Da Capo included a piece the group commissioned to Enríquez. Throughout its existence, the group commissioned works that became hallmarks of the repertoire of late-twentieth-century chamber Mexican music. The inaugural program also included pieces by Julio Estrada, Isang Yun, and Antonio Russek.



Figure 4.11 Cuarteto Da Capo ca. 1983. From left to right: Leonora Saavedra, Lilia Vázquez, Álvaro Bitrán, and Marielena Arizpe. Courtesy of Juan Arturo Brennan.

in their primary language whenever possible.”¹⁰⁶ Saavedra added that *Pauta* was also meant as a space for performers to write about music and for authors to translate texts relevant to their craft. “[A journal such as *Pauta*] is not a luxury; it is a necessity,” she remarked. “Within the cultural scene of a country like ours, it is about time for a publication like *Pauta* to emerge; a venue where we musicians can express our ideas.”¹⁰⁷

Lavista had a very close relationship with the members of Da Capo, and all of them collaborated with *Pauta* in some capacity. Saavedra, who was at the time Cenidim’s Director, became a member of *Pauta*’s editorial board. Other members of the first

¹⁰⁶ Mario Lavista, “La Unidad Iztapalapa editará la revista *Pauta*, especializada en música contemporánea,” *Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana Boletín informativo*, January 27, 1982, 10. [Sí existe un público interesado en ese material, un público que debe recurrir a los libros en su idioma original, cuando puede conseguirlos.]

¹⁰⁷ Leonora Saavedra, “La Unidad Iztapalapa editará la revista *Pauta*.” [No es un lujo, creo que es una necesidad dentro del medio cultural de un país como el nuestro, ya es hora de que exista una publicación como *Pauta* en donde los músicos podamos expresar nuestras ideas.]

editorial board were composer Rodolfo Halffter, music historians Gloria Carmona and Yolanda Moreno Rivas, guitarist Federico Bañuelos, and harpsichordist Enrique Aracil—many of whom had participated previously in *Talea*. *Pauta*'s editorial board was in charge of submitting their own texts or suggesting texts by others.

At the beginning of the journal's history, the editorial board was involved in all aspects of the selection and evaluation process of each submission. However, Lavista explained that it became an overly burdensome task to coordinate schedules to hold meetings, and to reconcile the conflicting opinions and preferences of the board. Ultimately, in order for *Pauta* to be published in a timely fashion, he decided it was best to adopt a "vertical, not democratic procedure," meaning that Lavista himself would be responsible for the selection process in coordination with the editor-in-chief and the design editor, *Pauta*'s core team.¹⁰⁸ Although Lavista believed that the content of *Pauta* reflected a diversity of aesthetic views, he intended this publication to be centered on matters pertaining to the Western concert music tradition, so-called *música clásica*. Throughout its existence and with very few exceptions, the journal did not deviate from this focus.¹⁰⁹

The three main areas represented in *Pauta*—literature, visual arts, and music—were first coordinated by Sheridan, Bernardo Recamier, and Lavista, respectively. While there were several editors-in-chief (all from the literary field)—writers Guillermo Sheridan, Juan Villoro, Luis Ignacio Helguera, and Luigi Amara—Bernardo Recamier was the sole design/layout editor throughout the entirety of *Pauta*'s existence. Each issue of *Pauta* included original vignettes designed explicitly for the journal by visual artists and graphic designers. Most of these graphics make musical allusions. Recamier was in charge of incorporating all graphic submissions into the different sections of the journal and designing the covers. One attractive characteristic of *Pauta* was each issue's original and colorful cover that incorporated artwork by myriad artists (see Figure 4.12).¹¹⁰

Recamier would include the vignettes on the first pages of each essay, and at times these vignettes would take up entire pages (see Figure 4.13).¹¹¹ The contributions of certain artists were given special treatment in *Pauta*. On several occasions, the editorial team of the journal would publish submitted vignettes as a collection under the heading "Cuaderno de música"—an album of drawings by an artist presented in the journal as some sort of musically inspired essay.¹¹² Among the visual artists who

¹⁰⁸ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, via phone, August 2, 2020.

¹⁰⁹ For example, an essay on *son huasteco* appeared in *Pauta* 73 (2000), and a text centered on children's popular songs by Francisco Gabilondo Soler, "Cri-Cri" was published in *Pauta* 102 (2007).

¹¹⁰ An image of the cover of *Pauta* 114 (2020) with graphic art by Natalia Gurovich can be found in the companion website for this book.

¹¹¹ An image of a vignette designed by Esther Lopezllera for *Pauta* 67 (1998) can be found in the companion website for this book.

¹¹² Luigi Amara characterizes Francisco Toledo's drawings as "la carpeta de inspiración musical. . . [presentada] como una suerte de ensayo personalísimo." See Luigi Amara, "Presentación," *Pauta* 103 (2007): 4. Among the artists whose vignettes were compiled in "Cuadernos de música" were Francisco Toledo in *Pauta* 103 (2007), Joy Laville in *Pauta* 111 (2009), John Cage in *Pauta* 123–124 (2012), and Arnaldo Coen in conjunction with poetry by Alberto Blanco in *Pauta* 127 (2013).

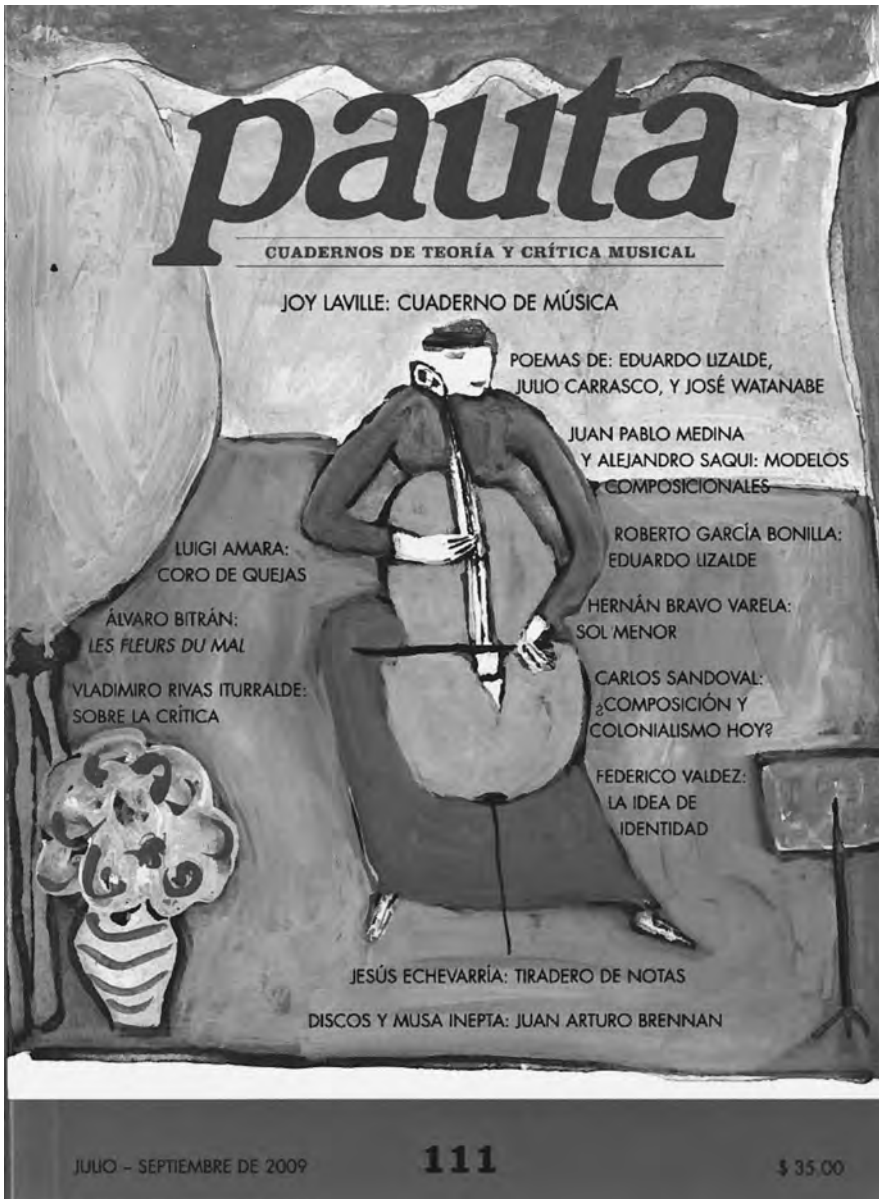


Figure 4.12 Cover of *Pauta* 111 (2009). Graphic art by Joe Laville. Used by permission.

designed these vignettes (which were also informally called “pautas”) were Arnaldo Coen, who illustrated the inaugural issue, José Luis Cuevas, Manuel Felguérez, Joy Laville, Vicente Rojo, Juan Soriano, and Francisco Toledo.

Through Toscano, *Pauta* found a provisional home at UAM-Iztapalapa, and soon after, the project was co-funded by Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA) and

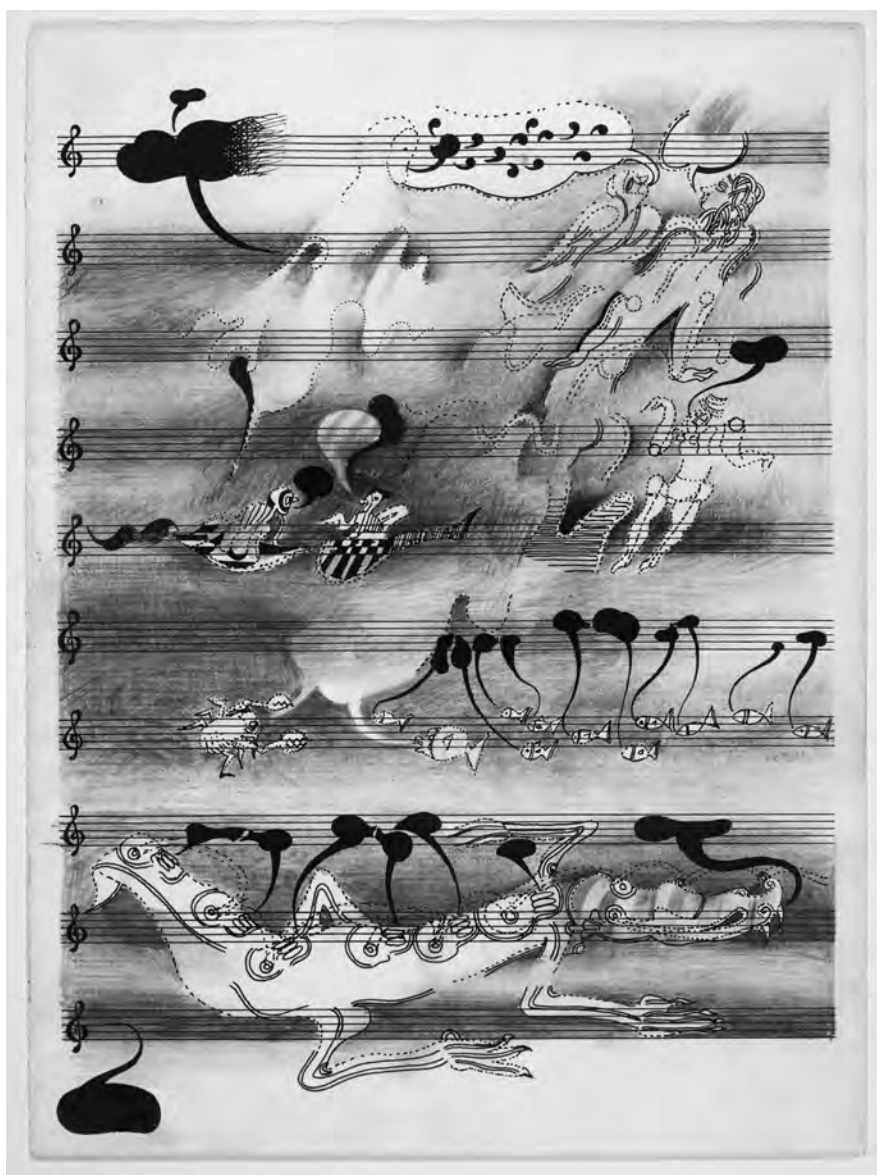


Figure 4.13 Vignette designed by Arnaldo Coen. Included on page 2 of *Pauta's* inaugural issue (1982). Courtesy of Arnaldo Coen.

the Secretariat of Public Education via the Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (National Council for Culture and Arts, Conaculta).¹¹³ Changes brought about by Enrique Peña Nieto's administration in 2015 resulted in the creation of a

¹¹³ UAM-Iztapalapa ceased to fund *Pauta* in 1986.

Secretariat of Culture, which absorbed Conaculta with significant transformations in budget allocations. *Pauta's* existence was always contingent on budgetary changes wrought by governmental administrators, some of whom were not interested in sponsoring the project. Together with the editor-in-chief, Lavista had to fiercely advocate for the continuation of *Pauta* every time state institutions changed leadership. In 2006, after publishing one hundred issues of the journal, Lavista stated: “*Pauta* has not been immune to the whims, tastes, and choices of officials who have impeded its stability and continuation. In other words, *Pauta* exists today because we have been able to overcome the successive changes of officials and priorities within cultural institutions . . . and we have been winning that battle over and over again for twenty-five years.”¹¹⁴ Publishing a quarterly journal subject to state budgets in Mexico is, as many have expressed, a titanic task. On multiple occasions, the funding necessary to print *Pauta* was significantly delayed—which led to the journal being nicknamed *Pausa* (pause)—and on more than one occasion *Pauta's* existence itself was put in jeopardy.¹¹⁵

Pauta's difficulties did not end once the issues were printed. The journal's major hindrance was distribution. Once issues were published, *Pauta's* distribution depended solely on Conaculta, which, as Lavista regularly noted, was highly deficient. Although Lavista and Amara repeatedly requested that Conaculta loosen restrictions on sales and distribution, this never happened. *Pauta* could not be sold by anyone other than the staff assigned by Conaculta and only in those bookstores that were already in partnership with the institution. Thus, instead of finding *Pauta* at concert or music venues, the journal was only available in a few selected bookstores. To mitigate this restriction, Lavista donated issues of *Pauta* to libraries and music schools on multiple occasions. In fact, Lavista considered distribution to be the journal's biggest problem.¹¹⁶ *Pauta's* faithful readers—especially those living in Mexico City—would obtain new issues of the journal at Conaculta's central offices or at one of Educal's bookstores. At times, *Pauta's* distribution reached bookstores in other states, and INBA would distribute past issues to some music schools around the country but in a very irregular fashion.¹¹⁷ Moreover, although the journal's contents can be found in RILM (Répertoire International de Littérature Musicale) and other online bibliographies, few university libraries held subscriptions to the journal, either at home or abroad.

¹¹⁴ Mario Lavista, “*Pauta*. Veinticinco años de música por escrito: Entrevista a Mario Lavista,” interview by Juan Arturo Brennan, *Este País | Cultura* 185 (2006): 3–7, https://archivo.estepais.com/inicio/historicos/185/15_cultura2_pauta_brennan.pdf, accessed June 22, 2023. [*Pauta* no ha sido ajena a las veleidades, gustos y voluntades de funcionarios diversos que han bloqueado su permanencia y continuidad. Dicho de otra manera, *Pauta* existe hoy porque hemos podido superar los sucesivos cambios de funcionarios y de prioridades en las instituciones culturales . . . y llevamos veinticinco años de ganar esa batalla una y otra vez.]

¹¹⁵ Luis Ignacio Helguera, “Veinte años de *Pauta*,” *Pauta* 86 (2003): 8.

¹¹⁶ Helguera, “Veinte años de *Pauta*,” 8. Helguera remarks: “Me parece que este problema es un mal endémico en México, que ocurre también con la distribución de los productos y materiales de otras instituciones, como la UNAM. Éste ha sido sin duda el problema mayor de *Pauta*: el de la distribución y el correcto cumplimiento con las suscripciones.”

¹¹⁷ Luigi Amara, in discussion with the author, via Zoom, August 7, 2020.

The bulk of the work of putting each issue of *Pauta* together would fall on three individuals: the *jefe de redacción* or editor-in-chief, the design editor, and the general director. Both Sheridan and Villoro were *jefes de redacción* only briefly. Sheridan served from 1982 to mid-1985, for the first fifteen issues. He was followed by Villoro, who only worked with *Pauta* from mid-1985 to late 1988, for issues 16 to 28. Helguera remained with the journal fifteen years (issues 29–86) until his premature death in 2003 and was shortly thereafter succeeded by Amara, who worked for *Pauta* from issue 87 to 147, the last one published. The editor-in-chief, along with Recamier and Lavista, would be involved in all aspects of the process, ranging from inviting visual artists to draw the illustrations (*las pautas*) and selecting the submissions to designing the layout, *página por página*, one page at a time.¹¹⁸ The three of them would regularly meet for several hours to decide on the content and layout of the journal.

Helguera once noted that *Pauta*'s work sessions happened “en un ambiente tertulero,” in the manner of an informal social gathering. He described how making each issue of the journal was a task born of pleasure, as a playful, creative act; “without play, there is no creation,” he remarked.¹¹⁹ In a similar vein, Amara stated that what drew him to work for *Pauta*—in spite of the “ridiculously low pay”—was being able to engage in open and honest conversations with Lavista in which both of them were equally invested in building bridges between musical and literary subjects. Amara also notes that there seemed to be no clear division of labor among the three core members of the editorial team (Lavista, Recamier, and himself): “All of us would do a little bit of everything.” From evaluating and editing the texts, to selecting accompanying images, “all of us would participate in every step of the process.”¹²⁰ This process is yet another example of how Lavista fostered a creative intimacy when collaborating with others on artistic projects.

Most notable to Amara was Lavista's relentless commitment to publishing *Pauta* in spite of the many bureaucratic challenges the journal faced, as well as the composer's significant involvement in each step of the process. Lavista was constantly looking for authors to contribute to the journal and for texts—both musical and literary—that could be reprinted. Amara recalls that, regardless of the nature of the texts, Lavista would read and revise each and every word printed in the journal. All of *Pauta*'s editors-in-chief have remarked on Lavista's unusually high level of involvement in every single aspect of the journal. As he was about to begin working for *Pauta*, Luis Ignacio Helguera recalled Juan Villoro, telling him, “Mario is like an apostle, bro . . . he even makes corrections to the page proofs and refuses to be paid more than the editor-in-chief.”¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Lavista, discussion, August 27, 2004.

¹¹⁹ Helguera, “Veinte años de *Pauta*,” 6, 8.

¹²⁰ Amara, discussion. [Todos hacíamos de todo . . . Era un trabajo hecho por todos y en el que todos participábamos en todas las etapas del proceso.]

¹²¹ Helguera, “Veinte años de *Pauta*,” 5. [Mario es como un apóstol, manito . . . hasta corrige pruebas de imprenta y se niega a cobrar más que el jefe de redacción.]

Although Helguera offered no further elaboration on Villoro's characterization of Lavista as an "apostle," the manner in which he and other editors-in-chief talked about their experience in *Pauta* makes clear that they saw Lavista as a kind of mentor, someone to learn from. They all concurred that Lavista's mentorship happened in a mutual learning environment. Amara added that "the most interesting aspect of making the journal with someone like him—besides the conversation—has been that honesty of not pretending to know what one does not know." He mentioned that Lavista's "search for understanding denote[d] thoughtful reading habits and an open, curious, and careful character." Amara added that Lavista's fostering of an honest learning environment and a quest for an open, interdisciplinary dialogue set *Pauta* apart from other publications he had worked for.¹²²

Pauta received submissions from a great variety of authors, from music theorists and musicologists, composers, performers, cultural promoters, intellectuals, writers, poets, and all kinds of *melómanos*—music lovers. Although it included mostly submissions from Mexico, many authors from elsewhere also published in *Pauta* and, in spite of its poor distribution, the journal became widely known within new music scenes throughout the Spanish-speaking world. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s—when the Internet was still precarious—*Pauta* provided a significant channel of communication about what was happening in various new music scenes across Latin America. Within the first decade of its existence, several issues of *Pauta* were devoted exclusively to writings by Latin American authors about Latin American music.¹²³ During this time, *Pauta* published a series of texts written by musicians addressing practical matters of performing extended techniques. Collected by Lavista in a volume titled *Nuevas técnicas instrumentales*, this effort remained the only text of its kind written in Spanish throughout the 1990s. Colombian composer, conductor, and promoter Rodolfo Acosta (b. 1970) asserts that the volume has remained paramount among performers of new music, and he continues to share portions of it with his colleagues and students. Acosta regards *Pauta* as a publication of great historical importance throughout Latin America because it fulfilled a pressing need for texts in Spanish on contemporary music.¹²⁴

At home and abroad, *Pauta*'s main readers were individuals involved in new music scenes, ranging from performers to scholars and aficionados. *Pauta*'s accessible tone, along with its emphasis on post-1900s musical repertoires from the Americas, was very attractive to a wide readership. Several issues of *Pauta* were dedicated to particular musicians, including Berg, Brahms, Cage, Chopin, Mata, Mozart, Nancarrow,

¹²² Amara, discussion. [Lo más interesante para mí además de la conversación de hacer la revista con alguien como él, ha sido esa honestidad en el sentido de no dar nada por supuesto, no fingir que uno sabe lo que no sabe. . . . Una búsqueda de comprensión que denota una muy buena atención y lectura, un temperamento curioso, abierto y cuidadoso.]

¹²³ See, for example, *Pauta* 17 (1986) and *Pauta* 59–60 (1996).

¹²⁴ Rodolfo Acosta, in discussion with the author, via Zoom, August 7, 2020. In Acosta's words: "Es fundamental, muy importante porque históricamente hemos sido muy perezosos en generar literatura en español sobre estas cosas. Es prácticamente de lo único que hay sobre técnica actual instrumental en español. Este esfuerzo fue brillante. Y lo uso con mis alumnos y lo comparto a diestra y siniestra."

Orbón, Prokofiev, Stravinsky, and Wagner. Some other issues presented a unifying theme, such as Fluxus, sound art, sound poetry, music-centered short stories, and musical creative processes.

With regard to the literary content of the journal—present in all the issues—the selection criteria obeyed rather broad parameters: *Pauta* was interested in publishing poems, short stories, or literary essays that engaged with music and/or sound. Some of the texts were first published in *Pauta*, while many others were reprints or Spanish translations of texts originally written in various languages. Although not all the literary texts published in the journal fulfilled this mission, most poems and creative writings were connected to music in some way. As a journal with a strong literary emphasis, *Pauta* gained respectability among literary circles throughout the 1990s. For young poets in particular, having their poems published in the journal was a sign of prestige. Some of the poems featured were commissioned by the journal from young Mexican poets; others were translations of poems originally written in different languages; and many others were submitted by poets in Mexico and abroad. Lavista enthusiastically observed that a good number of poets and writers chose to publish their work for the first time in *Pauta* instead of submitting their work to the various literary magazines in circulation.¹²⁵

As editor-in-chief, Luigi Amara was interested in publishing work by writers who attempted to think *through* music. Among the group of Mexican writers who have centered their creative writing on music/sound processes, Amara mentioned Antonio Alatorre, Juan Vicente Melo, Eduardo Lizalde, Gerardo Deniz, José de la Colina, Carlos Montemayor, Alberto Blanco, Juan Arturo Brennan, Luis Ignacio Helguera, and Eusebio Ruvalcaba.¹²⁶ To balance the journal's emphasis on poetry, Amara also wanted fiction and essays to be well represented.¹²⁷ To this end and to commemorate *Pauta*'s thirtieth anniversary, he coordinated a special issue dedicated to short stories, "Cuentos con música"—a compilation of stories previously published in the journal, including texts by Juan José Arreola, Julio Cortázar, Mónica Lavín, Verónica Murguía, and Alejandro Rossi.

Among *Pauta*'s most attractive features were the plurality of voices it represented and the diverse types of submissions it published. In a given issue, one could find a musicological essay by Argentine scholar and composer Graciela Paraskevaídis, a performer-oriented text by Mexican percussionist Alfredo Bringas, a poem by Colombian poet Álvaro Mutis or by Mexican poet Alberto Blanco, a creative essay by Italian-Venezuelan writer Alejandro Rossi, a short story by Mexican writer Juan José Arreola, an analytical text by Cuban composers Julián Orbón or Argeliers León, an interview with Uruguayan composer Héctor Tosar by Uruguayan musicologist Coriún Aharonián, a biographical account of Venezuelan composer/conductor Antonio Estévez by Venezuelan writer José Balza, catalogues of works by young Mexican

¹²⁵ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, via phone, July 28, 2020.

¹²⁶ See Amara, "Presentación: Cuentos con música," 4.

¹²⁷ Amara, discussion.

composers compiled and introduced by Consuelo Carredano,¹²⁸ correspondence between Spanish-born Mexican composer Rodolfo Halffter and Spanish composer Manuel de Falla, photographs of Stravinsky's visit to Mexico taken by Mexican photographer Raúl Abarca, announcements of all kinds, multiple reviews of recordings, books, concerts, and festivals by Juan Arturo Brennan,¹²⁹ a "Crucipauta"—a crossword puzzle created by Lavista, short "music lessons," and last, but not least, the humorist section, *La musa inepta* (The inept muse), consisting of a compilation of errors and absurdities found in media releases or program notes.¹³⁰ Each issue of *Pauta* offered the reader a journey that could be musical and poetical, fictional and real, analytical and factual, and serious and parodic at the same time. The diversity of each issue appealed to a wide audience from among the arts and beyond.

In 2003, *Pauta* celebrated its twentieth anniversary with concerts, discussion panels and, most importantly, the publication of a general index of the journal elaborated by Carredano, which though now outdated has remained the only centralized index of the journal.¹³¹ For thirty-five years, from 1982 to 2017, Lavista directed and oversaw a total of 142 issues of *Pauta*. From the very beginning, Lavista stated that *Pauta's* primary aim was "to establish a dialogue, an effective yet critical exchange of ideas between Mexican musicians and their international colleagues."¹³² In general terms, his goal succeeded. One of the journal's most significant contributions was its facilitation of an exchange of musical and literary views among people involved in contemporary music practices across the Spanish-speaking world. More specifically, *Pauta* provided an overview of avant-garde music activities carried out in Mexico. This had a significant pedagogical value. At a time when books on twentieth-century Mexican music were extremely rare, issues of *Pauta* became unofficial textbooks adopted by students involved in various music fields. This pedagogical aspect was paramount to Lavista, who at one point commented that he had not abandoned the project so that students could be exposed to writings by musicians about music.¹³³

Throughout its existence, *Pauta* remained at the core of Lavista's creative process. As Carredano pointed out, *Pauta es* Mario Lavista. For Lavista, the process of putting together each issue represented a pleasurable creative process, and the idea of *Pauta* as a platform where music, poetry, and visual arts could coexist resonated with him on many levels. After the table of contents of every issue of *Pauta*, before digging

¹²⁸ Carredano, a member of *Pauta's* editorial board, contributed numerous short biographical accounts of young Mexican composers. For a short time, these narratives constituted a journal's section titled "Viñetas de compositores." Among the composers Carredano featured (between 1999 and 2001) were: Ana Lara, Eugenio Toussaint, María Granillo, Hebert Vázquez, Armando Luna, Jorge Torres Sáenz, Georgina Derbez, Juan Fernando Durán, Horacio Uribe, and Gabriela Ortiz.

¹²⁹ Brennan contributed to every single issue of *Pauta*.

¹³⁰ Arón Bitrán gave this section its title, and Juan Arturo Brennan has contributed to most iterations of "La musa inepta."

¹³¹ Carredano, *Pauta*. The index is arranged thematically, by author, by discipline and by geographical region.

¹³² Lavista and Helguera, Preface to Carredano, *Pauta*, 12. [Estableciendo un diálogo, un intercambio de ideas efectivo y crítico entre los músicos mexicanos y sus colegas de otros países.]

¹³³ Lavista, discussion, August 27, 2004.

into the texts, the reader could find the following quote from Juan Rulfo's short story, "Luvina":

—¿Qué es?—me dijo.—	—What is that?—he told me.—
—¿Qué es qué?—le pregunté.	—What is what?—I asked him.
—Eso, el ruido ese.	—That noise.
—Es el silencio...	—It is silence...

Amara considers this epigraph, which opens every single issue of *Pauta*, to be a *declaración de principios*, an initial statement. "In the end," Amara says, "silence is the central theme of this journal."¹³⁴ Silence constitutes the point of convergence between music and poetry. The conversational nature of the epigraph, moreover, mirrors the dialogue that *Pauta* is intended to foster. In each issue, the journal's editors invited the reader to join a conversational space where many questions would be raised and where the answers might often be contradictory.¹³⁵

The double issue of *Pauta* 141–142, published in 2017 conjointly by INBA and the Secretariat of Culture, celebrated the journal's thirty-fifth anniversary. Titled "Músicos que escriben," the issue featured a number of texts written by performers. With a celebratory tone, Amara opened the editorial note emphasizing the remarkable—and almost unthinkable—achievement of reaching thirty-five years of publishing a journal devoted to Latin American music amidst the multiple budgetary cuts to cultural projects that the government made during that time span. Amara enthusiastically announced the arrival of "a dream come true." *Pauta* was going to go virtual: "the journal will not only be available to read in the cyberspace, but its historical archive will be searchable [online] as well."¹³⁶

This promising online transition was also announced in a major newspaper, *El Universal*. Both the Secretariat of Culture and INBA would jointly fund the project.¹³⁷ Despite such grandiose announcements, *Pauta* online did not come to pass during Lavista's lifetime.¹³⁸ The next five issues (143–147) were not published due to a lack of funds, and, in light of the stringent restrictions placed upon cultural projects by the current administration, the editors decided to cease the preparation of further issues.

¹³⁴ Luigi Amara, "Música y literatura: La convivencia posible," *Pauta* 103 (2007): 95. [En última instancia se trata de una revista cuyo tema central es el silencio. Quizás a ninguno de los lectores de *Pauta* les haya pasado inadvertido el único contenido fijo y siempre idéntico de la revista, un diálogo del cuento "Luvina" de Juan Rulfo que sirve de manera de frontispicio pero también como declaración de principios.]

¹³⁵ The inclusion of this epigraph was first suggested to Lavista by his close friend filmmaker Nicolás Echevarría.

¹³⁶ Luigi Amara, "Presentación," *Pauta* 141–142 (2017): 3. [... estamos en condiciones de anunciar que se hace realidad un sueño (no necesariamente juvenil) acariciado desde hace mucho tiempo: la revista no solo podrá leerse en el ciberespacio, sino que también podrá consultarse el archivo histórico de *Pauta*.]

¹³⁷ Alida Piñón, "La revista *Pauta*, al mundo digital," *El Universal*, June 20, 2017, <https://www.eluniversal.com.mx/articulo/cultura/letras/2017/06/20/la-revista-pauta-al-mundo-digital>, accessed June 22, 2023.

¹³⁸ INBA began the digitalizing process soon after this announcement, but up to 2021, only a very limited number of issues could be found online. Visit INBAL Publicaciones Digitales, <https://inba.gob.mx/digital/publicaciones>, accessed June 22, 2023.

In what was to be the last in-person conversation I had with Lavista in January of 2020, I asked him about the present and future of *Pauta*. Perhaps affected by the then recent death of Ignacio Toscano, who had been a crucial figure in the creation of the journal, Lavista responded somewhat resigned: “We were able to publish 142 issues in thirty-five years—how wonderful! That the State funded this project for over three decades is already remarkable.”¹³⁹ In spite of the legal and bureaucratic apparatus that limited *Pauta* from obtaining private funding, INBA remained supportive of the project. However, the global pandemic that began in 2020 paralyzed many of INBA’s projects, and *Pauta* was no exception. After a hiatus of five years, and only after Lavista’s passing, his daughter Claudia Lavista was able to secure the posthumous publication of the last issues of *Pauta* prepared under Lavista’s leadership: 143, and two double issues 144–145, and 146–147. In a beautifully moving and succinct presentation of *Pauta* 143, Amara communicates the reasons for the journal’s long pause and dedicates the publication to Lavista’s memory and to his indefatigable and enthusiastic editorial labor.¹⁴⁰

In spite of being a very personal project with no systematic peer-review process, operating under an insufficient budget and subject to a deficient distribution, as a creative project *Pauta* accomplished what its founder had intended: to create a platform for the exchange of views about contemporary music for a Spanish-speaking audience. Even though those views were mostly circumscribed by Lavista’s predilections, they were crucial for the formation of young musicians interested in music-centered texts written in their own language. It is not an overstatement to say that the journal filled an important void in Spanish-language music literature.

My own experience with *Pauta* as a young student in the late 1990s speaks about the importance of the journal for the formation of people of my generation. More than a music journal for specialists, *Pauta* was commonly used as a textbook.¹⁴¹ Having grown up in a pre-Internet era and eager to learn about what was happening in the new music scenes of my own country and throughout Latin America, *Pauta* was the only publication to turn to. During my undergraduate studies in music, getting a hold of an issue of *Pauta* was highly valued among my cohorts—especially because our campus library did not have a subscription to the journal and very few bookstores in the city sold issues of *Pauta*. We would devour the contents of whatever issue we could find, and on several occasions, our professors would assign readings from the journal, in which case they would distribute photocopies to us. *Pauta* served a crucial role by introducing me and my classmates to writings by Latin American authors writing

¹³⁹ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, January 14, 2020. [Pudimos publicar 142 números en 35 años—¡qué maravilla! Que el Estado haya subvencionado ese proyecto por más de tres décadas es una gran cosa.]

¹⁴⁰ See Luigi Amara, “Presentación,” *Pauta* 143 (2022): 3–4. These last issues of *Pauta* were presented on October 28, 2022, as part of the activities of the 44th iteration of the Foro de Música Nueva Manuel Enriquez.

¹⁴¹ *Pauta* was used in several music courses during my studies at the Universidad de las Américas Puebla.

about Latin American music. It was through *Pauta* that I was introduced to currents in electroacoustic production in Mexico and to the music of Mariana Villanueva, for example.¹⁴²

In my music education, *Pauta* provided a counterbalance to hegemonic music history narratives centered on Euro-American repertoires by purposefully emphasizing creative activity from Latin America, both musical and literary. This aspect was certainly crucial to my formation. Although issues of *Pauta* were hard to come by in Puebla, where I resided, every time I would visit Mexico City I was able to purchase several issues, as the price was very affordable.¹⁴³ As an aspiring musicologist interested in new music, I was eager to find literature focused on analysis of new music, and it was through reading *Pauta* that I could see examples of how to effectively use music analysis as a methodology. When I think back to my music education, I clearly see that in spite of the journal's shortcomings, it provided me with useful new music terminology and exposure to repertoires and topics that would become relevant to my profession. Regardless of its multiple shortcomings, *Pauta* communicated that, beyond the dominant Euro-American canon, there were *other* repertoires to pay attention to and *other* stories to know. And those were precisely the stories that young aspiring Mexican musicians and scholars like me needed to read.

¹⁴² Regarding essays focused on electroacoustic composition in Mexico, I'm thinking of the writings by composer Javier Álvarez (1956–2023) published in *Pauta* in the mid- to late 1990s. These were later followed by Manuel Rocha Iturbide's texts published in the early 2000s. About the music of Mexican composer Mariana Villanueva (b. 1964), I'm thinking of Ricardo Miranda's analysis of Villanueva's *Canto oscuro*, which was followed by a short essay by Villanueva herself, both published in *Pauta* 55–56 (1995).

¹⁴³ From 1999 to 2017, the price of a single issue of *Pauta* remained the same: \$35 MXN. In the early 2000s, that amount was the equivalent to \$3.25 USD.

5

Of Birds, Ballerinas, and Other Creatures

A central premise of this book is that Mario Lavista was a relational composer and that affective relationships were at the core of his aesthetic thought and creative process. As seen in Chapter 4, Lavista established affective relationships with humans and nonhumans; with performers who worked with him; and with the poetic, literary, or visual texts he alluded to in his compositions. When used as an analytical tool, intertextuality empowers those who approach Lavista's music to imagine meaningful connections between the references they encounter. Intertextuality, as a literary device, can be defined as the interrelationship between one text and another. This interrelationship can occur through allusion, quotation, or reference. Intertextuality is present in any text, since every text has connections to other texts.¹ This interdependence between texts can be purposefully or intentionally designed in the way texts are written, but this is not always the case. As texts, Lavista's scores incorporate external references that are not only musical, but literary and pictorial as well. These references sometimes are made explicit as paratexts—that is, the added elements that frame the main texts such as titles, dedications, and epigraphs. Other times, these references are integrated into the musical tissue of the works in the form of musical quotations, or the borrowing of certain structural elements from other pieces. To the reader—whether listener, performer, or scholar—these references are invitations to imagine the associations they may elicit.

In the introduction of this book, I proposed that a score can be understood not only as a text but also as a social space that remains perpetually open for us to inhabit. Inside this multidimensional and multidirectional space, different presences (intertexts) engage in a communal exchange, inviting us to partake of it. As a listener and a scholar, I enter that space and imagine possible connections between the intertexts I encounter. As a result, engaging in this creative and imaginative exercise enhances my listening experience. I use intertextuality as an analysis tool for the sole purpose of my own pleasurable experience of this music. Why should this personal pleasurable experience be made public? While highly subjective, performing analysis—and making it available—is a creative exercise that extends an invitation to the reader to also engage in that performance. My exploration of the intertextuality in Lavista's

¹ Philosopher and literary critic Julia Kristeva coined the term *intertextuality* in the late 1960s. See Julia Kristeva, *Séméiotikè: Recherches pour une sémanalyse* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1969).

music has allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the composer's ideology, compositional habits, and aspirations.

In this chapter, I present an intertextual analysis of a series of pieces in which Lavista sought to connect music with literary texts (beyond poetry), pictorial texts (painting, drawing, and installations), and dance. The metaphor of *mirrors*—a central concept of this book—is useful for visualizing how each intertext reflects back to another. A spiral of meaning is drawn in each reflection. Beyond these multi- and interdisciplinary references, I also explore the intertextual possibilities of Lavista's integration of previously composed music into new compositions. Through intertextual self-citations, Lavista transforms the past of his previous works by giving them a new meaning and a new future.

Lavista began the 1980s by completing two compositions connected to one another both musically and conceptually. The first one, *Simurg*, for solo piano, was written for German pianist and composer Gerhart Muench (or Münch); the second one, for orchestra—commissioned by conductor Luis Herrera de la Fuente—presents in its second section a lengthy arrangement of *Simurg*. The title of this orchestral piece, *Ficciones*, sheds light on the title of the first: Argentinean writer Jorge Luis Borges's book of the same name mentions the Simurg, a bird with divine qualities in Persian mythology. The exercise of transcribing a musical passage from one piece to another while changing instrumentation has been present in Lavista's compositional trajectory since very early in his career. In the trilogy *Quotations* (for cello and piano), *Trio* (for violin, cello, and piano), and *Lyhannh* (for orchestra), all from 1976, Lavista largely transposes the same musical material from one work to another. However, even though these works are connected musically, they allude to different literary sources via titles and epigraphs. Lavista's reference for *Quotations* is Edgar Allan Poe, but he links *Lyhannh* to the worlds of both Jonathan Swift and Lewis Carroll. By contrast, *Simurg* and *Ficciones* maintain the same literary reference, Jorge Luis Borges. These two musical works also present additional, less evident connections, which, I argue, spring from the visual and metaphorical image of bird(s).

While exploring the intertextuality between *Simurg* and *Ficciones*, one is faced with a rich and complex web that introduces a multiplicity of references, both fictional and real, human and nonhuman. What follows in this chapter is an attempt to untangle this web as a way to grasp the nuances behind the musico-literary connections that Lavista draws on in his music. Coming from a subjective, personal stance, this untangling illuminates ways in which I as a listener have come to understand the intimate encounters between music and literature that recurred constantly in Lavista's thinking and music.

Simurg or Thirty+ Birds

The solo piano piece *Simurg* was written as a commission for Gerhart Muench (1907–1988), a German composer and pianist who came to Mexico in 1953 and lived there

for the rest of his life. Muench and Lavista maintained a very close friendship, though they likely did not see each other very often because Muench resided in Tacámbaro, Michoacán—a city about 400 kilometers west of Mexico City. Lavista was fond of Muench's music, which he regarded as “the echo that says, for the first time, what has been said by other musics.”² Muench was key to Lavista's study of medieval and Renaissance music, and Lavista credits Muench for introducing him to the music of Guillaume de Machaut and Guillaume Dufay.

In writing *Simurg*, Lavista faced the challenge of composing a piece that could showcase Muench's extraordinary piano abilities.³ In his own words, “In my work I have wanted to ‘translate’ certain features of the personality of this notable composer, as well as his interpretative ‘stance.’”⁴ Even though Lavista started his music career as a pianist, had an active career as a solo pianist and accompanist during the 1970s and 1980s, and continued to play the piano on a regular basis from the comfort of his home throughout his life, he did not write extensively for that instrument. Most of the pieces for piano he wrote in the 1970s presented a certain degree of indeterminacy, as seen in *Pieza para un(a) pianista y un piano*, *Pieza para dos pianistas y un piano*, *Cluster*, and *Jaula*. *Simurg* was the first of his piano scores to depart from the exploration of open forms and the first in which Lavista did not include any extended techniques, such as plucking the piano strings, as in *Diálogos*, or incorporating percussive effects, as in *Continuo*. This restriction originated in the commission itself, for it was Muench who asked Lavista to write the piece in a conventional way if the idea was for Muench to perform it.⁵ Perhaps this limitation, and the self-imposed pressure to showcase Muench's abilities, contributed to the fact that it took Lavista almost two years to complete this commission.

Lavista linked several aspects of Muench's life to the image of a bird by drawing a connection between the “avian gestures” of Muench's piano playing and the bird-like lifestyle of Muench's multiple migrations. After leaving Germany, Muench lived in France, Italy, and the United States before finally settling down in Mexico. In Lavista's words: “I like to think that Muench is a bird, a flying bird that time ago started a long journey in search for knowledge.”⁶ Lavista's constructed image of Muench as a

² Mario Lavista, “Gerhart Muench,” in *Mario Lavista: Textos en torno a la música*, ed. Luis Jaime Cortez (Mexico City: Conaculta, INBA, Cenidim, 1988), 87. [Tu música es el eco que dice por vez primera lo que han dicho otras músicas.]

³ Hebert Vázquez comments that composing *Simurg* demanded so much effort from Lavista precisely because he wanted the piece to reflect Muench's “performative gestures.” According to Vázquez, during the two years it took Lavista to compose *Simurg*, he discarded two versions of the piece and worked simultaneously on other projects that represented less of a challenge. Vázquez's interview with Lavista was conducted on June 27, 2005. Hebert Vázquez, *Cuaderno de viaje: Un posible itinerario analítico en torno a Simurg y Ficciones de Mario Lavista* (Mexico City: Conaculta; Morelia: Proart, 2009), 16–17.

⁴ Mario Lavista, “*Simurg*,” in Cortez, *Mario Lavista*, 99. [He querido “traducir” en mi obra ciertos rasgos de la personalidad de este notable compositor, así como su “gesto” interpretativo.]

⁵ Vázquez, *Cuaderno de viaje*, 18.

⁶ Lavista, “*Simurg*,” 99. [Me gusta pensar que Muench es un ave, un pájaro, que hace tiempo inició un largo viaje en búsqueda del saber.]

migratory bird is a starting point to discuss the intertextuality present in the piano piece, starting with its title, *Simurg*.

Lavista came across the Simurg, a mythological bird of Persian origin, in a short story by Jorge Luis Borges (1899–1986), “The Approach to Al-Mu’tasim,” which first appeared in Borges’s *Historia de la eternidad* (1936) and was later included in his collection *Ficciones* (1944). This short story is written in the form of a “nota,” a fictional book review in which the author discusses a work by Bombay lawyer Mir Bahadur Ali titled *The Approach to Al-Mu’tasim*; neither the author nor the work is real. After bringing out the main aspects of the work, Borges points out its resemblance to *Mantiq ut-Tair* or *The Conference of the Birds*, a real literary work by the Persian poet Farid ud-Din Attar (ca. 1145–ca. 1221). The Simurg appears in Borges’s texts through the back door; it is not part of the body of the text, but it appears rather in a long footnote where Borges summarizes Attar’s book:

I have referred, in the course of this note, to the *Mantiq ut-Tair* (*Colloquy of the Birds*) by the Persian mystic Farid ud-din Abu Talib Mehammed ibn-Ibrahim Attar, who was assassinated by the soldiers of Tului, Genghis Khan’s son, when Nishapur was sacked. Perhaps it will not prove idle to summarize the poem. The faraway king of the birds, the Simurg, drops an exquisite feather in the middle of China; weary of their ancient anarchy, the birds determine to find it. They know that their king’s name means “Thirty Birds”; they know that his royal palace stands on the Kaf, the circular mountain which surrounds the earth. They undertake the almost infinite adventure. They fly over seven valleys, or seven seas; the next-to-the-last one is called Vertigo; the last, Annihilation. Many of the pilgrims desert; others perish. Thirty of them, purified by their labors, set foot upon the Mountain of the Simurg. At last they contemplate it: they perceive that *they* are the Simurg, and that the Simurg is each one of them and all of them.⁷

Lavista reproduced this very note—in its original Spanish—on the last page of the score of *Simurg*, published by Ediciones Mexicanas de Música in 1980. In doing so, he invites the score’s reader—the performer, or in this case the scholar—to place the musical score and this literary quote in conversation with one another and to explore the intertextual nuances that emerge. It is at the end of the piano score, therefore, where we learn the origin of the piece’s title. The Simurg came to Lavista through a “book review” where Borges compares a fictional novel to a real Persian poem that addresses the Simurg.⁸ But that is not all the information we are given. The web of

⁷ Jorge Luis Borges, *Ficciones*, ed. Anthony Kerrigan, trans. Anthony Kerrigan et al. (New York: Grove Press, 1962), 40–41. Gene H. Bell-Villada says that “[s]o convincing was this pseudofactual rendition, however, that one of Borges’s readers, his friend Bioy Casares, actually put in an order with Victor Gollancz in London for the novel *The Approach to Al-Mu-tasim!*” See Gene H. Bell-Villada, *Borges and His Fiction: A Guide to His Mind and Art*, rev. ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1999), 73.

⁸ In Attar’s *Mantiq ut-Tair*, there is a pun, for “si” means thirty, and “morgh” means bird; “the *si morgh* meets the Simorgh, the goal of their quest.” See Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis’s translation of *The Conference of the Birds* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1984), 16.

references becomes more intricate when we take into consideration the score's epigraph: "... *no de un pájaro, sino de muchos*" (not of one bird but of many). This phrase is the last line of Canto LXXV, one of expatriate U.S. poet Ezra Pound's *Pisan Cantos* (1945). Even though the two works were separated by decades, what Pound's Canto LXXV and Lavista's *Simurg* have in common is that both are dedicated to the same person: Gerhart Muench.

Pound and Muench's friendship developed while they were both living in Rapallo, Italy, in the 1930s. It was violinist Olga Rudge—Pound's lover—who introduced them in the summer of 1933. A few months after their first encounter, Pound started a concert series in Rapallo that had both Muench and Rudge as main protagonists.⁹ Written at a U.S.-military detention center near Pisa where Pound was imprisoned in an open-air wire cage, Canto LXXV is a eulogy for Muench, as Pound wondered if his friend had survived World War II.¹⁰ This Canto presents a recollection of Pound's memories of Muench and Rudge.¹¹ It is structured in two parts, the first in the form of written words and the second in the form of musical notation, as seen in Figure 5.1.

Pound highlights the centrality of Muench by isolating his first name in the third line of the Canto and by referring to certain biographical facts about Muench. The Phlegethon—the river of fire in Hades (Virgil's *Aeneid* VI)—alludes to the fire-bombing of Dresden on February 13 and 14, 1945, during which Muench lost some of his relatives.¹² Moreover, by ending the first phrase with an exclamation mark, Pound conveys a sense of urgency; it could almost be read as an imperative: [Get] out of Phlegethon! The same words appear in the second line, although by ending it with a comma, Pound gives the statement a sense of certainty: Gerhart did in fact get out of Phlegethon. Nevertheless, this certainty vanishes with the question mark in the


⁹ Arguably, Pound's concert series was his greatest contribution to the artistic life of Rapallo. The Rapallo concert series ran from 1933 to 1939. After actively participating in Pound's series as a pianist for two seasons (1933–1934 and 1934–1935), Muench departed from Rapallo in July of 1935. See R. Murray Schafer, "The Rapallo Years 1928–1941," in *Ezra Pound and Music*, ed. R. Murray Schafer (New York: New Directions, 1977), 321–463. According to Roxana Preda, Muench's departure from Rapallo to Anacapri, apart from financial difficulties, might have been the result of his frustration over the fact that Pound was not programming his own music in the concert series. While he was making money playing the piano, his ultimate goal was to devote himself fully to composition. Roxana Preda, "Of Birds, Composers, and Poets: Ezra Pound's Memoir of Gerhart Muench in Canto 75," *Paideuma: Modern and Contemporary Poetry and Poetics* 42 (2015): 148.

¹⁰ The possibility that Muench may have died during World War II instigated Pound's "elegiac stanza." Preda, "Of Birds, Composers, and Poets," 152–53.

¹¹ For more information on the collaboration between Olga Rudge, Gerhart Muench, and Ezra Pound in 1933, see Preda, "Of Birds, Composers, and Poets"; Heriberto Cruz Cornejo, "From Arcadia to Hell: The Fate of Gerhart and Vera Muench, 1937–1947," *Make It New: The Ezra Pound Society Magazine* 3, no. 3 (2016), <http://makeitnew.ezrapoundsociety.org/volume-iii/3-3-december-2016/the-music-column?-showall=1>, accessed June 23, 2023; and Roxana Preda and Heriberto Cruz Cornejo, "Vida Sin Fin: Ezra Pound and Gerhart Muench," in *The Edinburgh Companion to Ezra Pound and the Arts*, ed. Roxana Preda (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 445–59. Preda produced a video where Pound's Canto LXXV is recited, followed by a performance of Muench's *Canzone degli ucelli*. See Roxana Preda, "Ezra Pound Canto 75.m4v," YouTube video, 4:33, May 1, 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9BvYvs9Gq34>, accessed June 23, 2023.

¹² In his seminal study on Muench, Julio Estrada addresses these and other biographical events of the German composer. See Julio Estrada, "Gerhart Muench-Lorenz (1907–1988): Semblanza sin silencios," *Perspectiva Interdisciplinaria de Música* 2 (2008): 7–19.

LXXV


 out of Phlegethon!
 out of Phlegethon,
 Gerhart
 art thou come forth out of Phlegethon?
 with Buxtehude and Klages in your satchel, with the
 Stambuch of Sachs in yr/ luggage
 —not of one bird but of many



Musical score for Canto LXXV, featuring multiple staves of music with lyrics and performance markings. The score includes various musical notations such as notes, rests, and dynamic markings like *pp*, *mf*, and *ppp*. There are also performance instructions such as *Tr. Pic.* and *Tr. Pic. 2*. The lyrics are interspersed between the staves.

Figure 5.1 Ezra Pound, Canto LXXV, from *The Cantos of Ezra Pound*, copyright © 1948 by Ezra Pound. Reprinted by permission of New Directions Publishing Corp.

fourth line. One wonders if Pound used the word “Phlegethon” to create an audible resemblance to the German *fliegen* (or *der Flug*), hinting perhaps at the idea of a bird that flies away, and also suggesting that after his hardship, his friend had indeed flown away. As Roxana Preda argues, the three-times-repeated line “out of Phlegethon,” “may show that the question had become an obsession.”¹³ Ultimately, Pound did not know if Muench had survived the war.

In the following two lines of the Canto, Pound recalls the significant contributions of Muench’s friendship: notably, the music of Dieterich Buxtehude (ca. 1637–1707), the philosophy of Ludwig Klages (1872–1956), and the poetry of *Meistersinger* Hans Sachs (1494–1576).¹⁴ The Spanish paraphrase of the Canto, elaborated by writer and translator Uwe Frisch Guajardo, connects these biographical details as follows: “*portando en el morral a tu espalda / de Buxtehude la música y de Klages el pensamiento, / y el Libro Gremial del maestro cantor, / el poeta, Hans Sachs*” (from Buxtehude, the music, and from Klages, the thought, and the collection of poems of

¹³ Preda, “Of Birds, Composers, and Poets,” 164.

¹⁴ Ludwig Klages was Muench’s favorite philosopher.

the Meistersinger, the poet Hans Sachs).¹⁵ The imagery of having Buxtehude, Klages, and a collection of poems (*Stammbuch*) by Sachs in the same luggage creates a play of temporality: the remote past and the present are contained in the same bag. But the very last line of Pound's text, "Not of one bird but of many," does not seem to follow this biographical narrative. Preceded by a dash, it creates contrast. The image of the bird might not come as a surprise since previous lines had alluded to "flying," but we cannot overlook the fact that this last line makes reference not to "one" bird, but to many.

One might think that, like Lavista, Pound associated Muench with the Simurg, for the last line of his Canto, "not of one bird but of many," resonates with the line from the Persian poem cited by Borges, "all of the birds are the Simurg, and the Simurg is in each one of them." But in order to come to an understanding of that line, we have to start by clarifying that these are not Pound's words. The line, "not of one bird but of many" was in fact Olga Rudge's expression when she first performed Clément Janequin's *Le chant des oyseaux* in an arrangement by Muench for violin and piano. The violin line of Muench's arrangement is in fact what we find reproduced as the second section of Pound's Canto LXXV.¹⁶

Le chant des oyseaux, a sixteenth-century polyphonic chanson by Janequin (ca. 1485–1558), came to Muench via a transcription by Oscar Chilesotti (1848–1916) from an arrangement for lute by Francesco da Milano (1497–1543)—hence the inclusion of Milano's name at the top of Muench's manuscript. Therefore, Muench was working from an already doubly altered form of the song, one that was stripped of the text.¹⁷ Given the limited number of performers available for the Rapallo concerts, Muench arranged a vast repertoire, perhaps to ensure that there would be a variety of composers on the programs. According to composer R. Murray Schafer, Muench's arrangements tended to be "quite elaborate reconstructions."¹⁸ In fact, Schafer purposefully avoids the use of the term *transcriptions* when describing Muench's arrangements. It is impossible to fully appreciate Muench's alterations to Milano's transcription of Janequin's chanson, as the piano part was lost during the Dresden bombings. Nevertheless, from the violin part we can see significant melodic departures from Janequin's chanson. After acknowledging Muench's labor of recomposition, one can better appreciate the nuances of the word he used to introduce his own arrangement, placed between brackets at the top of the score: [*per metamorfosi*] (see Figure 5.1 and compare it with Example 5.1).

¹⁵ Ezra Pound, "Canto LXXV," trans. Uwe Frisch, *Pauta: Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical* 16 (1985): 47.

¹⁶ As explained by Pound himself, "The point is 'not one bird but a lot of birds' as our violinist said on first playing it." See Ezra Pound, "Janequin, Francesco da Milano," *Townsmen Quarterly* 1, no. 1 (1938): 18.

¹⁷ Music scholar Oscar Chilesotti specialized in transcriptions of lute scores. His manuscripts, which were in the possession of his son who lived in Rapallo, were available to local musicians. Therefore, while living in Rapallo, Muench was able to work with Chilesotti's transcriptions and adapt them for violin and piano. Of these, Pound's favorite was *Canzone de li uccelli*. See Preda, "Of Birds, Composers, and Poets," 143–45.

¹⁸ Murray Schafer, "The Rapallo Years," 328.

Example 5.1 Clément Janequin, *Les chant des oyseaux*, mm. 1–11.

The image displays a musical score for the vocal parts of Clément Janequin's *Les chant des oyseaux*, measures 1 through 11. The score is arranged in three systems, each with four staves for Soprano (S), Alto (A), Tenor (T), and Bass (B). The lyrics are in French and are distributed across the vocal parts. The first system (measures 1-3) shows the Soprano part starting with 'Ré - veillez' and the other parts with 'Ré - veillez vous cueurs en - dor - mis'. The second system (measures 4-7) continues the lyrics, with the Soprano part having 'vous cueurs en - dor - mis, Le dieu d'a - mours vous son - ne, ré - veillez' and the other parts having 'mis, Le dieu d'a - mours vous son - ne, Le dieu d'a - mours vous son - ne, Ré - veillez vous cueurs'. The third system (measures 8-11) shows the Soprano part with 'vous ré - veillez vous cueurs en - dor - mis, Le dieu d'a -' and the other parts with 'ré - veillez vous cueurs en - dor - mis, Le dieu d'a - mours vous en - dor - mis, cueurs en - dor - mis, cueurs'.

According to Roxana Preda, by including Olga Rudge’s remark “not of one bird but of many,” Pound “maintains that the idea of multiplicity and representation of natural sound inherent to Janequin’s original does not get lost but is preserved in the chords, pizzicato, turns, and trills played by the violin.”¹⁹ Moreover, Pound’s insertion of Muench’s recomposition is a reflection of the multiplicity of voices he was trying to bring to the surface, as he often referred to this score as “Gerhart’s Janequin” and viewed Muench as the third composer in the line of transmission. But more than that, Pound wanted to prove that, in spite of that multiplicity of voices present in the music,

¹⁹ Preda, “Of Birds, Composers, and Poets,” 153.

the main imagery remains *the same*: birds. To Brad Bucknell, this is why Pound chose to quote Rudge: “Pound quotes Olga Rudge in order to certify that the birds are there ... [he] transcribes in Canto 75, not the sound of the birds, but the written presentation of the bird song.”²⁰ Bucknell goes on to explain:

The birds are not in Janequin’s words, though his is a choral version, but in the music only: “... when Francesco da Milano reduced it for the lute, the birds were still in the music. And when Münch transcribed it for modern instruments the birds were still there. They ARE still in the violin part.” The birds have transferred their position over time, shifting from the language of the troubadours to the intervals of Janequin. But this transference is not somehow complete until the Münch transcription, and even here, the birds are only really “there” in the violin part.²¹

I would add to Bucknell’s observation that Pound quotes Rudge not only to certify the imagery of birds, but also to give validity particularly to Muench’s birds, in addition to Milano’s or Janequin’s. The birds—plural, multiple—are *right there*, in the violin part. That is why I suggest an understanding of Rudge’s line as the element in the Canto that amalgamates two different artistic forms, poetry and music, as the pivot that connects text with sound. In this regard, Mark Byron concludes that Canto LXXV constitutes a lesson in aesthetics, for “it demonstrates the complex relations between artworks and between artistic media, and calls for a considered, singular meditation on the status of the literary text and its intersection with the musical score.”²²

A strong sense of memory and nostalgia pervades the Canto: *The Pisan Cantos* were written in 1945 while Pound was being held as a military prisoner at the U.S. Army Disciplinary Training Center, in Pisa. In Canto LXXV, Pound remembers Muench and wonders if his German friend is still alive. In his poem, he also recalls the bird song by Janequin–Milano–Muench, which was the piece that opened the very first concert of the Rapallo series back in 1933.²³ More than this, he remembers the words of his dear Olga, his lover for many years. By pairing written words and written music on the same page, Pound proposes a merging of poetry and music, challenging the ontological separation between the two art forms.²⁴ Moreover, by quoting Muench’s recomposition, Pound also raises issues of transcription, arrangement, new composition, authenticity, and authorship. This Canto presents a collage of memories

²⁰ Brad Bucknell, “The Musical Aesthetics of Ezra Pound: Its Shorts and Conditions from Imagism and Vorticism to the *Cantos*,” in *Literary Modernism and Musical Aesthetics* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 111.

²¹ Bucknell, “The Musical Aesthetics of Ezra Pound,” 111–12.

²² Mark Byron, “A Defining Moment in Ezra Pound’s *Cantos*: Musical Scores and Literary Texts,” in *Literature and Music*, ed. Michael J. Meyer (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 157.

²³ The first concert was held on October 10, 1933. Muench’s recomposition was performed again in the last concert of the first series of the Rapallo concerts, on March 31, 1934.

²⁴ According to Ellen Keck Stauder, “Whatever the ancient source of bird sounds may have been, Arnaut Daniel, Janequin, Francesco da Milano, Münch, Rudge and Pound himself, participate in an ongoing generation of objections and responses each of which generates further form.” See Ellen Keck Stauder, “‘Without an Ear of His Own’: Pound’s Janequin in Canto 75,” *Quaderni di Palazzo Serra* 15 (2008): 265.

Example 5.2 Clément Janequin, *Le chant des oyseaux*, mm. 110–17.

The musical score for Example 5.2, Clément Janequin's *Le chant des oyseaux*, measures 110–117, is presented in four parts: Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), and Bass (B.). The score is in 3/4 time and features a complex polyphonic texture with multiple voices imitating bird sounds. The lyrics are in French and include words like "ne", "frian", "tar", "ve-le-cy", "tu", "Co-qui", "qui la-ra", "qui la-ra", "qui la-ra", "fe-ne-ly", "fy", "qui", "Oy-ty", "qui si ti si ti", "Qui la-ra", "qui la-ra", "qui la-ra", "qui la-ra".

in which these friends and collaborators recognize themselves in one another. At the end of a difficult and “perilous” journey, the multiple voices go through a process of recognition, at the end arriving at the realization that all of them are the Simurg and the Simurg is all of them.

This complex, tangled web of interrelations is also present in Lavista’s *Simurg* in the form of paratexts (title and epigraph) and in the musical tissue. The birds that Pound found in the violin line of Muench’s recomposition are also present in Lavista’s *Simurg*. Janequin’s chanson is filled with the onomatopoeic effects of bird songs involving the repetition of a single pitch with noncomprehensible words (“tu,” “coqui,” “qui lara,” etc.; see Example 5.2).

In this example, the four imitative voices create natural accents through reiteration of a consonant; in Muench’s violin line, this effect is obtained not just by the reiteration of a pitch, but also by the effect of using arco and pizzicato simultaneously, as well as by the use of a trill. In Lavista’s *Simurg*, a similar effect is created through isolation of a motif of a repeated pitch in the high register (compare Examples 5.3 and 5.4).

We can find other parallels between Muench’s recomposition and Lavista’s *Simurg* in their compositional construction, which is based on fragments that are juxtaposed instead of developed. The implied polyphony in Muench’s violin line, which is achieved by using double stops and alternating pizzicato and arco, also finds its parallel in the exploration of independent voices in *Simurg*, where Lavista uses three different registers and assigns distinct motifs to each one. In his detailed analysis of

Example 5.3 Gerhart Muench, *La canzone de li ucelli*, mm. 84–88.

Example 5.4 Lavista, *Simurg*, mm. 10–11.

Simurg, Mexican composer Hebert Vázquez (b. 1963)—who studied with Lavista—describes Lavista’s timbral exploration in *Simurg* as a “polyphony of color” (*polifonía de color*).²⁵ In the first measure, for instance, Lavista isolates a four-note motif that outlines two perfect fifths separated by a tritone (or pitch class set [0167]). This collection recurs either as an ostinato (as in the first phrase) or as a vertical sonority in different transpositions. The motif of the middle range is also constructed upon the same intervallic collection, but it is presented in the familiar two-chord sonority that Lavista started to use in *Quotations* and continued to explore in his later works: Bb–F / E–B. The higher register introduces a three-note motif that outlines a diminished fifth and a minor seventh, followed by another set of two diminished fifths separated by a major second. As Vázquez points out, these collections are subsets of a whole-tone collection, which is used throughout the work (see Example 5.5).

The musical elements Lavista works with throughout *Simurg* allude to other pieces. Many of these allusions are self-references in which the composer—like Pound and Borges—explores his own personal memories. Moreover, Lavista introduces a small homage to Muench’s music by quoting two measures from one of Muench’s piano pieces, *Cuatro presencias*, written in 1978. As Vázquez notes, the

²⁵ Vázquez, *Cuaderno de viaje*, 18. In Vázquez’s words, “El compositor decide adoptar una técnica de *polifonía de color*, en la que el teclado es empleado en forma de diversos registros simultáneos, suficientemente alejados entre sí para que resulten fácilmente perceptibles, de manera que cada uno de ellos exprese su propia personalidad tímbrica.”

Example 5.5 Lavista, *Simurg*, mm. 1–3.

levels of intertextuality go even further, as Muench's *Cuatro presencias* was inspired by Aleksandr Scriabin's piano works.²⁶ Lavista's quote from Muench's piece is so seamlessly integrated into the texture of *Simurg* that it is almost imperceptible. "Nobody will know the existence of this quote," Lavista expressed, "but I do, and Muench knew." Ultimately, this is a piece for someone Lavista cherished and admired deeply; hence quoting him was a private message of admiration. Lavista further explained that, although he was interested in incorporating short quotes like this into his music, he would only do so in such a way "that they lose their referential character."²⁷ However, soon after *Simurg*, Lavista included an extensive quote in his orchestral work *Ficciones*. In *Ficciones*, he integrated not just a pair of measures, but almost the entire score of *Simurg* into the second section of the work.

***Ficciones*: A Work within a Work**

It is in the program note for *Ficciones* rather than the one for *Simurg* that Lavista identifies the source of the literary reference common to both compositions: Jorge Luis Borges. In the note, Lavista incorporates Borges's summary of Attar's poem.²⁸ By shifting our attention to Borges rather than to Attar, Lavista pays homage to a writer with whom he feels a profound affinity and who forms part of his imaginary network. Borges's *Ficciones*, first published in 1944, is a compendium in which the Argentinean writer introduces several themes that recur throughout his work, such as memory, circular time, language, and mirrors. In his study, Gene H. Bell-Villada points out that *Ficciones* illustrates Borges's two best-known contributions to the art of narrative: "the illusory book-within-another-book and the fantasy world that reflects earthly reality."²⁹ Lavista follows Borges's strategy: *Ficciones* could be regarded as an

²⁶ Vázquez, *Cuaderno de viaje*, 82–83.

²⁷ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, August 27, 2004. [En *Simurg* hago una cita de una obra de Muench, dos compases, nadie lo va a saber, pero yo sí y Muench también. . . . A mí me interesaba utilizar citas muy breves para que perdieran su carácter referencial y no se usaran como un simple collage.]

²⁸ Mario Lavista, "Ficciones," in Cortez, *Mario Lavista*, 99.

²⁹ Bell-Villada, *Borges and His Fiction*, 79.

illusory “work-within-another work,” for a transcription of *Simurg* is included in the second section of the piece.

Reading Borges for the first time while in his twenties was for Lavista “a fundamental discovery and a turning point.”³⁰ He was inspired by Borges’s notion that authors were free to choose their ancestors, a concept Lavista found liberatory.³¹ Lavista thought of his chosen ancestors as his contemporaries, and writing music was an act that put him in conversation with them. For Lavista, the idea of bringing the ancestors into a contemporary dialogic space in the process of composition suggested that the present modified the past as much as the past modified the present. For him, past and present reflected each other in a perpetual mirror effect.

Borges’s writing strategy of engaging with authors from different time periods in the same text offered Lavista a path toward designing his own aesthetic genealogy. From the multiple intertexts incorporated into *Ficciones* we can gather that Lavista’s chosen ancestors are not only composers, but also writers and poets. The title *Ficciones* alludes to Borges, and the insertion of *Simurg* into the orchestral score refers to Pound via Muench. Lavista makes this connection to literary figures clear and alludes to some of his ancestors. Not surprisingly, he dedicates this orchestral piece to another literary figure, one with whom he had a close relationship: Mexican writer Juan Vicente Melo. As discussed in Chapter 2, Lavista situated himself as a musician with roots in the literary arts, and he made sure his music clearly reflected this association.

Now regarded as “a modern classic of the Mexican symphonic repertoire,” *Ficciones* has gained a degree of popularity among Lavista’s compositions for orchestra.³² Of his orchestral pieces, it is to date the most frequently performed, recorded, and studied.³³ It has received scholarly attention since the mid-1980s, including U.S. conductor Jeannine Wagar’s brief study published in *Pauta* 9 (1984).³⁴ A somewhat longer discussion of *Ficciones*, which is deeply indebted to Wagar’s, can be found in Beatriz A. Bonnet’s master’s thesis (1988).³⁵ More recently, applying the principles of set

³⁰ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, January 10, 2005. [Uno de los descubrimientos fundamentales en mi vida fue Jorge Luis Borges, encontrarme con ese escritor fue un parteaguas.]

³¹ Lavista, discussion, January 10, 2005. [... que uno es el que elige a sus antecesores, algo que es muy liberador, porque de otra manera, tiendes a ver a la tradición como una cruz que estás cargando.]

³² Juan Arturo Brennan, review of the recording of *Ficciones* by the Orquesta Sinfónica de la Universidad de Guanajuato, dir. Juan Trigos, in “Discos,” *Pauta: Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical* 135 (2015): 86. [... un clásico moderno del repertorio sinfónico mexicano: *Ficciones*.]

³³ Lavista’s *Ficciones* has been recorded several times. Among the recordings (all on compact disc) that include *Ficciones* are: *Compositores mexicanos de hoy*, Orquesta Filarmónica de México, dir. Fernando Lozano, 1982; *Twentieth Century Mexican Symphonic Music*, vol. 3, Filarmónica de la Ciudad de México, dir. Eduardo Díazmuñoz, 1999; *Concierto sinfónico*, vol. 2., Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional, dir. Juan Carlos Lomónaco, 2003; *Heras-Lavista-Quintanar-Trigos-Vidaurri*, Orquesta Sinfónica de Guanajuato, dir. Juan Trigos, 2014.

³⁴ Jeannine Wagar, “*Ficciones* (Un análisis armónico),” trans. Dionisia Urtubees, *Pauta: Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical* 9 (1984): 72–76. *Ficciones* is one of several of Lavista’s pieces (up to 1984) that Wagar addressed in her dissertation. See Jeannine Wagar, “Stylistic Tendencies in Three Contemporary Mexican Composers: Manuel Enríquez, Mario Lavista and Alicia Urreta” (DMA diss., Stanford University, 1985).

³⁵ Beatriz A. Bonnet, “Mario Lavista and His Music with an Analysis of *Ficciones*” (master’s thesis, Rice University, 1988).

theory, Vázquez published an extensive and detailed comparative analysis of both *Simurg* and *Ficciones*; it represents the most exhaustive analytical book-length study of Lavista's music published to date.³⁶

Wagar, Bonnet, and Vázquez point to the correlation between Lavista's music and its literary counterparts by exploring the ways in which the composer drew a parallel between music and literature. This parallel is not to be taken literally, however, as Lavista adamantly clarified. About *Ficciones*, he wrote: "My work does not pretend to describe the story of the Simurg in the manner of a symphonic poem, where form depends on a story or a program serving as a guideline for the composer; my interest is that the principle of identity stated by this poem would be manifest whether in a form or musical language devoid of anecdotal reference."³⁷ It was fundamental for Lavista to clarify that he was not trying to compose descriptive music. Rather, he wanted the listener to be aware of his choice of aesthetic lineage (or musical genealogy).³⁸ Although he warned the listener not to expect his music to closely follow a descriptive narrative, his inclusion of extramusical references in the form of paratexts in his scores (titles, epigraphs) invites the listener to explore the layers of interconnectedness among his references. For a listener familiar with Borges's *Ficciones*, Lavista's piece presents a set of possible routes from which to draw connections between the literary volume and the musical work.

The point of departure for both Wagar's and Bonnet's analyses is the collection of pitches that unfolds at the beginning of *Ficciones*: Eb–Bb / A–E, two perfect fifths separated by a tritone (a collection Lavista had used since the 1970s). Both Wagar and Bonnet describe the harmonic connections established in *Ficciones* as being the result of transposing the collection through a circle of fifths. This system generates twelve possible modulations, half of them mirroring the other half. Both Wagar and Bonnet find a correlation between this closed harmonic structure and the Persian poem (as retold by Borges). To Wagar, "The birds' realization that Simurg is a mirror image of themselves is expressed harmonically in an extremely closed and self-generating system of composition, based on superimposed 5ths and their corresponding tritones."³⁹ Even though Wagar makes the connection between the "mirror image" of the birds and Simurg and the "self-generating system of composition," she does not elaborate further on this parallelism.

In discussing *Ficciones*'s second section, Wagar explains that the rhythmic complexity of the 7/8 meter, and the alternation between 3/4 and 4/4, "suggest the search

³⁶ Vázquez, *Cuaderno de viaje*. Vázquez published a shorter version of his study in 2008. See Hebert Vázquez, "Alegoría tonal, arborescencia y multiplicidad céntricas e intertextualidad en *Simurg* de Mario Lavista," *Perspectiva interdisciplinaria de la música 2* (2008): 20–38.

³⁷ Lavista, "Ficciones," 99.

³⁸ Lavista once remarked: "I'm very distant from descriptive music. . . . I'm very close to symbolism and a complete alien to any type of realism." Mario Lavista, "Las ficciones de la música," interview by Fabienne Bradu, in Cortez, *Mario Lavista*, 149. Bradu's interview with Lavista was originally published in *Vuelta 7*, no. 92 (1984). [Estoy muy lejos de la música descriptiva. . . . Yo estoy muy cerca del simbolismo, y soy completamente ajeno a cualquier tipo de realismo.]

³⁹ Wagar, "Stylistic Tendencies," 69.

of the Simurg through the Seven Valleys.”⁴⁰ In her analysis, Bonnet also calls attention to the parallelism between the idea of reflection referred to in the story of the Simurg and Lavista’s “technique of mirrors.” Following what Wagar had already observed, she states: “As the birds discover that they are a mirror of the king of birds, Lavista uses a technique of mirrors to generate much of the pitch material used in *Ficciones*.”⁴¹ Bonnet finds that the birds’ realization that Simurg is *each and every one of them* constitutes the “principle of identity” Lavista intends to portray. While discussing the second section of *Ficciones*, Bonnet also connects the 7/8 meter and the combination of 3/4 and 4/4 with “the seven valleys that have to be crossed to reach Kaf.”⁴² Nevertheless she does not further explore other relationships between the literary source and the music.

After drawing parallels between literature and music, Wagar ends her analysis by restating the nonprogrammatic quality of *Ficciones*: “Although the inspiration for the work came indirectly through Borges from ‘The Conference of the Birds,’ *Ficciones* is by no means a symphonic poem. The development of the compositional ideas and harmonic language is purely musical though Lavista does use a few extra-musical connotations which reflect the story and philosophy of the poem.”⁴³ Her conclusion could be read as contradictory. Is *Ficciones* to be regarded as a work in which Lavista followed a “purely musical process,” or is it to be understood as a piece connected primarily to its extramusical associations?

At the time Wagar was conducting her study (in the late 1980s), she may perhaps have deemed it necessary to stress Lavista’s adherence to the modernist ideal of absolute music. After all, the composer himself went to great lengths to underscore the nondescriptive aspect of his work. Departing from a different ideological platform, two decades after Wagar’s study, Vázquez begins his discussion of *Ficciones* by pointing out that, in spite of Lavista’s adherence to principles of absolute music, his piece presents layers of interconnectedness that are difficult to overlook. In his analysis, Vázquez demonstrates that the formal unfolding of the piece “could have a correlation with the progression of the birds through the Seven Valleys in the story of the Simurg.”⁴⁴

In a table titled “The seven valleys or seas (possible formal itinerary of *Ficciones*),” Vázquez divides the work into seven distinct sections that correspond to these seven valleys.⁴⁵ Whether or not intentionally programmatic, a discussion of the intertexts that inform *Ficciones* opens paths for understanding how the literary sources and music converse. I suggest that the core image that unifies *Ficciones* and *Simurg* is that

⁴⁰ Wagar, “*Ficciones* (un análisis armónico),” 75. [... sugieren la búsqueda del Simurg a través de los Siete Valles.]

⁴¹ Bonnet, “Mario Lavista and His Music,” 28.

⁴² Bonnet, “Mario Lavista and His Music,” 40.

⁴³ Wagar, “Stylistic Tendencies,” 73.

⁴⁴ Vázquez, *Cuaderno de viaje*, 90. [A pesar de la contundencia de la cita anterior, no deja de parecerme atractivo el que el despliegue formal de la pieza pudiera tener su correlato en el progreso de los pájaros a través de los siete valles de la historia del Simurg.]

⁴⁵ Vázquez, *Cuaderno de viaje*, 91. [Los siete valles o mares (posible itinerario formal de *Ficciones*).]

of a bird. It is not by chance that Lavista included the story of the Simurg in his program notes for *Ficciones*. Moreover, to explain the harmonic structure of his orchestral piece, Lavista alluded to the story of the Simurg:

In the poem we find the idea of mirrors, of labyrinths, of identity (the Simurg is each one of the birds and each one of them is the Simurg). These “images” are also present in my piece, which is about harmonic mirrors, labyrinths, and circles. In *Ficciones*, I worked with a kind of harmony that would constantly bring me back to these “images.” I wanted to use a single chord that goes through a series of transpositions and transformations throughout. I wanted the harmonic fabric to be clearly connected to this single chord; that is to say, with chords of identical structure that, while connected, would form a closed harmonic circle or cycle. The entire work is built from these concentric circles. At the end of the piece, the cycle closes, arriving back at the starting point: the encounter of the chord with itself, after having produced multiple reflections, after having traveled along various labyrinthine roads.⁴⁶

The purposeful connections that Lavista drew between the Persian poem and *Ficciones* also extended to the use of numeric symbolism. Here it is worth mentioning that Borges was also an advocate of numeric symbolism and used it thoroughly. Lavista was explicit in this regard: “There is, furthermore, the presence of the number seven; the birds that set out in search of the Simurg have to overcome seven valleys. In my work, the rhythmic principle is based on the number seven, and the second part of the piece is organized on the basis of a metric of seven.”⁴⁷ While Lavista might have insisted that his music was far from descriptive, the parallels he drew between the literary source and his orchestral piece indicate a number of intertextual possibilities.⁴⁸

When Lavista incorporated his piano piece *Simurg* into the orchestral context of *Ficciones*, the piece not only changed instrumental color but was also modified with regard to pitch content. For example, at the beginning of the citation (m. 115), *Simurg*'s

⁴⁶ Lavista, “Las ficciones de la música,” 148–49. [Hay en el poema la idea de los espejos, de los laberintos, de la identidad (el Simurg es cada uno de los pájaros y cada uno de ellos es el Simurg). Estas “imágenes” están presentes también en mi obra, pero se trata de espejos, laberintos y círculos armónicos. En *Ficciones* trabajé con un tipo de armonía que me remitiera constantemente a estas “imágenes.” Quise utilizar un solo acorde que sufre una serie de transposiciones y transformaciones a lo largo de la obra. Quería que todo el tejido armónico estuviera claramente relacionado con ese único acorde, es decir, con acordes de idéntica estructura que al enlazarse formaran un círculo o ciclo armónico cerrado. Toda la obra está hecha con base en estos círculos concéntricos. Al final de la pieza, se cierra el ciclo y se llega al punto de partida: es el encuentro del acorde consigo mismo, después de haber suscitado múltiples reflejos, de haber recorrido varios caminos laberínticos.]

⁴⁷ Lavista, “Las ficciones de la música,” 149. [Hay, además, la presencia del número siete: los pájaros que van en busca del Simurg tienen que superar siete valles. En mi obra el principio rítmico se sustenta en el número siete y la segunda parte de la pieza está organizada con base en una métrica de siete.]

⁴⁸ Lavista, “Las ficciones de la música,” 149. [La relación entre el relato del Simurg y mi obra es mucho más profunda, o menos evidente, si se quiere. Yo no quise describir musicalmente las aventuras del Simurg y los pájaros. Estoy muy lejos de la música descriptiva.]

opening cell (Eb–Bb–E–A) played in the low register of the piano, is now transposed a minor third below (C–G–Db–F#) and given to the harp, with added octave doublings (see Example 5.6 and compare it with Example 5.5). Lavista explained that he opted for this change in order to use the open strings of violas and cellos and also to emphasize the contrast between the first section (which started in Eb) and the second section (starting in C). Moreover, according to Vázquez, the omission of twenty-five measures of *Simurg* (from 45 to 69) makes the orchestral transcription more dynamic and helps to maintain the balance within the overall form of *Ficciones*.⁴⁹

The relationship between music and its literary intertexts is mediated by the imagery of bird(s), just as Muench's violin line depicted the bird song of Janequin's onomatopoeic chanson. By bringing *Simurg* into *Ficciones*, Lavista opens a window of time through which the present transforms the past, and both past and present offer space for a multiplicity of voices to emerge. These voices can be real or fictitious—it does not matter. Muench, Pound, Rudge, Borges, Attar, the Simurg, Lavista—and the list can go on—mingle in a single musical space. To Borges, interpolating a work within a work was an essential device in fantastic fiction, for “if the characters of a fictional work can be readers or spectators, we, its readers or spectators, can be fictitious.”⁵⁰ In *Ficciones*, Lavista designs a fictional musical world that envelops real and imaginary beings. In this world, creatures interact and ultimately identify one another as birds. This multiplicity points at some sort of identity principle that, while active in each individual intertext, could also be understood as unifying the whole. To illustrate the circularity of this metaphor, I conclude this section by quoting an excerpt of the “oldest” known intertext among those at play in these two musical pieces, *The Conference of the Birds*, by Attar:

There in the Simorgh's radiant face they saw
 Themselves, the Simorgh of the world—with awe
 They gazed, and dared at last to comprehend
 They were the Simorgh and the journey's end.⁵¹

Painting Music, Listening to Painting

While in *Simurg* and *Ficciones* Lavista drew connections between literary sources and music, in other pieces he took pictorial works as a point of departure. As previously discussed, beginning in the 1970s, Lavista engaged in interdisciplinary

⁴⁹ Vázquez includes a complete list of discrepancies between *Simurg* and *Ficciones* in pp. 135–59 of *Cuaderno de viaje*.

⁵⁰ Jorge Luis Borges, “Partial Magic in the Quixote,” trans. James E. Irby, in *Labyrinths: Selected Stories & Other Writings by Jorge Luis Borges*, ed. Donald A. Yates and James E. Irby (New York: New Directions, 1964), 196.

⁵¹ Farid ud-Din Attar, *The Conference of the Birds*, trans. Afkham Darbandi and Dick Davis (London: Penguin Books, 1984), 219.

Example 5.6 Lavista, *Ficciones*, mm. 114–17.

Musical score for Example 5.6, Lavista, *Ficciones*, mm. 114–17. The score is for a full orchestra and includes various instruments and their parts. The tempo is *Andante misterioso* (♩ = 68). The score is marked *largo* throughout.

The score is divided into measures 114, 115, 116, and 117. The instruments and their parts are:

- Picc.** Piccolo
- I Fl.** Flute I
- II Fl.** Flute II
- I Ob.** Oboe I
- II Ob.** Oboe II
- I-II Cor.** Cor Anglais
- III-IV Cor.** Cor Anglais
- I-II Trpt.** Trumpet I-II
- Trg.** Trombone
- XII.** Trombone
- Vibr.** Vibraphone
- Arpa** Arpeggiated Harp
- Piano** Piano
- I Vln.** Violin I
- II Vln.** Violin II
- Vla.** Viola
- Vc. div.** Violoncello
- Cb.** Contrabasso

The score includes various dynamics and markings, such as *ff* *violento*, *pp*, *mf*, *p*, *f*, *loco*, *senza sord.*, *div.*, *delicatoso*, *rit.*, and *mf delicato*. The score also includes performance instructions like *senza sord.* and *div.* for the strings.

projects that involved visual arts and music (e.g., the series of collaborations he realized with his life-long friend, visual artist Arnaldo Coen). In the late 1980s, he began to write pieces in response to specific paintings. To Lavista, paintings have “an acoustic quality,” a gamut of sounds and timbres that could be made audible to the viewer.⁵² In his compositions, therefore, he set himself the task of investigating this quality by imagining the sonic dimension of visual works. A discussion of certain features of these pieces in relation to their visual counterparts allows us to see how Lavista established connections between sound and image. Writing pieces that allude to specific visual images became an excuse, so to speak, to immerse himself in aesthetic contemplation, nostalgia, religion, and cosmopolitan imaginaries (see Figure 5.2).

During one of the very first conversations I had with Lavista in 2004, he told me that his inclination to write music in response to paintings had a seemingly arbitrary origin: “I think that there are paintings that remain in silence, like the *Annunciation* by Fra Angelico,” he remarked, “but there are others in which there is great noise, for example, *The Battles* by Paolo Ucello.”⁵³ Whenever he addressed matters pertaining to his interest in exploring music and the visual arts, Lavista mentioned these two Italian Renaissance figures from the fifteenth century: painter Fra Angelico (born Guido di Pietro) and painter and mathematician Paolo Ucello. Although he did not write pieces in response to specific works by these painters, Lavista centered his view regarding the relationship between music and painting on the contrasting auditory responses (silence vs. noise) that the work of these two artists provoked in him.⁵⁴

Lavista’s selection is not arbitrary, however. Early on in his career, he had demonstrated a strong predilection for late-medieval and Renaissance Western European art and musical thought—a preference that will be further explored in the next chapter. But more specifically, Fra Angelico’s altarpiece known as the *Annunciation* could also be regarded as an object that framed Lavista’s own sense of spirituality and religion. In several conversations, he mentioned that when contemplating Fra Angelico’s altarpiece, he gathered certainty about the existence of God. On the other hand, his reference to Ucello, and specifically to Ucello’s *Battle of San Romano*, might have been influenced by Coen’s fascination with the Italian artist and from Coen’s series

⁵² Lavista explored the interconnections between visual arts and music on multiple occasions, both orally and in writing. In his essay titled “El sonido y lo visible,” first given as a speech on the occasion of Arnaldo Coen’s admission to the Academia de las Artes in 2010, he further elaborated on this topic. See Mario Lavista, “El sonido y lo visible,” in *Cuaderno de música 1* (Mexico City: El Colegio Nacional, 2013), 93–102.

⁵³ Lavista, discussion, August 27, 2004. [Estas obras que tienen relación con la pintura parten de un hecho muy arbitrario: pienso que hay cuadros en silencio, por ejemplo, Fra Angelico. . . . Pero hay otras pinturas en las que hay un gran ruido, por ejemplo, *Las Batallas* de Paolo Ucello.]

⁵⁴ Fra Angelico’s altarpiece, *Annunciation*, is located at the Museo del Prado, in Madrid. The set of three paintings by Paolo Ucello known as *The Battle of San Romano* is divided between three collections: London’s National Gallery, Florence’s Galleria degli Uffizi, and Paris’s Musée du Louvre, all of which Lavista visited.



Figure 5.2 Mario Lavista, ca. 1994. Courtesy of Paulina Lavista.

of paintings in which he “paraphrased” Ucello’s battle.⁵⁵ And it is precisely in Lavista’s own description of the sonic quality inherent in Coen’s paintings that we catch a glimpse of the kind of auditory dimension the composer experienced when looking at a painting.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Coen’s paintings have been regarded by the press as “paraphrases” or “variations” of Ucello’s *Battle of San Romano*. His fascination with Ucello began early in his youth. In an essay in memory of Mexican writer Salvador Elizondo (1932–2006), Coen recalled that he met Elizondo at the house of Raúl Lavista (Mario Lavista’s uncle) in 1967 or 1968. Elizondo talked about how, when he saw Ucello’s *Battle of San Romano* at the National Gallery in London for the first time, he abandoned the idea of becoming a painter. Elizondo’s statement sparked Coen’s interest in Ucello. Arnaldo Coen, “La memoria y el olvido,” *Casa del Tiempo* 3, no. 86 (2006): 60.

⁵⁶ See Arnaldo Coen, “Batallas,” <https://www.arnaldocoen.com/batallas>, accessed June 26, 2023.

In a speech given during the 2010 ceremony for Coen's admission to the Academia de las Artes, Lavista made reference to his friend's paraphrases of Ucello's battle:

When we observe these canvases attentively, a surprising and unexpected element appears; I am referring to the sound and the noise that come from the canvas and which we can hear clearly when we see it. There they are, deafening, the noise of the violently clashing armors and the spears, the neighing of the horses, and the shouts and groans of the soldiers. At times you can hear, from afar, the brass instruments that accompany the ritual of battle. . . . As a musician, what never ceases to amaze me is the fact that such a variety and intensity of sounds and timbres could be made audible and reach us by employing solely the tools of painting.⁵⁷

Rooted in a subjective personal experience, Lavista's description invites us to imagine the "acoustic quality" of Coen's paintings. Furthermore, Lavista clarified that what instigated his collaborations with Coen was a shared interest in finding "zones of intersection, [or] correspondences, as Baudelaire calls them, between the visible and the invisible, and to attempt to bring together the qualities and structures of both disciplines: the time of one, and the space of the other."⁵⁸ The reference to Baudelaire reminds us of Lavista's affinity with French symbolism and, in particular, with the notion of synesthesia that Baudelaire's poem "Correspondances" alludes to in the line, "*Les parfums, les couleurs et les sons se répondent.*" Situating himself in a cosmopolitan imaginary, Lavista composed music as an exercise to explore, as Baudelaire did, the correspondences between perfumes, colors, and sounds.⁵⁹ As listeners of his music, he invites us to do the same.

Although Lavista's exploration of the intersections between *el sonido y lo visible*—sound and the visible—date from his collaborations with Coen in the 1970s, the first piece Lavista composed in response to a particular painting was *El pífano* (retrato de Manet), for solo piccolo (1989). This piece could be regarded as a continuation of pieces for solo flute that Lavista wrote starting in the late 1970s in collaboration with flutist Marielena Arizpe. Lavista chose a different instrument for each piece: a flute (in C) for *Canto del alba*, a bass flute for *Lamento*, and an alto flute for *Nocturno*, and in all of them he explored a gamut of extended techniques. *El pífano*, however, was

⁵⁷ Lavista, "El sonido y lo visible," 93–94. [Cuando observamos con atención estas telas se nos aparece de repente un elemento sorpresivo e inesperado, me refiero al sonido y al ruido que emanan de la tela, y que, claramente, escuchamos al mirarla. Ahí están, de forma ensordecedora, los ruidos de las armaduras y de las lanzas que chocan con violencia, el relinchar de los caballos y los gritos y quejas de los soldados. Por momentos se escuchan, a lo lejos, los instrumentos de metal que acompañan al ritual de la batalla. . . . Lo que a mí, como músico, nunca deja de asombrarme es el hecho de que tal variedad e intensidad de sonidos y de timbres, pueda hacerse audible y llegue hasta nosotros, empleando únicamente las herramientas propias de la pintura.]

⁵⁸ Lavista, "El sonido y lo visible," 101. [. . . la colaboración y al diálogo entre un pintor y un músico que, juntos, intentan encontrar zonas de intersección, correspondencias las llamaba Baudelaire, entre lo visible y lo invisible, y tratan de acercar lo más posible las cualidades y estructuras de ambas disciplinas: el tiempo de una y el espacio de la otra.]

⁵⁹ For more details about Lavista's forging of a cosmopolitan ideal, see Chapter 2.

not written for Arizpe, but for Venezuelan flute player Luis Julio Toro, who commissioned the piece. Lavista dedicated the work to both Toro and Mexican flute player Guillermo Portillo.⁶⁰

In *El pífano* (retrato de Manet), Lavista imagined the music played by a boy who belongs to a military band: a boy without a name or rank, the fife player, a child suspended in the air, taken out of any possible geographical landscape and immortalized by modernist painter Édouard Manet (1832–1883).⁶¹ After looking at a printed version of *Le Fifre* in a book in his possession, Lavista recalled thinking: “Evidently this little boy is playing something. What he is playing must be heard.” Therefore, he decided to compose the piece following a utopian notion that what he was writing was what the little boy was playing.⁶² *Le Fifre* shows Manet’s appreciation and assimilation of the work of seventeenth-century Spanish visual artist Diego Velázquez (1599–1660). It is said that during his visit to the Museo del Prado, in 1865, Manet was deeply impressed with *El bufón Pablo de Valladolid* (ca. 1635). What struck Manet was the lack of background in Velázquez’s painting; the male figure appears as if suspended in space: “It is air which surrounds the fellow,” he commented to one of his friends.⁶³ Upon returning from Spain, he began to emulate Velázquez’s work in various paintings. There are striking similarities between *Le Fifre* and *El bufón Pablo de Valladolid*: the male figures in both paintings are facing forward (toward the viewer), both portray relaxed postures (a semi-wide stance), and in both paintings there is no clear sense of ground, although we can perceive the figures’ shadows.⁶⁴

It should now be evident, from the diverse sources Lavista alludes to in his compositions—whether literary or pictorial—that he commonly selected sources that already present layers of interconnection to other sources. By referencing *Le Fifre*, and in consequence, *El bufón Pablo de Valladolid*, Lavista’s *El pífano* illustrates yet another case of intertextuality in which the past not only intersects with the present but also transforms it. Moreover, in selecting a painting by Manet—a key figure in the transition from realism to impressionism—Lavista consciously adheres to a lineage of French artists.

In terms of its sonic qualities, *El pífano* presents the kind of playfulness—which verges on technical virtuosity—that had been present in Lavista’s piece for solo

⁶⁰ Luis Julio Toro included *El pífano* in his recording *Vientos Alisios*, Airo Music, 1993, compact disc. *El pífano* is also included in Beatriz Plana’s recording, *Canto del alba: Música para flauta de Mario Lavista*, Quindecim, 2009, compact disc.

⁶¹ Manet’s oil painting, *Le Fifre* (1866), is located at the Musée d’Orsay in Paris. A digital reproduction of the image is available here: <https://www.musee-orsay.fr/fr/oeuvres/le-fifre-709>, accessed June 23, 2023.

⁶² Lavista, discussion, August 27, 2004. [Yo recordé que hay un cuadro de Manet que se llama *Le Fifre*: un jovencito vestido de uniforme militar, parado con su flautita de madera, tocando, precioso . . . fui al libro, lo saqué, y dije, “evidentemente este niño está tocando algo, hay que oír lo que está tocando.” Escribí una obra con la idea utópica de que lo que estoy escribiendo es lo que está tocando el joven, ésa es la idea.]

⁶³ As indicated on Musée d’Orsay’s webpage, Velázquez’s friend was Fantin-Latour.

⁶⁴ Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez’s oil on canvas *Pablo de Valladolid* (1635) is located at Madrid’s Museo del Prado. A digital reproduction of the image is available here: <https://www.museodelprado.es/en/the-collection/art-work/pablo-de-valladolid/774285f3-fb64-4b00-96a9-df799ab10222>, accessed June 23, 2023.

clarinet, *Madrigal*, written a few years earlier (1985).⁶⁵ Both pieces present a first rapid section that singles out a particular pitch as a pedal point and a second slower section that explores multiphonics. However, while *Madrigal* concludes in a more subdued, meditative manner, *El pífano* returns to the fast, agitated section, therefore creating a tripartite form A B A' (fast—slow—fast). The first section, *Presto*, presents frequent metric changes, from 4/8 to 3/8 to 5/8. The opening gesture emphasizes the intervals of a major second and a minor third, outlining a major third E–G# (see Example 5.7).

For the entirety of the first section of *El pífano*, G# acts as a point of reference. Some of the phrases depart from G# and others arrive at G#. Moreover, there are multiple staccato rearticulations of G#, which add to the liveliness of the section. In the second part of the first section (m. 22), Lavista introduces a rhythmic pattern of sextuplets that he had used in *Madrigal*—a pedal point that jumps up to a tritone (compare Examples 5.8 and 5.9). The tritone is also the interval that assists the transition between the first and second sections.

Example 5.7 Lavista, *El pífano*, mm. 1–4.

Example 5.8 Lavista, *Madrigal*, mm 1–6.

Example 5.9 Lavista, *El pífano*, mm. 22–23.

⁶⁵ *Madrigal* was written for and in collaboration with Mexican clarinetist Luis Humberto Ramos, who recorded the piece for several albums: *Reflejos de la noche* (the first monographic recording of Lavista's music, released in LP format), 1988; *Cuaderno de viaje* (INBA/Cenidim, 1994), and *México del siglo XX vol. 2*, Quindecim, 1999, compact disc.

In the second section of *El pífano*, the melody is enriched by an exploration of extended techniques. The main effects used are microtones that produce a change of color by assigning nontraditional fingering and different angles of embouchure. In my own listening experience, I perceive this exploration of colors at a slow tempo as giving the impression of weightlessness, similar to that found in Manet's painting. At some point during this section, the main melodic gesture from the first section comes back, although incomplete, to anticipate its full return. After the second theme of the first section returns, the piece gradually proceeds to the rhythmic force of the beginning while presenting a variant of thematic material. Toward the conclusion of the piece, Lavista brings back the emphatic jumps of the first section, arriving to a high G# in *ff*.

When gathering zones of confluence between *El pífano* and its pictorial reference, one could understand the overall rhythmic character of the piece and the lightness of its melodic motifs as reflecting the lightness and joviality of the boy painted in Manet's *Le Fifre*. However, one cannot ignore the fact that the boy, after all, is dressed in a military uniform. Allusions to traditional sonic representations of "military music," for instance, the use of regular accents and rhythmic patterns, are not present. Instead, Lavista writes music with a playful interchange of meters and timbres. It is possible, I argue, to imagine this playfulness as being the result of the intertextuality already at play in *Le Fifre*. After all, Manet was emulating the informal, expressive liberty of a jester, that of Velázquez's *El bufón Pablo de Valladolid*.

A year after *El pífano*, Lavista wrote *Las músicas dormidas* (1990) for Bb clarinet, bassoon, and piano. This chamber piece was commissioned by Trío Neos: clarinetist Luis Humberto Ramos (for whom Lavista had written *Madrigal*), bassoonist Wendy Holdaway (for whom Lavista had written *Responsorio*), and pianist Ana Maria Tradatti.⁶⁶ For this second attempt at exploring the intersections between music and image, Lavista chose a painting by Mexican visual artist Rufino Tamayo (1899–1991), *Músicas dormidas*.⁶⁷ The choice of Tamayo aligned with an aesthetic and ideological affinity Lavista felt with the painter. Tamayo, who was still alive when Lavista composed this piece, was recognized as an artist who distanced himself from the institutionalization of muralism and who exposed the limits of nationalism. When Tamayo's work was criticized for its lack of an overt "Mexicanness"—that is, it avoided the use of figurative realism to convey "Mexican" themes—he would reply that his work was indeed Mexican, "and to a greater degree than the muralists', because they stayed on the surface of national reality ending up

⁶⁶ In the process of writing *Las músicas dormidas*, Lavista worked in close collaboration with Ramos, Holdaway, and Tradatti. The ensemble premiered the piece at the Sala Manuel M. Ponce of the Palacio de Bellas Artes during the 13th iteration of the Foro Internacional de Música Nueva in May 1991. A recording of the piece is included in the album *Las músicas dormidas: Trío Neos*, CNCA, INBA, UNAM, Cendim, 1994, compact disc.

⁶⁷ Rufino Tamayo's oil on canvas, *Músicas dormidas* (1950), belongs to Mexico City's Museo de Arte Moderno. A digital reproduction of the image is available here: https://mexicana.cultura.gob.mx/es/repositorio/detalle?id=_suri:MAM:TransObject:5e011a9b7a8a0240e40331a7, accessed June 23, 2023.

in folklore, whereas he would descend to the depths, to the essences of what is [our] own.”⁶⁸

Lavista’s reluctance to sonically portray any overt *Mexicanness* in his music and his overall objection to nationalist attitudes parallel Tamayo’s in significant ways. Influenced by Chávez and other mentors, Lavista believed the use of “national themes” was inadequate for reflecting a “true” sense of Mexicanness and, early on in his career, he had expressed strong opinions about the issue. In a 1984 interview with Jeannine Wagar, Lavista affirmed that “[M]usic is going to be ‘Mexican music’ as far as I am Mexican. . . . There are many composers who quote Indian music in order to be Mexican. That’s a fallacy. Being Mexican is much deeper. It belongs to the realm of the soul and of the spirit.”⁶⁹ Therefore, his choice of Tamayo’s painting *Músicas dormidas* as a starting point for a composition can be seen as a way of emulating Tamayo’s desire to communicate a Mexicanness found in nuanced, subdued forms.⁷⁰

In *Músicas dormidas*, Tamayo alludes to *La Bohémienne endormie* by French artist Henri Rousseau (1844–1910). Tamayo’s painting shows two female figures lying next to each other, and between them are two musical instruments: a mandolin and some sort of wind instrument (perhaps a pan flute). In *La Bohémienne endormie*, one female figure is lying with a stick in one hand and a mandolin next to her body, while a lion is approaching her. In both paintings, the dark figures lie on the ground under a clear sky with a full moon.⁷¹ Tamayo had explored musical themes in several of his previous works, for instance, in *Perfil y guitarras* (1931), *El canto y la música* (1933), and *Los músicos* (1934). Why did Lavista choose *Músicas dormidas* from among Tamayo’s paintings of “musical” themes? Perhaps because it showed a penchant for abstraction. While other paintings display figures holding or playing their instruments, the performers in *Músicas dormidas* have a silent relationship with their instruments.

When facing Tamayo’s painting Lavista imagined the sonic dimension of the *músicas*’ dreams and aimed to compose what they were dreaming about. “The characters of this painting—the *músicas*—are sleeping and, most likely, dreaming.” Lavista wrote. He continued, “We know who they are from seeing their instruments resting on the floor. That’s why, I believe, [the painting] is about a musical dream: they dream about sounds. Their dreams narrate stories told with sounds, with the sounds that the sleeping musicians dream.”⁷² Lavista found in the idea of these characters’ sonic

⁶⁸ Jorge Alberto Manrique, “El proceso de las artes (1910–1970),” in *Historia General de México: Versión 2000*, ed. Daniel Cosío Villegas (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2000), 955–56. [. . . y en una medida mayor que la de los muralistas, pues aquéllos se quedaban en la superficie de la realidad nacional y caían en el folclorismo, mientras que él bajaba en profundidad a las esencias de lo propio.]

⁶⁹ Wagar, “Stylistic Tendencies,” 129–30. Wagar’s interview was transcribed in English.

⁷⁰ Jorge Alberto Manrique deems *Músicas dormidas* as one of the greatest paintings of the century. Manrique, “El proceso de las artes,” 955–56. *Músicas dormidas* was included in the Mexican Pavillion of the XXV Esposizione Biennale Internazionale d’Arte di Venecia (June–October 1950).

⁷¹ Rousseau’s oil on canvas, *La Bohémienne endormie* (1897), is located in New York’s Museum of Modern Art. A digital reproduction of the image can be found here: <https://www.moma.org/collection/works/80172>, accessed June 23, 2023.

⁷² Lavista, “El sonido y lo visible,” 96. [. . . los personajes—las *músicas*, en esta pintura— están dormidos y, muy previsiblemente, soñando. Sabemos lo que son al ver sus instrumentos descansando en el suelo.

Example 5.10 Lavista, *Las músicas dormidas*, mm. 1–5.

dream an alluring point of departure for his composition. The indication that opens his score, “*Con bruscas oposiciones de extrema violencia y de lánguida dulzura*” (With rough oppositions of extreme violence and languid sweetness), points to a possible connection between painting and sound. Taking into consideration Tamayo’s allusion to Rousseau’s painting (which includes a lion) might also shed light on the opposition between violence and sweetness that Lavista tries to convey in his piece. While the figures of the painting seem peaceful, their dreams might not be so.

The choice of *Músicas dormidas*, a painting in which the main figures are not portrayed playing their instruments, inspired a different response than *El pífano*. While imagining the *músicas*’ dreams, Lavista had before him infinite possibilities for instrumentation and the exploration of textures. He chose to focus on the opposition between “violence” and “gentleness.” Thus, the beginning of the piece introduces this opposition of contrasting atmospheres. First, the winds’ melodic material moves slowly and quietly in contrary motion. The clarinet’s main motif [A] outlines a minor third ascending (A–C), while the bassoon motive [B] consists of a minor second followed by a minor third. Second, the piano’s outbursts agitate within a succession of two perfect fourths separated by a tritone (see Example 5.10).

After a series of phrases in which this opposition is explored, the three instruments come to a climactic unison, a point of convergence, after which the piece slips back into a circular form by returning to the slow beginning (see Example 5.11). The piece comes to an end by bringing back the piano’s opening chords, this time inverted. The sonority Lavista had been using since his 1976 piece *Quotations* serves as a reminder that elements of the past always remain present.

Shortly after *Las músicas dormidas*, Lavista explored a different approach to pictorial themes in *Danza de las bailarinas de Degas* (1991), for flute and piano. This piece

Por esa razón, creo que se trata de un sueño musical: ellas sueñan con sonidos. Sus sueños narran historias dichas con sonidos, con los sonidos que sueñan las músicas dormidas.]

Example 5.11 Lavista, *Las músicas dormidas*, mm. 136–41.

The image shows a musical score for three instruments: Clarinet in B-flat (Cl. Bb), Bassoon (Fagot), and Piano. The score is for measures 136 to 141. The tempo is marked 'Lento, dolce' with a quarter note equal to approximately 40 beats (♩ = c. 40). The score includes dynamic markings such as (p), mf, and espressivo, and performance instructions like 'non rall.' and 'espressivo'. The piano part features a complex contrapuntal texture with irregular meters.

was commissioned by U.S.-American flutist Jill Felber, to whom it is dedicated.⁷³ Inspired not by a particular canvas, but rather as an homage to one of Degas's favorite themes, ballerinas, *Danza de las bailarinas de Degas* was Lavista's imaginative re-creation of the music Degas's dancers might be listening or dancing to at a given moment.⁷⁴ The highly contrapuntal treatment of the lines could allude to the fact that the work points not to one particular ballerina, but is rather a representation of bodily movement abstracted from a series of paintings.

Lavista structures the work in ternary form (A B A'), with the outer sections presenting imitative counterpoint in a three-voice texture (flute, piano right-hand, piano left-hand). In this virtuosic *tour de force*, he explores motivic gestures of irregular meter that move at great speed. In a condensed manner, the first two measures introduce the melodic, rhythmic, and harmonic bases of the work (a six-note motif outlining two diminished fifths separated by a minor third, the reiteration of a single pitch, an augmented triad, and an incessant subdivision of the beat). The initial indication, *Leggiero, ma deciso e con ostinazione*, describes the overall atmosphere of the first section of the piece, as the rhythmic drive present in the three voices is, in fact very obstinate.

The high voice (right hand of the piano) enters with an outburst on Db spanning three different octaves in measure one, followed almost immediately by the lower voice (left hand of the piano) with a six-note motif that arrives on A at the moment when the flute enters with a motif centered on F. As the three voices are heard simultaneously for the first time, in measure 2, the augmented chord Db–F–A is outlined.

⁷³ *Danza de las bailarinas de Degas* is included in the following recordings: *Jade nocturno*, Alejandro Escuer (flute) and Mauricio Nader (piano), Quindecim, 1997; *Canto del alba: Música para flauta de Mario Lavista*, Beatriz Plana (flute) and Mario Colombo (piano), Quindecim, El Colegio Nacional, 2009; *Invocaciones: Música mexicana para flauta y piano*, Evangelina Reyes (flute) and Camelia Goia (piano), Urtext, 2009.

⁷⁴ Digital reproductions of Edgar Degas's paintings depicting ballet dancers are available here: <https://www.edgar-degas.org/Dancers.html>, accessed June 23, 2023.

Example 5.12 Lavista, *Danza de las bailarinas de Degas*, mm. 1–2.

Allegro molto [♩] = 132]
 Sempre a tempo
 Leggiero, ma deciso e con ostinazione

Flauta

Piano

pp sordina

poco

p

senza pedal

This will be the central sonority throughout the piece, and the three pitches will act as tonal centers (see Example 5.12).

We find imitative entrances throughout the section, and the main motifs are transposed, varied, and distributed between the voices. The rhythmic drive becomes more complex as irregular accents accompany the flute lines from m. 27 onward. The piano texture changes from mm. 46 to 84: chords of perfect fifths alternate with augmented fourths, and there is an obstinate repetition of F and Db. The piano chords belong primarily to the middle-high register until m. 77, when the Db is brought back to the bass and sustained as a pedal point—a passage that serves as a retransition to the flute theme again (m. 85). The counterpoint between the voices comes back with less intensity as the rhythmic force begins to slow down until it reaches a *Lento* section. Instead of having a clear demarcation, there is a smooth transition from section one to section two, starting in m. 102.

A contrast in texture happens in the slower central section, where chordal writing is predominant. In this section, the left hand of the piano presents mainly augmented chords, while the flute has a lyric melody. Instances of imitation still occur between the top line of the piano and the flute, until both reach a unison at m. 112; this comes as a surprise, for it represents not just the only time when the instrumental forces merge in one pitch (in *pp*) but also the longest point of rest. Flute and piano carry this union to the next section, where Lavista assigns polyphonic sonorities to the flute (perfect fifths) for the only time in the piece (see Example 5.13). Both piano and flute intermingle on perfect fifths separated by a tritone. The fifth played by the piano, which is an open fifth displaced by an octave, resembles a familiar sonority—a chord that has been emblematic of Lavista's harmonic language (which in terms of its intervallic content is represented as [0167]). After two measures of harmonic fifths, the flute comes back to a melodic line while the piano returns to augmented chords in the left hand and perfect fifths in the right. This passage functions as a retransition that arrives at a recapitulation of the first section in m. 121. The material from the first section is condensed, and the focus on the triad Db–F–A is stronger. Gradually, the

Example 5.13 Lavista, *Danza de las bailarinas de Degas*, mm. 108–16.

The musical score consists of three systems. The first system (measures 108-110) shows the flute and piano parts. The flute part has a melodic line with a dynamic of *p*. The piano part has a steady eighth-note bass line in the left hand and chords in the right hand. The second system (measures 110-114) includes a *rall.* marking and a *piu Lento* marking with a tempo of approximately 60 beats per minute. The flute part has a dynamic of *pp* and a *dim.* marking. The piano part has a dynamic of *pp* and a *f* marking. The third system (measures 114-116) shows the flute part with a dynamic of *p* and a *mf* marking. The piano part has a dynamic of *p* and a *mf* marking.

lines of the three voices diminish in rhythmic pace, while sustaining the pitches that were assigned to them from the beginning: Db in the left hand of the piano, A in the right, and F in the flute. After a decrescendo toward the end of the piece, the flute's F diminishes to *niente*.

These brief descriptive commentaries on three of Lavista's chamber works written in a short period of three years (1989–1991) show the dynamic intertextual relationships the composer envisioned between painting and music. In *El pífono*, we can appreciate the melodic and rhythmic playfulness, which, it could be argued, is connected not only to the image of a boy playing the flute in Manet's painting but also to that of Velázquez's buffoon. In the case of *Músicas dormidas*, a painting in which the figures are not actively engaging with the making of music, Lavista had more room to explore an imaginary dream of sounds. Finally, in *Danza de las bailarinas de Degas*, we can appreciate Lavista's musical portrayal of the lightness and balance he gathered from

Degas's ballerinas. After these three pieces, Lavista ceased to compose works based on paintings until 2004, when he was commissioned by the Festival Internacional de Música y Danza de Granada (Spain), to celebrate the centenary of Salvador Dalí's birthday. In response, Lavista wrote an instrumental work that pays homage not to the *surrealist* Dalí, but to the less famous *religious* Dalí who converted to Catholicism in the 1950s. As a point of departure, Lavista chose Dalí's *Cristo de San Juan de la Cruz* (1951)—a painting in which Dalí alludes to the drawings of the Spanish mystic Saint John of the Cross (1542–1591).⁷⁵

Before receiving this commission, Lavista had not been particularly attracted to surrealism. This represented the first (and probably the only) time he composed a piece honoring a visual artist to whom he did not feel particularly attached. Perhaps for this reason he chose to focus on a painting that allowed him to explore a topic he had been very interested in: Christian devotion and spirituality. To Lavista, Dalí's *Cristo de San Juan de la Cruz* evokes the notion of music as an act of worship and worship as embedded in ritual. He explained:

In this painting, the one who is in silence is the crucified Christ ... suspended, without gravity, he is in silence. Those who sing canticles are the angels, but this singing comes from another place to be heard in the *Cristo de San Juan de la Cruz*. ... The painting reminded me of religious music and especially of the Mass, since the Mass is the great religious ritual by which Christ is to be renewed through communion. It is not a Requiem that I wrote; nor is it a Lament on the death of Christ. It is, I repeat, a kind of Mass, because the Mass represents the renewal of the life of Christ; it is about eating his body and drinking his blood.⁷⁶

Given Lavista's association of the music he envisioned for Dalí's painting and the Catholic religious ritual of the Mass—specifically the Eucharist—he took his *Missa Brevis ad Consolationis Dominam Nostram* (1994–1995) as the point of departure for his instrumental composition. In his piece *Cristo de San Juan de la Cruz*, Lavista opens a long parenthesis of music where he transfers material from the Mass to an instrumental setting—the same technique he had used in *Ficciones*. This piece is one of several in which Lavista alludes to his Mass, a central work within his oeuvre. *Cristo de San Juan de la Cruz*, therefore, is not only an example of Lavista's interest in exploring intersections between music and image but also a platform from which he

⁷⁵ Dalí's oil on canvas, *Cristo de San Juan de la Cruz*, is located at Glasgow's Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum. A digital image of the painting is available here: <https://www.thedaliuniverse.com/es/cristo-de-san-juan-de-la-cruz-salvador-dali-pintura>, accessed June 26, 2023.

⁷⁶ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, July 25, 2005. [En ese cuadro, quien está en silencio, es el Cristo crucificado ... suspendido, sin gravedad, él está en silencio. Los que entonan cantos son los ángeles, pero es un canto que viene de otro lado para escucharse en el *Cristo de San Juan de la Cruz*. ... El cuadro me remitió a la música religiosa y en especial a la Misa, ya que la Misa es el gran ritual religioso para que Cristo se renueve a través de la comunión. No es un Requiem el que yo escribí; tampoco es un lamento a la muerte de Cristo. Es, repito, una suerte de Misa, porque la Misa representa la renovación de la vida de Cristo; es tomar su cuerpo y beber su sangre.]

ponders a theme that was to become increasingly significant in his compositional activities: spirituality and religion.⁷⁷

Dancing Bodies, Mirrors, and a Travel Log

One could say that Lavista was a synesthetic composer, that he wrote music that simultaneously responded to images, words, senses of smell, and place. As discussed in the previous section, there were times when he was inspired to write music in response to specific paintings. What Lavista experienced as a spectator of those paintings was not just color, figures, and shapes, but also movement. A piece like *Danza de las bailarinas de Degas* is an example. What inspired Lavista to compose music after Degas's paintings was not the paintings themselves, but imagining the ballerinas' movements. Although sometimes overlooked, dance as an art form always had a significant place in Lavista's life, and his connection with dance became stronger when his daughter, Claudia, started her own path within the discipline.⁷⁸

A close look at his list of works shows that Lavista was involved in collaborative projects with choreographers and dancers from early on in his career. He wrote a significant number of pieces that allude to dance forms or that were conceived as instrumental dances. As discussed before, soon after his return from Paris, Lavista formed the collective improvisation group Quanta in 1970. As part of this group, he participated in a series of spontaneous and improvisational events with dancers and visual artists. An early example of this kind of project was *Danza Hebdomadaria*, coordinated by dancer and choreographer Rocío Sagaón (1933–2015).⁷⁹ Sagaón envisioned *Danza Hebdomadaria* as a multidisciplinary performance “laboratory” of sorts where every person involved—dancers, visual artists, and musicians—had complete liberty to improvise. For an entire month, each performance of *Danza Hebdomadaria* would offer the public something different. This was the first time Lavista collaborated with Arnaldo Coen. Coen painted on the dancers' (naked) bodies and the musicians improvised music “reading” the graphics on the bodies as they moved.⁸⁰ Apart from Quanta's collaborations with Coen, the group participated in the 1970 Jornada de Arte Contemporáneo, during which visual artists José Hernández Delgado,

⁷⁷ For more about *Cristo de San Juan de la Cruz*, see Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, “Trayectorias de espiritualidad y redes intertextuales en la música religiosa de Mario Lavista,” in *Músicas Iberoamericanas: Caminos, redes y circuitos*, ed. Javier Marín-López, Montserrat Capelán, and Paulo A. Castagna (Madrid: Iberoamericana / Frankfurt: Vervuert, forthcoming).

⁷⁸ Óscar Flores Martínez's short study is the first and only published text that documents the connections between Lavista's music and dance up to 1988. See Óscar Flores Martínez, “Mario Lavista y la danza,” in Cortez, *Mario Lavista*, 163–65.

⁷⁹ For more about Lavista's collaboration with Rocío Sagaón, see Chapter 3.

⁸⁰ One of the dancers who participated in this project was actress Pilar Pellicer. For more about Coen's and Pellicer's involvement with *Danza Hebdomadaria*, see “Danza Hebdomadaria,” Pilar Pellicer a campo abierto, Secretaría de Cultura and INBAL, <https://citru.inba.gob.mx/proyectos/exposiciones/pilarpellicer/danza/danza-hebdomadaria/D0024/>, accessed June 23, 2023.

Guillermo Ceniceros, Leonel Maciel, and Gustavo Arias Murueta painted a collective mural while *los Quantas* improvised.⁸¹

As explored in Chapter 2, through Quanta, Lavista began a fruitful collaboration with choreographer Gloria Contreras (1934–2015), who founded UNAM's Taller Coreográfico (Choreographic Workshop) in 1970 and directed it until her death. This period of intense experimentation and collective improvisation among dancers and musicians was unprecedented in the history of Mexico's multidisciplinary avant-garde. When describing the improvisatory processes with Lavista, Contreras expressed:

These sessions were very special because both musicians and dancers improvised in front of audiences, while following some preestablished rules. We had many rehearsals at the CUC [Centro Universitario Cultural]. We used to spend hours improvising until we got to know each other so well that Mario was able to know whether or not I had finished a dance theme, and when he could finish because I was finishing; it was the same way for me.⁸²

To her and to her group, those improvisations were cathartic experiences, as they were still healing from the devastating 1968 Tlatelolco massacre that forever changed the University's community. Although that period of intense collective improvisation was very brief, Contreras and Lavista continued to collaborate, and she continued to use Lavista's music for her choreographies.⁸³

Lavista's involvement with cutting-edge dance groups went beyond the early 1970s. In 1980, he collaborated with the Forion Ensemble. This was a pioneering group associated with Danza Independiente, a movement characterized by an irreverent attitude toward traditional technique and an antagonism toward the "abstract virtuosity" of classical and contemporary dance.⁸⁴ Choreographer Lydia Romero, a founding member of Forion and a key figure in this postmodern cosmopolitan dance movement, invited Lavista to provide music for her project *Historias como*

⁸¹ Esperanza Pulido, "Conservatorio Nacional: Jornadas de Arte Contemporáneo," *Heterofonía* 3, no. 15 (1970): 41.

⁸² Gloria Contreras, "Taller Coreográfico de la UNAM. Historia: 1971," snapshot created May 11, 2009, https://web.archive.org/web/20090511154940/http://www.tcunam.org/tcu_1971.cfm, accessed July 15, 2022. [Estas sesiones eran muy especiales porque tanto los músicos como los bailarines, conforme a algunas reglas preestablecidas, improvisábamos ante el público. Llevamos a cabo muchos ensayos en el cuc, pasábamos horas enteras improvisando hasta llegar a compenetrarnos tanto que en un momento Mario sabía si yo no había terminado de desarrollar un tema dancístico y cuándo podía él terminar porque yo estaba también terminando; de igual manera me pasaba a mí.]

⁸³ For example, in her choreography *Tres* (1975), Contreras used Lavista's *Pieza para un(a) pianista y un piano*, and in *Gravitacional* (1978), she used Lavista's *Antifonía*.

⁸⁴ Patricia Cardona, *La nueva cara del bailarín mexicano: Antología hemerográfica* (Mexico City: Cenidi Danza, INBA, 1990), 9. See also Margarita Tortajada Quiroz, "La danza contemporánea independiente mexicana. Bailan los irreverentes y audaces," *Casa del Tiempo* 95–96 (2007): 73–80, http://www.uam.mx/difusion/casadeltiempo/95_96_dic_ene_2007/casa_del_tiempo_num95_96_73_80.pdf, accessed June 23, 2023. The members of Forion Ensemble were sisters Lidya and Rosa Romero, Jorge Domínguez, and Eva Zapfe.

cuerpos—a phrase that comes from Poema VII of Luis Cernuda's *Donde habite el olvido*. The soundtrack for *Historias como cuerpos*, composed for tape, consisted of a collage of opera arias compiled and arranged by Lavista, which included "electroacoustic distortions."⁸⁵

Although years later Lavista could not recall the details of Romero's choreography, he did mention the full nudity of Jorge Domínguez in performance. Since Domínguez was the only male dancer in the ensemble, his nudity was considered by audiences and critics a quite audacious act.⁸⁶ Lavista also remembered that Romero asked him to incorporate opera arias into the music he composed for the choreography. As Lavista recalled, "So, what I did was take Puccini, something from *La bohème* or *Tosca*, and reproduce it as is, without modifying it but adding some kind of sphere, a totally electronic environment with plenty of echo, so that you could hear from afar, a bit surreal, everything that was happening."⁸⁷ *Historias como cuerpos* is one of several electronic pieces Lavista did for dance, theater, television, and film throughout the 1970s and 1980s, including the film *Flores de papel* (directed by Gabriel Retes, 1977), the play *Fue una historia de amor* (by French playwright Gilbert Léautier, 1979), and the play *Hécuba la perra* (by Hugo Hiriart, 1982). Although Lavista only wrote two pieces specifically for dance choreography (*Historias para cuerpos* and *Divertimento para una bruja*), choreographers in both Mexico and abroad have used his music.⁸⁸

Lavista's collaborations with dancers during the 1970s and 1980s played an influential role for his daughter Claudia Lavista (b. 1969), one of the most renowned choreographers of her generation.⁸⁹ Claudia accompanied her father to his rehearsals with

⁸⁵ Alberto Dallal, "Obras del Forion Ensemble," *Diálogos: Artes, Letras, Ciencias Humanas* 16, no. 3 (1980): 26. [La música, un conjunto de arias de óperas compilado por (y en distorsiones electroacústicas de) Mario Lavista.] Also see Alberto Dallal, *Estudios sobre el arte coreográfico* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2006), 212. According to Flores Martínez, the fragments Lavista included in *Historias para cuerpos* came from Bellini's *Norma* and Puccini's *Madama Butterfly*. See Flores Martínez, "Mario Lavista y la danza," 164.

⁸⁶ Michael K. Schuessler and Miguel Capistrán, *México se escribe con J: Una historia de la cultura gay* (Mexico City: Editorial Planeta Mexicana, 2010), n.p. In Schuessler and Capistrán's words: "En la obra *Historias como cuerpos*, de Lidya [sic] Romero, el joven bailarín rompió el tabú de la desnudez en escena al interpretar a un adolescente que sueña tres mujeres en una noche lujuriosa.... Casi cuatro décadas después Jorge Domínguez considera aquella osadía coreográfica como 'un comentario sobre la sexualidad.'"

⁸⁷ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, March 30, 2012. [Entonces yo lo que hice es tomar Puccini, algo de *La bohème* o *Tosca*, y reproducirla tal cual, sin modificarla, pero agregándole una especie de esfera, de ambiente totalmente electrónico, con mucho eco, para que se oyera de lejos, un poco surrealista, todo lo que está pasando.]

⁸⁸ Among the choreographers who have set their work to Lavista's music are Guillermina Bravo, Graciela Henríquez, Michel Descombey, Jaime Blanc, Pilar Urreta, Josefina Lavalle, Yaron Margolis, Diana Teocharidis, Duane Cochran, and Ellie Leonhardt.

⁸⁹ Throughout the rest of this section, I use first names to avoid confusion. Claudia was born in Paris. As discussed in Chapter 1, both her parents had obtained scholarships to study in France; Mario enrolled in the Schola Cantorum, and Claudia's mother, Rosa Martha Fernández, was pursuing a career in film. Their marriage was short-lived, and they split up on their return from Japan in 1972. Fernández became one of the leaders of a feminist film movement that flourished in Mexico in the 1970s. The artistic careers of Lavista and Fernández have been very influential for Claudia, and over the years she collaborated in artistic projects with both parents.



Figure 5.3 Claudia Lavista dancing *Lamento a la memoria de mi abuela*, 1994. Photo by Andrea López. Courtesy of Claudia Lavista.

Guillermina Bravo. Seated under the piano, Claudia remembers attentively watching the dancers' feet moving to her father's playing.⁹⁰ She regards these sessions as fundamental to her childhood education and to the development of her vocation as dancer and choreographer. While her parents did not enroll her in dance classes, she decided to study dance on her own at age fourteen after one of her friends took her to a dance class.⁹¹ Her career as a choreographer began in her early twenties, and for her very first solo, *Lamento a la memoria de mi abuela* (1994), she used her father's *Lamento*, for bass flute (see Figure 5.3). This is the first of a series of choreographies based on her father's music that Claudia has created.⁹² Introduced by a virtuosic improvisatory section performed live by flutist Alejandro Escuer, Claudia's first solo choreography illuminated core aspects of the artistic affinities between daughter and father: a

⁹⁰ Alondra Flores, "Homenaje nacional a Guillermina Bravo," *La Jornada*, February 5, 2011, <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2011/02/05/cultura/a06n1cul>, accessed July 15, 2023.

⁹¹ Years after Claudia started her dance education, her father confessed to her that his dream had always been for her to be a dancer. However, he did not enroll her in dance lessons because he did not want to force that path on her. Claudia Lavista, in discussion with the author, via Zoom, September 28, 2020.

⁹² Since her father's passing, Claudia has continued to use his music in her choreographies. As a 2022 Jerusalem International Fellow, she produced a videodance using Mario's *Ofrenda* (1986), for tenor recorder, and in *Nautilus* (premiered in the 2022 Festival Ballo Pubblico in Siena, Italy), she used *Reflejos de la noche*. In conjunction with Ceprodac (Centro de Producción de Danza), Alejandro Escuer, Cuarteto Lavista, and choreographers Melva Olivas, Raúl Tamez, and Víctor Manuel Ruiz, Claudia produced *Luz Sonora*, an hour-long dance project based on Mario's music presented during the 2022 Festival Internacional Cervantino.

predilection for suggestive atmospheres, abstract symbolist aesthetics, and the use of poetic and literary texts as a point of departure for creative thought.

Claudia describes her father's music as "an ocean . . . a canopy that envelops dances and provides them with a fertile land to express themselves, to grow."⁹³ "The sensation I have with my dad," she expresses, "is that each one of us is a universe, but we form a unity."⁹⁴ The relationship Claudia had with her father was very close.⁹⁵ As a child, she accompanied him to multiple concerts and practice sessions and she waited for him in the Conservatory's gardens while he taught classes. Given their closeness, she feels that his musical language resounds in her body in a "very organic and natural way."⁹⁶ She thinks of her body as a container of memories that appear, unconsciously, whenever they need to appear. In her own words, "All those long processes I experienced with my dad, as a child and young adult, watching him working with performers and witnessing his processes of searching for the precise sound . . . , all of that later affected how I would relate to his music."⁹⁷

The sonic memories of her father's music in her body allow Claudia to enact movement, to materialize the sounds in bodily expressions. To her, his music is a *habitat* in which she can dwell and where she can simply be. In her own words, "his music is like a big house with many rooms that can be inhabited in multiple ways."⁹⁸ In this habitat, Claudia is free to imagine bodily gestures and to generate movement, as it is a habitat formed by a playful contrast of spatial volumes, of both emptiness and fullness. "There are things in his music," she says, "that are full of volume; they become volume, like sculpture, and suddenly, that volume empties itself."⁹⁹ The textural gestures Claudia finds in her father's music allow her to invent a language of movement charged with structure. As she remarks:

There are aspects of my dad's music that grant me structure as a human being. Which is rather curious because, as a father, he has given me structure throughout my life—he is a very structured person, and his relationship with me has always

⁹³ C. Lavista, discussion, September 28, 2020. [... como un mar . . . su música es como una bóveda, que envuelve estas danzas y les da un territorio fértil para expresarse, para crecer.]

⁹⁴ C. Lavista, discussion, September 28, 2020. [La sensación que tengo con mi papá es que cada uno es un universo, pero somos una unidad.]

⁹⁵ Claudia described their closeness as being like *muéganos*, a traditional Mexican candy made with pieces of flour glued by honey. Claudia Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, February 26, 2022.

⁹⁶ Claudia Lavista, in El Colegio Nacional (Mexico), "Cuaderno de viaje. Coordina: Mario Lavista," streamed live on May 27, 2020, Facebook Watch video, 1:52:42, <https://www.facebook.com/ColegioNacional.mx/videos/3691197990895820>, accessed June 23, 2023. [Resuena en mí de una manera muy orgánica y muy natural.]

⁹⁷ C. Lavista, discussion, September 28, 2020. [Todos estos largos procesos que yo viví de niña con mi papá, o de joven, viéndolo trabajar con los intérpretes en la casa, todo ese proceso en el que él estaba buscando el sonido preciso . . . todo eso tuvo una influencia en cómo yo me relacioné después con esa obra.]

⁹⁸ C. Lavista, discussion, September 28, 2020. [Como una casa enorme en donde hay varios cuartos, hay muchas maneras de habitar esa casa, es una música muy habitable, se puede habitar de muchas maneras.]

⁹⁹ C. Lavista, discussion, September 28, 2020. [Hay en su música cosas que se llenan de un volumen, se vuelven volumen; se vuelven casi como una especie de escultura y de pronto ese volumen se vacía.]

been very close, very loving, and very present—but his music *also* gives me structure. I find many spaces to be myself in that music. It's very peculiar, because his music doesn't have a linear narrative. . . . In my dad's music there are many spaces, many gaps, and I believe that's the *ideal* music for creating choreography.¹⁰⁰

Since her first solo work in 1994, Claudia has choreographed several of her father's compositions. However, the opportunity to collaborate on a project that would involve newly created music and choreography came through a commission they received in 2010 from Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes (INBA) via Ignacio Toscano to celebrate the ninetieth birthday of Mexican choreographer Guillermina Bravo (1920–2013). For this project, Mario decided to revisit a piece he had written in 2006 for two cellos and prepared piano, *Divertimento para una coreografía imaginaria*, commissioned by and dedicated to the ensemble Cello Alterno.¹⁰¹ The title perhaps gives us a hint as to the reasons why Mario would choose to rework this piece for his daughter to choreograph: what was envisioned as a divertimento for an *imaginary* choreography would become music for a *real* one. He arranged the piece for an ensemble consisting of clarinet, viola, violoncello, double bass, and prepared piano, to be performed by members of Ensemble Cepromusic, directed by José Luis Castillo. The title he gave to his arranged version, *Divertimento para una bruja*, alludes to the previous piece and simultaneously serves as a dedication. Ultimately, this music was meant to pay homage to Guillermina Bravo, who was known as *la bruja de la danza*—the Dance Witch.¹⁰²

The sonic atmosphere of *Divertimento para una bruja* is mesmerizing. While viola and cello play natural harmonics throughout, the percussive gonglike quality of the prepared piano and the pizzicato of the double bass produce a delicate, eerie texture. The formal design of the piece follows the structural pattern of John Cage's *A Room* (1943), in which the numbers 4-7-2-5-4-7-2-3-5 indicate the measures in each section, for a total of thirty-nine measures. Mario varied this pattern by presenting it in retrograde fashion (*en espejo*) in its totality, or inside each unit.¹⁰³ The permutability of this structural arrangement allowed for the repetition of certain sections to accommodate Claudia's choreography. Apart from his fascination with Cage's micro

¹⁰⁰ C. Lavista, discussion, September 28, 2020. [Hay muchas cosas en su música que a mí como ser humano me dan estructura. Lo cual es muy curioso porque él como papá me da estructura, a lo largo de toda mi vida, él es una persona muy estructurada y su relación con su hija ha sido siempre una relación muy amorosa, muy presente, muy cercana. . . . Su música *también* me da mucha estructura. Y encuentro muchos espacios para ser yo misma en esa música. Es muy particular. Porque su música no tiene una narrativa lineal. . . . es una música donde hay muchos espacios, muchos huecos. Yo creo que la música ideal para hacer coreografía es esa música.]

¹⁰¹ The ensemble Cello Alterno is comprised of cellists Iracema de Andrade and Edgardo Espinosa and pianist Edith Ruiz. Lavista's *Divertimento para una coreografía imaginaria* is included in their album *Cello Alterno: Música mexicana para dos violoncellos y piano*, Lituus, 2010, compact disc.

¹⁰² The National Homage to Guillermina Bravo took place on February 18, 2011, at Mexico City's Palacio de Bellas Artes.

¹⁰³ Mario Lavista, program note for *Divertimento para una coreografía imaginaria*, included in the liner notes for *Cello Alterno*.

macrocosmic structures and his prepared piano pieces in general, Mario was very fond of adopting blocklike structures that allowed him to interchange them and/or present them backwards, as if in a reflection from a mirror. The notion of mirroring, as we will shortly see, became a shared vision between composer and choreographer.

Claudia's conceptual inspiration for her homage to Bravo came from the poem "Everness," by Jorge Luis Borges. She took the lines "*Y todo es una parte del diverso / cristal de esa memoria, el universo*" (And everything is part of that diverse / crystalline memory, the universe) to envision a choreography centered in memory.¹⁰⁴ To Claudia, Bravo represented "the living memory of dance in Mexico because she had lived it all. She had lived the beginning of the dance; she was our great altar of memory."¹⁰⁵ The inspiration from Borges and her decision to include his poetry as an epigraph to her choreography is proof of the many convergences between father and daughter. Claudia titled her choreography, *Memoria ciega* (Blind Memory), a title that symbolically represents the spirals of memory carried out by Bravo's dance trajectory. Moreover, Claudia's "blind memory"—what I understand as the unconscious memory built up in her body—pays tribute to the wisdom of her maternal grandmother Cristina Vargas—who passed away when Claudia was fifteen—and that of her paternal grandmother, María Luisa "Chata" Camacho, who is still alive at the time of this writing. Hence, she dedicated the piece to her *abuelas*.¹⁰⁶ Throughout the project, Claudia's creative process was highly collaborative, as she worked in conjunction with the members of her dance company, Delfos, as well as with scenographer Eloise Kazan and video designer Renato González.¹⁰⁷ Taking Borges as a point of departure, Claudia centered *Memoria ciega* in notions of reflections and echoes in dialogue with each other, "as if they were sending information back and forth. That is what gradually constitutes the narrative of the piece."¹⁰⁸

Memoria ciega emerges from darkness and into subtle deep blue reflections over some sort of frame, a central crystal door or a portal through which the dancers cross. One dancer approaches the portal and with his fingers draws a curved line on the spine of a second dancer. This gesture marks the beginning of the music. Guided by an invisible thread, the dancers' movements are curved and their gestures hint at infinite spirals. The motif of spirals and circles is also present in the costume design. The force that propels the dancers' movements has at times the invisible shape of a spiral

¹⁰⁴ Jorge Luis Borges, "Everness," trans. Richard Wilbur, in *Twentieth-Century Latin American Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology*, ed. Stephen Tapscott (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996), 149.

¹⁰⁵ C. Lavista, discussion, September 28, 2020. [Guillermina Bravo era la gran memoria viva de la danza en México porque lo había vivido todo. Había vivido el principio de la danza, y ella era nuestro gran altar de memoria.]

¹⁰⁶ In an interview for the newspaper *La Jornada*, Claudia Lavista clarified that she regarded Guillermina Bravo as a grandmother, since her main dance professor, Federico Castro, studied under her. See Flores, "Homenaje nacional a Guillermina Bravo."

¹⁰⁷ The dancers with whom Claudia collaborated and who participated in *Memoria ciega* are Karla Núñez, Aura Patrón, Surasí Lavalle, Omar Carrum, Agustín Martínez, Johnny Millán, and Daniel Marín.

¹⁰⁸ C. Lavista, discussion, September 28, 2020. [La pieza está llena de reflejos, de ecos, no solo reflejos que se reflejan uno al otro, sino como que dialogan, como que van mandando una información y eso va construyendo la narrativa de la obra.]



Figure 5.4 Delfos Danza Contemporánea, *Memoria ciega*, 2011. Photo by Andrea López. Courtesy of Claudia Lavista.

thread, and at other times, it takes the shape of a crystal ball that makes them turn and shift in circles. As if retelling the passing of time in an oneiric atmosphere, the dancers interact with each other, gesturing and responding to one another. Duets, trios, solos, and full seven-member ensemble phrases are interspersed within the eleven-minute choreography. The light is always dim, always subtle, and blue reflections illuminate the various portals at the back of the stage. When all seven dancers are lying on the floor, moving in a parallel and angular fashion, the piece is driven to its conclusion. One by one, all the dancers disappear behind the crystal portals while the last dancer turns his back to the audience and crosses them. All we see are the reflections of the dancers' bodies projected in the portals, but they, too, disintegrate to luminous dust (see Figure 5.4).

Mario revealed that what he liked the most about *Memoria ciega* were the dream-like, mysterious atmosphere that Claudia created and the balance she achieved through the alternation of duets, trios, and full ensemble sections.¹⁰⁹ Claudia maintained that Mario's music invited her to daydream and to translate sonic symbols into movement. Both dancer and composer adhere to a symbolist aesthetic of suggestion, of dreams and memories that are like spirals, and both think of their own artistic mediums—choreography and composition—as intrinsically connected to poetry and silence.

¹⁰⁹ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, via Zoom, March 9, 2021.

To celebrate the twentieth anniversary of Delfos Danza Contemporánea, the dance company Claudia co-founded and co-directs with Víctor Ruiz, she organized a program titled *Cuaderno de viaje* (Travel Log) in 2011. Its title serves as a metaphor of her company's journey up to that point, and also—and most importantly—as homage to her father, who dedicated his 1989 viola piece *Cuaderno de viaje* to her. This program comprised seven choreographies designed by Claudia between 1994 and 2011, all set to music by her father. Four of the seven pieces were to be performed live by musicians who had championed Mario's music, including Tambuco Percussion Ensemble, cellist Bozena Slawinska, flutist Alejandro Escuer, and oboist Carmen Thierry.

Claudia's selection of pieces from her father's vast repertoire reflects a depth of knowledge of Mario's career. On the one hand, she chose some of the most intimate, yet virtuosic, pieces her father wrote for solo instruments such as *Lamento*, *Marsias*, and *Madrigal*, in close collaboration with performers, and on the other hand, some of his most rhythmic-driven chamber pieces, such as *Danza isorrítmica* and *Suite en cinco partes*. And at the center of her *Cuaderno de viaje* is *Divertimento a una bruja*, the precise composition her father intended to accompany her choreography. Claudia's selection summarizes her father's compositional trajectory, as it includes widely performed emblematic pieces known both at home and abroad. (Here I am thinking of *Marsias*, *Reflejos de la noche*, and *Lamento*, three pieces that were also included in Mario's very first monographic CD recording, which was also titled *Cuaderno de viaje*.)

The title Claudia gives to her program, "Travel Log," not only metaphorically represents Delfos's trajectory and her father's compositional career but also commemorates the intimacy of their relationship by alluding to a memory of traveling together. In 1988, Mario took the then nineteen-year-old Claudia on an extended trip to Italy. They rented a car and visited several museums and galleries across the country, where Claudia saw for the first time the artworks that her father had been talking about all her life. Importantly, as she expressed it: "I believe that my artistic formation was solidified in that trip."¹¹⁰ It was also in Italy, while visiting double bassist Stefano Scodanibbio in Pollenza, that Mario met violist Maurizio Barbetti, for whom he wrote *Cuaderno de viaje* (1989), which (as previously mentioned) he dedicated to his daughter.

Years later, this memory of traveling together was to be the point of departure for an online event where both father and daughter conducted a public conversation centered on *Cuaderno de viaje*. In May 2020, in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic, Mario organized his first fully online program for El Colegio Nacional. Sitting next to each other in an intimate setting—the piano room of his home—father and daughter shared with the public moments of their personal and creative relationship and broadcasted excerpts of Delfos's videorecording, *Cuaderno de viaje*. During a vulnerable and difficult time worldwide, the public was invited into Mario Lavista's private

¹¹⁰ C. Lavista, discussion, September 28, 2020. [Yo siento que mi formación acabó ahí de estructurarse.]

space. The glimpse I gathered of their family life shed light on my own understanding of their artistic confluences, which are rooted in intimacy and freedom.

A Cosmopolitan Ritual: Music for the Gallery

In the 2010s, Lavista adopted alternative ways of creating intersections between sound and image when writing music to be performed during art installations. Instead of elaborating fully written scores, he envisioned guided sessions of collective improvisation. While early in his career Lavista's creative activities involved the use of graphic notation, collective improvisation, and certain levels of indeterminacy, from 1979 onward he went back to writing very detailed and carefully notated music.¹¹¹ Although in his chamber and solo pieces he collaborated closely with performers, the resulting score was presented as a finished and autonomous product of his authorship. However, in 2011, Lavista unexpectedly returned to incorporating a certain degree of indeterminacy and collective improvisation in the music he wrote to accompany art exhibitions.

When I first learned about Lavista's plans for what was to become *Música para un árbol* (2011), for soprano, recorder, violoncello, and wine crystal glasses, I was shocked because this was the first time in over thirty years that he was going to write an open-form piece that allowed performers a degree of freedom similar to some of his works from the early 1970s.¹¹² Was this renewed interest in indeterminacy the result of Lavista reminiscing about "his roots," as musicologist Luisa Vilar-Payá ventured, or was it, perhaps, a reimagining of an alternative form of modernity that would provide room for collective subjectivity?¹¹³ The sonic projects Lavista envisioned for art installations show a reconfiguration of modernist localities by repositioning the composer *as* performer and the work as the result of a collective soundspace. An investigation of the performance context—these pieces premiered at elite art galleries in Mexico City—illuminates how Lavista invited a selected audience (that of the city's upper middle class) to experience a degree of artistic freedom rooted in a cosmopolitan imaginary. The outcome was an alternative way of experiencing music as a modernist ritual in the space of the art gallery.

¹¹¹ While in our conversations over the years Lavista often mentioned his fondness for improvisation, when I first asked him (in 2006) about his activities with the collective improvisation group Quanta, he seemed somewhat reluctant to elaborate on the topic; he tended to simply dismiss these improvisations as juvenile exercises. At the time, it was clear to me that he wanted to distance himself from the aesthetics of indeterminacy, chance, and open forms.

¹¹² For more information about the context surrounding *Música para un árbol*, see Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, "Escuchar la pintura, pintar la música: Intertextualidad musical y pictórica en la música de Mario Lavista," *Pauta: Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical* 139–140 (2016): 85–105.

¹¹³ In this regard, Luisa Vilar-Payá says: "*Música para un árbol* se estrenó en la inauguración de la exposición *De ser árbol* y presenta elementos de aleatoriedad que parecieran referirse a la música creada por el mismo Lavista en los años 70, como si el compositor mirara sus propias raíces." See Luisa Vilar-Payá, liner notes for *Mario Lavista: Música para un árbol*, Secretaría de Cultura, INBA, Colegio Nacional, 2016, compact disc.

On a warm afternoon in May 2012, I arrived at the Centro Cultural Estación Indianilla, a former train station that had now been converted into an upscale art gallery in Mexico City. That night was the opening of *Kailash*, a multimedia installation by Mexican visual artist Ricardo Mazal (b. 1950), and I was there not only as spectator but also as part of the music ensemble that was to participate in a collective improvisation guided by Lavista, which was planned specifically for this occasion. My role was a minor one: I was there to play one of four tuned wine crystal glasses that would sustain a chord throughout the improvisation. The rest of the ensemble included Lavista at the prepared piano, oboist Carmen Thierry, and the four members of Tambuco Percussion Ensemble (see Figure 5.5). In that historical space, surrounded by Mazal's large-scale paintings and in the company of some of the most accomplished musicians of Mexico, I anticipated that night would be *special*.

More than simply a *unique* musical performance or an eventful art installation opening, what happened that night could be better described as a multisensorial experience. All attendees were participating in a kind of ritual in which the musicians' sonic tapestry invited us to experience Mazal's visual work with all our senses. This invitation was consistent with Mazal's work, inspired by the sacred rituals that take place at Mount Kailash, which many believers consider the center of the universe. In my own role as a musician and a scholar, I was there to inquire into the intended intersection between visual art and music and its possible manifestations. How would



Figure 5.5 *Kailash* rehearsal at Centro Cultural Estación Indianilla, 2012. From left to right: Ricardo Gallardo, Ana R. Alonso-Minutti (behind), Mario Lavista, Raúl Tudón, Carmen Thierry, unknown videographer, Alfredo Bringas, and Miguel González. Courtesy of Ricardo Mazal.

Lavista construct sound that interacts with Mazal's multimedia installation? How would the ensemble respond to the visual stimulation of Mazal's paintings that surrounded them? Could Mazal's abstract transformation of representational subjects illuminate aspects of the collective improvisation? Could I find sonic resonances between the sonic product of the collective improvisation and Mazal's treatment of color in his impressive large-scale canvas exhibited in the gallery? An attempt to provide partial answers to those initial questions led me first to inquire into Mazal's own trajectory and his reasons for embarking on a collaboration with Lavista for this particular installation.

In 2004, Mazal began a trilogy of large-scale bodies of work centered on the cycle of life and death, rituals, and burial practices from three different cultures. *Kailash*, the third and last series of the trilogy, was inspired by a journey to Mt. Kailash, where Mazal and his wife, Fabiola González, engaged in a sacred Tibetan pilgrimage to circumambulate the mountain as an act to regenerate and purify the soul.¹¹⁴ Conceptually, what unifies Mazal's trilogy is a deep reflection on the intersections between life and death; the physical and the spiritual; the visible and the invisible; stasis and transformation. Mazal's approach to abstraction as a path to representing life experiences and spiritual beliefs is intrinsically linked with the sonic dimension of his artistic work, that is, to the music that accompanies his creative process. When he is painting, Mazal is interested in exploring the connections between his visual art and the world of sounds. Mazal's musical preferences are contemplative and mystical, with enormous strength and yet intimate peace. He seems to prefer music that has a connection with the sacred, with ritual, and with transcendence.¹¹⁵

What became the installation titled *Kailash* began as a response to Mazal's experience after his summer 2009 trip to Mt. Kailash, which Hindus and Buddhists believe to be the ultimate destination of souls and the center of the universe. Mazal and his wife performed a *kora*, a 32-mile circumambulation of the mountain at a minimum altitude of 18,000 feet above sea level. Their journey involved witnessing devotees undertaking complete prostrations with every single step, priests performing "sky burials" (rites in which the corpse is placed on a mountaintop), and pilgrims hanging their prayer flags while chanting. During their four-day pilgrimage, Mazal took hundreds of photos and videos that became the point of departure for his artwork. Once back at his studio, he worked with the photographs using a complex digital process and transformed them into images for his large-scale paintings. In a way, this digital transformation parallels what pilgrims believe to happen to them when they complete a *kora*. Emulating his own experience during the peregrination, Mazal wanted *Kailash*

¹¹⁴ Ricardo Mazal and Fabiola González took a trip to Tibet during the summer (June–July) of 2009. Their pilgrimage was documented by Jon Carver in his text, "KORA: Mount Kailash," included in Mazal's exhibition catalogue. See Ricardo Mazal, Jon Carver, and Henry Shukman, eds., *Ricardo Mazal KORA*, 17–19 (New York: Sundaram Tagore Gallery, 2010), exhibition catalog.

¹¹⁵ Mazal mentions that, out of other living composers, he wanted to ask Lavista to collaborate with him for *Kailash* because he felt a deep affinity with Lavista's contemplative religious music. Ricardo Mazal, in discussion with the author, Santa Fe, NM, October 20, 2020.

to “instill an experience” of spirituality, devotion, faith, and ritual in the viewer. In his installation, photography, video, painting, music, and architecture come together “as an integral part of the experience.”¹¹⁶

While preexisting music had been a guide during Mazal’s creative process throughout his career, when envisioning *Kailash* as a multisensorial journey, he wanted newly composed music to be an integral part of it. Therefore, he commissioned Lavista to compose music for the project. Mazal was not just commissioning any composer; Lavista and Mazal had been friends for quite some time and had a mutual admiration for each other’s work. To Mazal, the point of convergence between them was spirituality and religiosity. “I know that each of us goes about doing our work perhaps without thinking about spirituality, but it manifests itself, as it is very important for each of us. . . . I believe that to be one of the factors that unified our work.”¹¹⁷

In a virtual roundtable with Mazal, Tambuco, Lavista, and myself (released on Facebook during the fall of 2020), I asked Lavista what had prompted him to accept Mazal’s request and why he had decided to use collective improvisation. He responded three main factors had aided his decision. First, he felt a profound affinity with Mazal’s emphasis on spirituality and ritual. Second, he saw the project as an opportunity to continue his ongoing exploration of the intersections between music and painting. And lastly, he felt particularly excited to engage in collective improvisation by performing prepared piano—a sonority that he was very fond of. In this project, Lavista remarked, “my pictorial, religious, and improvisatory passions merged.”¹¹⁸

After accepting Mazal’s commission and strongly encouraged by percussionist Ricardo Gallardo, Lavista formed a group for collective improvisation.¹¹⁹ The group consisted of the four members of Tambuco—Gallardo, Alfredo Bringas, Raúl Tudón, and Miguel González—and oboist Carmen Thierry. Taking a closer look at the choice of instrumentation for *Kailash*—prepared piano, oboe, and percussion—what predominates is a variety of metallic sounds, as the four percussionists play an assortment of mostly metallic instruments. Gallardo explains that this selection was purposefully meant to portray coldness: “we decided to use metallic percussion because the color and texture of metallic percussion allude to cold sonic realms . . . cold

¹¹⁶ Ricardo Mazal, “Ricardo Mazal Kailash,” YouTube video, 5:37, October 27, 2014, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tisx5dzRv1Y>, accessed June 23, 2023.

¹¹⁷ Ricardo Mazal, in Tambuco Percussion Ensemble, “Tambuco y su Discografía. Charla #9: KAILASH,” streamed live on September 14, 2020, Facebook Watch video, 1:12:20, <https://www.facebook.com/watch/?v=646055612976509>, accessed June 23, 2023. [Sé que cada uno de nosotros hacemos nuestro trabajo quizá sin pensar en la espiritualidad, pero se manifiesta. Es algo que es muy importante para nosotros. . . . Creo que es uno de los factores que unió nuestras obras.]

¹¹⁸ Mario Lavista, in “Tambuco y su Discografía. Charla #9: KAILASH.” [. . . se juntaron mis pasiones pictóricas, religiosas, e improvisativas.]

¹¹⁹ Ricardo Gallardo had been encouraging Lavista to return to improvisation and was looking for an opportunity to invite him for a collective session with Tambuco. Ricardo Gallardo, Facebook direct message to author, August 4, 2020.

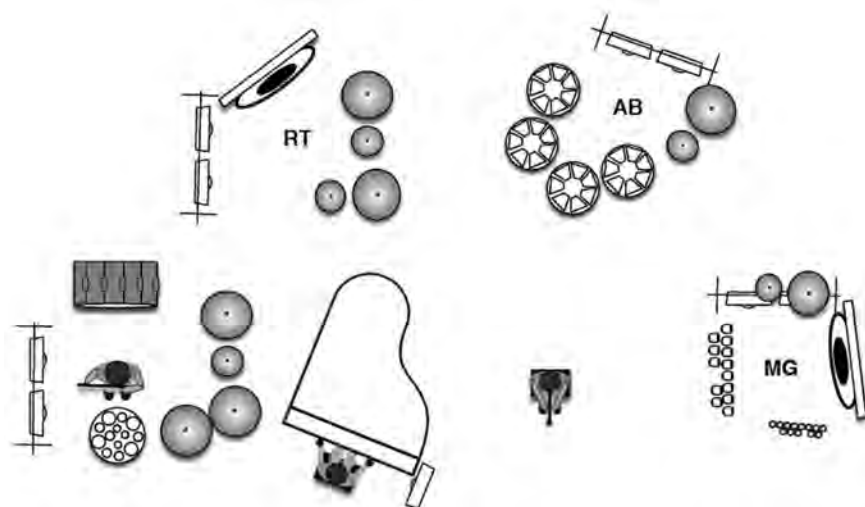


Figure 5.6 Diagram of *Kailash* ensemble. Designed by Ricardo Gallardo. Used by permission.

like Mount Kailash, a stone mountain covered with snow.”¹²⁰ Their large metallic percussion orchestra included gongs, cymbals, temple bells, tam-tams, cow bells, jingles, crotales, Glockenspiel, and steelpans, to which Gallardo added a bass drum—the only membrane instrument—and a bansuri, a bamboo side-blown flute used in the Hindustani classical music tradition (see Figure 5.6). The bass drum is played just four times to identify sections, and the bansuri flute—played by Gallardo—mostly echoes the oboe lines. This instrumental choice might create in the listener an imaginary association with sounds from Tibet, since traditional Tibetan instruments used in religious music include bamboo flutes, cymbals, bells, oboe-like instruments, and drums.

Lavista’s point of departure for envisioning what would be a kind of sonic map for the project was Mazal’s account of his visit to Mt. Kailash as well as the paintings he had already completed for the installation. On a piece of staff paper, the composer outlined a “harmonic sequence” built on a series of perfect fifths linked by tritones (see Figure 5.7). This functioned as a basic sonic trajectory for the ensemble. In Lavista’s words, “What fascinated me was the way in which Mazal merged what seemed to be abstract alongside the colorful prayer flags he found on the mountain. The abstract and the figurative are presented simultaneously [on the canvas].”¹²¹ To mirror the

¹²⁰ Ricardo Gallardo, in “Tambuco y su Discografía. Charla #9: KAILASH.” [... decidimos utilizar percusión metálica porque el color y la textura de la percusión metálica te lleva generalmente a ámbitos sonoros fríos, no cálidos; fríos, igualito que el Monte Kailash, una montaña de piedra con nieve.]

¹²¹ Mario Lavista, email message to author, August 27, 2018. [Me fascinó la manera en que conjuntaba lo aparentemente abstracto con las banderas que ondean alrededor del monte: lo abstracto y lo figurativo presentados simultáneamente.]

Figure 5.7 Mario Lavista's sonic map for *Kailash*. Photo by Ricardo Mazal. Used by permission.

simultaneity of “the abstract” and “the representational” in Mazal’s paintings, Lavista chose to quote musical themes (“the figurative”) alongside nonsymmetrical rhythms (“the abstract”). He connected each of the four main chords of his sonic map to specific pieces for prepared piano: Cage’s *A Room* and *Music for Marcel Duchamp*, and his own piece *A Cage for Sirius*.

Lavista is very fond of the timbre capabilities of the prepared piano, and his decision to include this instrument in the ensemble for *Kailash* might also have been an intentional way to connect with John Cage’s philosophy. Cage, who is often credited with “inventing” the instrument, was immersed in the study of Asian philosophy when he began writing extensively for prepared piano, and some critics assert that the sonorities of Cage’s prepared piano evoke the bells and gong sounds of the Balinese gamelan.¹²² The sonic possibilities of the prepared piano have also contributed to the Western imagination of an “oriental” sound (see Chapter 3). In this sense, it is not hard to imagine that, by using an instrument that symbolizes the oriental Other, Lavista was trying to create a soundscape that the listener could think of as “Tibetan.”¹²³

¹²² At the time, Cage was taking lessons with Gita Sarabhai, who introduced him to Indian music and philosophy.

¹²³ The sonic association of the prepared piano with Indonesian gamelan is still very prevalent today. When addressing the commonalities between prepared piano and metallic percussion, Gallardo explains

To Lavista, the improvisatory narrative of the music alluded to the journey of the pilgrims around Mt. Kailash.¹²⁴ Moreover, his choice of working collectively with others when he envisioned *Kailash* mirrored the communal aspect of Mazal's journey around the mountain as best reflected in his *Prayer Flags* series. Referring to Mazal's prayer flags, artist and curator Jon Carver argues that "these spontaneous outdoor installations represent the highest aspirations and achievements of human spirituality. They are deeply collaborative, as each pilgrim ties his or her own prayers to the elaborate cumulative construct, and they represent the presence of human faith in an otherwise barren landscape."¹²⁵ For Lavista, these colorful prayer flags are evoked in the dynamic combination of colors produced by the unique combination of oboe, prepared piano, and percussion.¹²⁶

Apart from the instrumentation, the shape of the overall collective improvisation creates a sensation of a musical circumambulation or circular time, which parallels the *kora*, or circumambulation of Mt. Kailash. In order to give direction to the collective improvisation, Lavista and Gallardo decided to outline certain sections according to particular combinations of instruments: the improvisation starts with all performers improvising (*Tutti*), followed by a second section where diverse metallic jingles are incorporated into the collective. The third section showcases the prepared piano and oboe and is followed by a fourth section for solo percussion. Finally, the improvisation concludes with the sonority of the full ensemble (*Tutti*). The five sections of the collective improvisation are punctuated by the sound of a concert bass drum, one of the few nonmetal percussion instruments used.¹²⁷ This overall form bestows a sense of having a circular form, and the incessant repetition of rhythmic motifs throughout also gives the music a sense of stasis (see Figure 5.8). To Lavista, this circular form mirrored the mystical concept of circular time present in religious music across the world.¹²⁸

Lavista asked Thierry to base her improvisation on fragments and chords from *Marsias*, his 1982 piece for oboe and crystal glasses. Lavista's choice of the oboe as part of the ensemble and his request that Thierry include fragments from his piece *Marsias* provide noteworthy intertextual connections. As discussed in Chapter 4, *Marsias*, based on the Greek myth of the satyr as narrated by Spanish writer Luis Cernuda, is a piece in which Lavista assigns musical symbolism to elements of the story. The oboe represents the satyr, while the crystal glasses symbolize the world of Apollo, and Marsyas's struggle is represented by the oboe's multiphonics. The oboe's

that it functions as "una especie de gamelán espacial" (a kind of spatial gamelan). Gallardo, in "Tambuco y su Discografía. Charla #9: KAILASH."

¹²⁴ Mario Lavista, email message to author, August 27, 2018.

¹²⁵ Jon Carver, "Prayer Flags," in *KORA: Ricardo Mazal*, ed. Ricardo Mazal, Jon Carver, and Henry Shukman (New York: Sundaram Tagore Gallery, 2010), 68. Emphasis added.

¹²⁶ Mario Lavista, email message to author, August 27, 2018.

¹²⁷ Ricardo Gallardo, email message to author, May 26, 2016.

¹²⁸ Mario Lavista, "Mario Lavista musicaliza 'el transfondo místico' de la pintura de Ricardo Mazal," interview by Merry MacMasters, *La Jornada*, October 27, 2012, <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2012/10/27/cultura/a04n1cul>, accessed July 23, 2023.

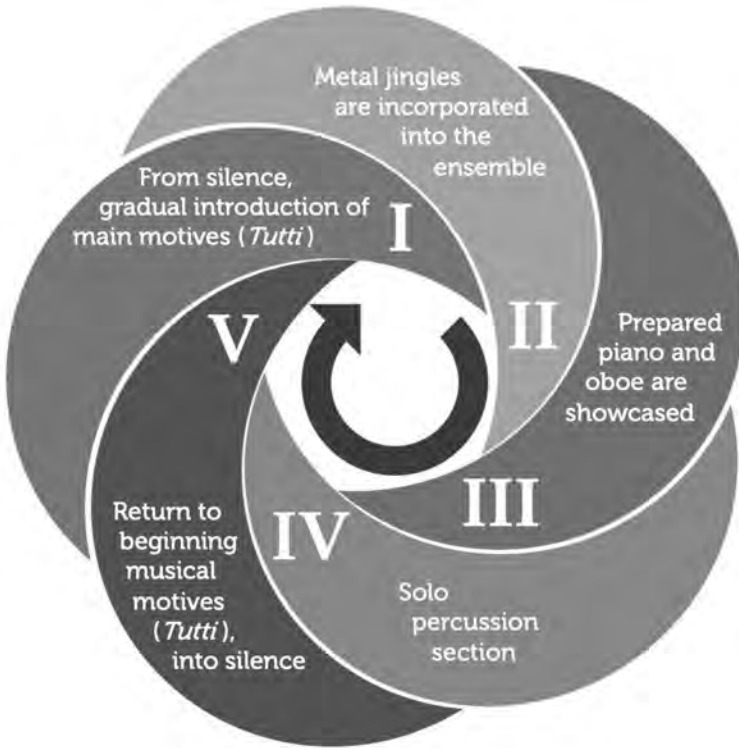


Figure 5.8 Diagram of structural design of collective improvisation, *Kailash*. Designed by Eduardo García.

failed attempts to sustain polyphony symbolize Marsyas's frustration at his inability to attain the perfection of Apollo's musicianship, as symbolized by the perfect intervals of the glasses. In Lavista's interpretation, the story of Marsyas parallels that of the artist who, when attempting perfection, is doomed to fail.¹²⁹ It is only through struggle that the artist achieves transformation and regeneration.

The presence of *Marsyas* in the sonic palette of *Kailash* may be seen as an opportunity to reflect on the importance of the element of struggle for both composer and artist, one in which the act of creation implies coming to face with one's own mortality while undergoing a transformative and regenerating process.¹³⁰ This, in turn, parallels the ultimate symbolism and purpose behind undertaking a *kora* (pilgrimage) around Mt. Kailash. The full-length body prostrations that devotees perform during the circumambulation of the mountain are linked to the "hardships

¹²⁹ Mario Lavista, "Diálogo entre música y poesía," in *Memoria de El Colegio Nacional 2002*, ed. Ramón Xirau (Mexico City: El Colegio Nacional, 2002), 89.

¹³⁰ Lavista's choice to use crystal wine glasses in *Kailash* could also be read as an attempt to associate that sonority with the spiritual, the divine, and the otherworldly.

and suffering that must be faced on the ritual journey,” and at the same time are meant to effect gradual embodied transformation.¹³¹ The climactic moment of the collective improvisation (which happens in its fourth section and into its fifth), illustrates the intertextual interpretation I offered in the previous paragraph. To my ear, the intensity of the cymbals symbolically marks the moment of uttermost struggle during the pilgrimage. This climax is followed by a sudden turning point, in absolute silence, after which the oboe reemerges, transformed. In my interpretation, the gestures by the solo oboe illustrate how the soul of the pilgrim—the artist—has been renewed.¹³²

While Thierry plays sounds that establish an intertextual connection with a myth about soul transformation, struggle, and the cycle of life and death, Lavista’s improvisation at the prepared piano introduces yet another layer of intertextual meaning by inserting quotes from two pieces by Cage: *A Room*, and *Music for Marcel Duchamp*. Cage designed the short piece *A Room* (1943) with a constant, flowing pulse and constructed it in a complex rhythmic scheme.¹³³ In *Music for Marcel Duchamp* (1947), a piece also based on a very strict rhythmic structure, Cage evoked timbres and harmonies from Asian music.¹³⁴ The use of muted tones and the lack of resonance give the piece a static and meditative character. This intertextual connection allows us to draw yet another parallel with Mazal’s series *Cajas*.¹³⁵ Quoting from a music composition constructed on a complex rhythmic structure that functions as a “container” in which to place pitches mirrors the visual “quote” that Mazal uses in *Cajas*: wooden quadrangles of powdered pigments from the open-air markets that he encountered on his way to Mt. Kailash. As Jon Carver points out, the wooden containers hold the colors that are used to dye the prayer flags throughout the *kora*. “Like Mount Kailash,” Carver says, “they participate in a quadrant, and a repetition of four-sided forms. This is then connected to Mazal’s working process as he moves from photography, through drawing, into digital images, and then to painting

¹³¹ Toni Huber, *The Cult of Pure Crystal Mountain: Popular Pilgrimage and Visionary Landscape in Southeast Tibet* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 17.

¹³² Tambuco, Thierry, and Lavista performed two consecutive sessions of collective improvisation at the National School of Music’s Sala Xochipilli on May 18, 2012, which were recorded by Juan Switalski. Each session became a version of *Kailash*. The first version had a duration of 32:27 minutes, and the second, 20:21. Both versions were included as a single uninterrupted track on the recording *Kailash: Obra colectiva de Mario Lavista, Tambuco y Carmen Thierry inspirada en la obra de Ricardo Mazal*, Tempus, 2012, compact disc.

¹³³ In his improvisation, Lavista also inserts quotes from his piece *A Cage for Sirius*, for piano and percussion, in which he pays homage to John Cage. See Hernán Gabriel Vázquez, “Discurso e interpretación en *A Cage for Sirius* de Mario Lavista,” *Huellas* 7 (2010): 75–86.

¹³⁴ Note that Lavista chose to quote a piece that was also the product of a collaboration between composer and visual artist (in this case, Cage and Duchamp). *Music for Marcel Duchamp* was written for the portion of Duchamp’s sequence in Hans Richter’s surrealist film *Dreams That Money Can Buy*. James Pritchett notes that “[t]he film consists of many unrelated segments designed by different artists, linked together by a somewhat absurd common story line. Cage’s music was for the sequence prepared by Marcel Duchamp—hence the title of the composition.” James Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 26.

¹³⁵ To preview Mazal’s *Cajas*, which are part of the 2010–2011 series *Kora*, see Ricardo Mazal, “KORA,” <http://www.ricardomazal.com/series-work/kora-series/>, accessed June 23, 2023.

over and over, like a pilgrim repeating a circular journey, or an alchemist circling a square.”¹³⁶

“The purpose of music,” Cage once said, “is to sober and quiet the mind, thus making it susceptible to divine influences.”¹³⁷ I propose to understand Lavista’s improvisation for prepared piano, which is based on incessant repetitive rhythmic motifs from Cage’s pieces, as an attempt to provide a soundscape that illustrates the incessant prostrations of Buddhist pilgrims around Mt. Kailash. These prostrations are accompanied by repeated mantras and prayers and are performed over twenty-eight days on about a 32-mile route, resulting in “the complete purification of their souls.”¹³⁸ Just as the repeated prepared piano motifs might illustrate the prostrations of the pilgrims circumambulating Mt. Kailash, there are visual elements in Mazal’s paintings that also reflect the act of pilgrimage. In Mazal’s canvas, one can perceive the landscape-like references, such as the dynamic use of black and white, which represents snow on the mountain. The gestural strokes in his paintings also invoke movement—perhaps that of the wind at Mt. Kailash, blowing at 18,000 feet above sea level. Musically, the roar of high winds is illustrated by the brushing of the cymbals and other metallic instruments used. In this way, music and painting pose an invitation for us to reflect on the act of pilgrimage as an attempt to get closer to the divine.

“For me, Ricardo Mazal’s paintings are not paintings to be seen, but to be inhabited. You feel like you are inside of them.” This is how Gallardo characterized the experience of improvising for *Kailash*.¹³⁹ He associates the imposing dimensions of the mountain with the large-scale size of Mazal’s paintings. For Lavista, Mazal’s paintings contain a sonic dimension from which everything breathes.¹⁴⁰ Therefore, he wanted their collective improvisation to reflect spatiality and breathing. This was made possible through the playful exploratory attitude shared by all the performers involved. When addressing specific aspects of what guided their improvisation, the members of Tambuco stated that *Kailash* was an opportunity for them to engage in a *creación–interpretación simultánea*, a process of simultaneous composition–performance with a composer they appreciated and admired.¹⁴¹ As Raúl Tudon remarked, after the long hiatus Lavista had taken from collective improvisation, *Kailash* was an opportunity to remind the public that the composer had been a pioneer of collective improvisation in Mexico during the 1970s. While broadly guided by Lavista’s sonic map, the members of Tambuco regard *Kailash* as a journey of discovery that allowed them to take unforeseen turns. In Tudon’s words, “At times, a note, or the speed of a passage takes

¹³⁶ Jon Carver, “Cajas,” in Mazal, Carver, and Shukman, *Ricardo Mazal KORA*, 42.

¹³⁷ John Cage, “An Autobiographical Statement,” *Southwest Review* 76, no. 1 (1991): 59.

¹³⁸ Ricardo Mazal, “Kailash,” <http://www.ricardomazal.com/series-work/kailash/>, accessed June 26, 2023.

¹³⁹ Gallardo, in “Tambuco y su Discografía. Charla #9: KAILASH.” [Para mí, la pintura de Ricardo es una pintura que no se ve, sino que se habita. Sientes que estás adentro.]

¹⁴⁰ Lavista, in “Tambuco y su Discografía. Charla #9: KAILASH.”

¹⁴¹ “Creación–interpretación simultánea” is a concept Lavista often addressed, in both writing and interviews.

you to places you didn't even know you would get to."¹⁴² Discovering those places collectively was very stimulating. Alfredo Bringas equates the process with that of a game (*juego*), "a game where each of us play at the same time without causing a problem. We could all speak at the same time through our instruments and enjoy what the others were doing."¹⁴³ For this multiplicity of voices to be coherent, Miguel González adds, "you have to keep your ear wide open to what's happening around you to be able to decide what to play and what not to play. It's an exercise of discipline."¹⁴⁴

During the opening night of Mazal's installation *Kailash* at the Estación Indianilla, journalists, art aficionados, curators, and the general public enjoyed cocktails and hors d'oeuvres while the performers engaged in collective improvisation. From my vantage point, on stage playing a tuned crystal glass, I could see the public's interactions and responses to *Kailash*.¹⁴⁵ Some members of the audience were chitchatting, others were enjoying their drinks, while still others walked through the exhibition space, engrossed in Mazal's work. Many did not seem to be paying attention to the intricacies of the improvisatory process, but all were involved in its sonic cloud. Lavista's music was not *just* listened to but also experienced as part of a multisensorial social event. In this experience, the audience was inadvertently immersed in a communal ritual. While this ritual was supposed to direct spectators to pondering life, death, and life transformation, what I saw for the most part was members of the elite *performing* classiness and sophistication. Writing music *as* a ritual to be experienced in galleries therefore presented yet another variant of Lavista's cosmopolitan imaginary. Here, the composer felt free to engage in a collective sonic atmosphere in which the journey of improvisation allowed the ensemble to play the game of finding echoes in Mazal's colors. By stepping away from modernist tenets such as an emphasis on originality, innovation, authorship, and the totality of the work of art, in his works for art exhibitions (*Música para un árbol* and *Kailash*), Lavista allowed himself to create an alternative cosmopolitan modernity in which human subjectivities are at the core of the musical experience.

Transformative journeys, resounding echoes, reflective mirrors, and spiraling memories: all these metaphors point to the intertextuality present in Lavista's music. The multiple intertexts I have addressed in this chapter provide not only a route for appreciating the composer's music as if it were something *external*, but also a way to assess my own *internal* listening process, my own relationship with the music. An intertextual analysis allows us to consider how birds, ballerinas, and other creatures can coexist in what Claudia Lavista calls the *habitat* that is her father's music. This is a

¹⁴² Raúl Tudón, in "Tambuco y su Discografía. Charla #9: KAILASH." [A veces, una nota, o la velocidad de un pasaje te lleva a lugares donde no sabías que ibas a llegar.]

¹⁴³ Alfredo Bringas, in "Tambuco y su Discografía. Charla #9: KAILASH." [La improvisación [es] un juego donde todos hablamos al mismo tiempo y no es problema. En esa improvisación que hicimos pudimos hablar todos al mismo tiempo en nuestro instrumento y disfrutar de lo que hacían los demás.]

¹⁴⁴ Miguel González, in "Tambuco y su Discografía. Charla #9: KAILASH." [Tienes que tener los oídos abiertos a lo que está sucediendo a tu alrededor para decidir qué toco y qué no toco.]

¹⁴⁵ Note that, for this live performance, Lavista incorporated a set of four wine crystal glasses. These, however, were not included in the recording.

place of fantastic fiction where, echoing Borges, fictional characters interact with the *real* ones: readers and listeners like you and me. In this Lavista-esque habitat, birds, ballerinas, and other creatures, like us, discover that we are a mirror of each other. We hear our own voices through the echoes of another. Mapping intertextual connections is a creative exercise of fiction for listeners in search of identity. And like the birds discovering that they are a mirror of the Simurg, we discover that our own identity is reflected in the sounds we listen. Perhaps, as Lavista once said in relation to the literary associations of *Ficciones*, “We can consider this search for identity as a search for the divine.”¹⁴⁶ And it is precisely Lavista’s quest for identity that guided him to imagine more mirrors and reflections, more echoes and memories that ultimately, as we will discuss in the following chapter, pointed him toward the divine.

¹⁴⁶ Mario Lavista, in “Lavista, Mario—Ficciones,” Orquesta Filarmónica de la Ciudad de México, August 10, 2019, <http://ofcm.cultura.cdmx.gob.mx/node/505>, accessed June 23, 2023. [Esa búsqueda de la identidad podemos considerarla como una búsqueda de la divinidad.]

6

Mirrors of a Superior Order

Tradition, Memory, and Spirituality

I believe, along with Álvaro Mutis, that music is the highest form of prayer, and therefore, it is impossible for me not to be a believer.

—Mario Lavista¹

Although he did not consider himself a Catholic, or a practitioner of any religion for that matter, starting in the early 1980s Mario Lavista dedicated a significant portion of his creative endeavors to composing pieces that were connected in some way to the Judeo-Christian religion. In a 2014 lecture at the Universidad de Guadalajara, Lavista revealed that his interest in sacred music had always been present and stated: “I am a believer, perhaps more for aesthetic reasons, but I am very distant from the Catholic Church.”² In spite of his self-declared distance from the Church and his severe criticism of the musical practices of contemporary Catholic services, most of the genres on which Lavista relied for writing religious music come from the Roman Catholic tradition (see Figure 6.1). Not only did the composer set to music sacred texts from Christianity, but he also wrote numerous essays and lectures on the topic of religious music. Sacred texts, images, and subjects continued to inspire Lavista to produce some of his most exquisite, contemplative, powerful, and grandiose works.³

A closer look at the composer’s words on the subject reveals that his interest in religious music was largely the result of his affinity for medieval musical thought and a predilection for the compositional techniques of late medieval and Renaissance Western European music. Lavista admired the Boethian categorization of music as one of the disciplines of the *quadrivium*—along with arithmetic, geometry, and

¹ Mario Lavista, “La devoción sonora, Mario Lavista,” interview by Roberto García Bonilla, in Roberto García Bonilla, *Visiones sonoras: Entrevistas con compositores, solistas y directores* (Mexico City: Siglo Veintiuno Editores, Conaculta, 2001), 107. García Bonilla’s interview with Lavista was also published in *La Jornada Semanal* on September 29, 1996. [Creo, junto con Álvaro Mutis, que la música es la más alta forma de oración, y por ello es imposible para mí no ser creyente.]

² Mario Lavista, quoted in Pablo Mares, “Inaugura el compositor Mario Lavista las actividades de la Cátedra Julio Cortázar,” Centro Universitario de Ciencias Sociales y Humanidades, Universidad de Guadalajara, February 28, 2014, <http://www.cucsh.udg.mx/noticia/inaugura-el-compositor-mario-lavista-las-actividades-de-la-catedra-julio-cortazar>, accessed July 15, 2022. [Soy creyente, quizá más por razones estéticas, pero estoy muy alejado de la Iglesia católica.]

³ A complete list of Lavista’s compositions that present a connection with religious subjects can be found on the companion website for this book.



Figure 6.1 Mario Lavista delivering the Cátedra Latinoamericana “Julio Cortázar” at the Paraninfo Enrique Díaz de León, Universidad de Guadalajara, February 27, 2014. Keynote title, “Música religiosa.” Photo by María Adriana González García. Used by courtesy of Coordinación General de Comunicación Social, Universidad de Guadalajara.

astronomy. More specifically, he often emphasized the medieval concept of *musica speculativa*, which, in contrast to *musica prattica*, regards music not as an activity to be practiced but as an object of contemplation.⁴ As Lavista recounted in an essay he wrote on Guido de Arezzo and Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz, “[*musica speculativa*] aspired ... to reflect a superior order and to extend a spiritual bridge between men and the divinity.” He explained that the realm of *musica speculativa* belonged to the *musicus*-composer or *musicus*-philosopher, not to the *cantor*-performer. In this view, music is conceived as a discipline formed not only of sounds, but also of numerical relationships. Following this, music aspires to perfection; it is a mirror of a superior order that reflects the order of the universe.⁵

In this chapter, I show how writing music based on religious subjects allowed Lavista to build bridges that connected him with other beings, human and spiritual.

⁴ Jan Herlinger describes *musica speculativa* as “a contemplation that serves the moral edification of the soul as well as the intellectual edification of the mind.” See Jan Herlinger, “Music Theory of the Fourteenth and Early Fifteenth Centuries,” in *Music as Concept and Practice in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. Reinhard Strohm and Bonnie J. Blackburn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 293.

⁵ Mario Lavista, “Guido y Sor Juana,” *Letras Libres*, January 31, 2006, <http://www.letraslibres.com/revista/artes-y-medios/guido-y-sor-juana>, accessed June 23, 2023. [... aspiraba, ni más ni menos, a reflejar un orden superior y a tender un puente espiritual entre el hombre y la divinidad.]

He linked his own compositional practices to a lineage of creators and thinkers of the Western European tradition. This lineage allowed him to navigate both the local and the global in a cosmopolitan imaginary. As he stated in an interview in 2018, “I have always thought religious music has the potential to be some sort of bridge, or communicating vessel, between this world and the beyond—I don’t know what to call it—between us and the divinity, God, or Gods, no matter what we call it, but evidently, there is that other world, the world of the dead. And I am convinced that the dead are able to hear music.”⁶ By writing memorial pieces, for example, Lavista fostered a dialogue with the divine and also opened spaces of emotional and spiritual communion with the friends to whom he dedicated these works.

Lavista’s initial forays into religious genres came by way of writing music to honor three important figures from his formative years, all of them composers: Raúl Lavista, Rodolfo Halffter, and Gerhart Muench. Each of these individuals encouraged Lavista to study specific composers of the Western European tradition they believed were important. Therefore, we can view the pieces Lavista wrote in their honor as attempts to extend bridges between himself, his mentors, and the composers his mentors admired. Choosing models for music composition is a task that composers undertake whether consciously or unconsciously. In the process of selecting models, composers identify themselves with particular lineages. This identification is usually accompanied by a vision of their place within that lineage, which becomes a frame of reference from which we can approach their work. Moreover, their assimilation of certain musical and ideological aspects from past figures gives composers a kind of musical memory. This memory is then reflected in their compositions directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously; it could be recognizable in the form of a musical quote, a predilection for certain chords or sonorities, or it could only be known after verbal declarations. As Joseph Straus asserted, “composers incorporate traditional elements . . . as a way to grapple with their musical heritage. They invoke the past in order to reinterpret it.”⁷

From the beginning of his career, Lavista was very straightforward about his conscious selection of musical ancestors—his *abuelos*, as he called them. In the preface to *Mario Lavista: Textos en torno a la música*, Luis Jaime Cortez wrote: “[Lavista] learns from Mozart and Machaut, from Wagner and Monteverdi. They are his grandparents and he wants to remember them.”⁸ Even though ideas about tradition and memory

⁶ Mario Lavista, in TV UNAM, “Programa 7. OFUNAM. Tercera Temporada 2018,” YouTube video, 1:33:23, December 13, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SREOCq2l7c0>, accessed June 23, 2023. [Yo siempre he pensado que la música religiosa tiene la capacidad de convertirse en una especie de puente o de vaso comunicante entre este mundo y el más allá—no sé cómo llamarle—entre nosotros y la divinidad, dios o los dioses, no importa cómo lo llamemos, pero evidentemente hay ese otro mundo, el mundo de los muertos. Y estoy convencido que los muertos tienen la capacidad de oír música.]

⁷ Joseph N. Straus, *Remaking the Past: Musical Modernism and the Influence of the Tonal Tradition* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990), 1.

⁸ Luis Jaime Cortez, preface to *Mario Lavista: Textos en torno a la música*, ed. Luis Jaime Cortez (Mexico City: Conaculta, INBA, Cenidim, 1988), 14. [Aprende de Mozart y de Machaut, de Wagner y de Monteverdi. Son sus abuelos y quiere recordarlos.]

permeate Lavista's repertoire in general, by examining his religious music we can trace the features of what would become staples in his musical idiom. This idiom is characterized by an incorporation of procedures present in medieval and Renaissance music; for example, a symbolic use of certain intervals and musical constructions such as isorhythms and canonic permutations, and an exploration of unconventional ways of envisioning sound, incorporating so-called extended techniques.

Lavista explored the mystical symbolism present in Western European music traditions in which certain intervals, chords, numerical relations (reflected mainly in rhythmic structures), or particular ranges have specific meaning and may be recognized by the listener familiar with them. This musical symbolism is most evident in his *Missa Brevis ad Consolationis Dominam Nostram* (or *Missa Brevis*), composed in 1994–1995. Lavista's *Missa* was a central work in his oeuvre, representing the zenith of his interest for religious genres. All the religious works he wrote after the *Missa* draw material from it, and it continued to be a source of inspiration in Lavista's spiritual—and musical—journey until the end of his life.

***In memoriam*: Music for the Dwellers of Heaven**

Lavista wrote his first memorial piece, *Lamento* (a la muerte de Raúl Lavista) in 1981, shortly after the death of his uncle, Mexican composer Raúl Lavista (1913–1980), a deeply distressing event that he described as a type of orphanhood.⁹ The title of the piece alludes to the tradition of writing laments for deceased colleagues that began “in the fourteenth century when Franciscus Andrieu wrote a lament for Guillaume de Machaut's death.”¹⁰ Notably, the text of Andrieu's ballad was written by Eustache Deschamps, who was Machaut's nephew and pupil—a situation parallel to that of Mario and his uncle Raúl (see Figure 6.2).

Known primarily for his work in the film industry, Raúl produced an outstanding catalogue of approximately 350 film scores in a forty-five-year period. He was a significant figure in Mario's life during his formative years, as he encouraged Mario to pursue music as a professional career, in contrast to the reluctant attitude of other family members. During his adolescence, Mario had complete access to his uncle's record collection (approximately 8,000 recordings) and to his vast music library, which exposed him to a variety of music scores from the Western European tradition.¹¹

Raúl's music collection must indeed have been quite impressive, as it caught the attention of musicologist Esperanza Pulido, who in 1948 wrote: “For a long time [Raúl] sacrificed comfort and material wellbeing to acquire everything that could contribute to his artistic development. He spent a large portion of what he earned from the

⁹ Throughout the rest of this section, I use first names to avoid confusion.

¹⁰ Lavista, in García Bonilla, *Visiones sonoras*, 107. [... que se inicia en el siglo XIV cuando Franciscus Andrieu escribe el primer *Lamento a la muerte de Guillaume de Machaut*.]

¹¹ Consuelo Carredano, “Lavista Peimbert, Raúl,” in *Diccionario de la música española e hispanoamericana*, dir. Emilio Casares Rodicio, vol. 6 (Madrid: Sociedad General de Autores y Editores, 2000), 803.



Figure 6.2 Raúl Lavista, 1972. Courtesy of Paulina Lavista.

movies on records. All of the most important recordings of a required work went into his music library to be studied from different angles.”¹² To Mario, Raúl’s house was *un paraíso musical*—a musical paradise, a space where he could dedicate entire weekends to the study of music. Through his uncle, Mario also became acquainted with other inspiring figures. For instance, he fondly recalls that it was in his uncle’s house that he met pianist György Sándor, a student of Béla Bartók. Bartók became a common

¹² Esperanza Pulido, “Raúl Lavista y la difusión musical por radio,” *Pauta: Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical* 59–60 (1996): 62. Text originally written in 1948. [Por largo tiempo sacrificó comodidades y bienestar material para adquirir todo lo que contribuyera a su desarrollo artístico. Una gran parte de lo que ganaba en las películas lo gastaba en discos. Todas las más importantes grabaciones de una obra requerida entraban a su discoteca para ser estudiadas desde diversos ángulos.]

topic of conversation and debate, punctuated by prolonged arguments about tonality versus atonality, a topic on which Mario and Raúl did not see eye to eye.¹³

Raúl had a significant role in the Mexican musical and artistic scenes from the 1940s until just before his death. He studied composition with José Rolón and Rodolfo Halffter and orchestral conducting with Silvestre Revueltas. He directed a prominent radio program, *La Hora Chrysler*, that broadcast orchestra concerts he coordinated and conducted. According to Pulido, these programs featured distinguished soloists from Mexico and abroad.¹⁴ Raúl received important awards for his film music, including several Arieles and the Kork Award (Dublin).¹⁵ Unfortunately, his prominence as a composer of film music, pianist, conductor, and advocate for Mexican symphonic music has not attracted much scholarly attention.¹⁶ The majority of Raúl's music remained unpublished during his lifetime, and Mario remembered sadly that some years after Raúl's death, his wife Helena cleaned his storage space and gave away thousands of manuscripts.¹⁷

Mario often spoke fondly of his indebtedness to Raúl for introducing him to Richard Wagner's operas. He recalled that he would get together with his uncle once a year to listen to the complete tetralogy of *Der Ring des Nibelungen*, reading the libretti beforehand.¹⁸ Wagner's music and philosophy were of seminal importance to Mario's musical education, and Wagner became one of his adopted "grandfathers." Through Raúl, Mario also deepened his knowledge and appreciation of Maurice Ravel and Claude Debussy.¹⁹ As mentioned in previous chapters, Lavista admired the elegance and subtleties of Debussy's music and shared an aesthetic affinity with early twentieth-century French symbolism. This affinity, so prevalent in Lavista's music, philosophy, and way of living, could be explained in part as a nostalgia he felt for the time he spent in France in the late 1960s. It can be also attributed to the overall Francophile attitude held by the Mexican middle and upper classes since the time of the *Porfiriato*.²⁰

Raúl's activities as a composer of film music also proved educational for Mario. He recalled that his uncle used to invite him to recording sessions with the orchestra. These sessions allowed him to observe how Raúl would work out the limitations or constraints set by film directors while conducting a large ensemble.²¹ Mario was able

¹³ While Raúl's music remained largely tonal, Mario would go on to adopt atonal music languages.

¹⁴ Pulido, "Raúl Lavista y la difusión musical," 62.

¹⁵ Carredano, "Lavista Peimbert, Raúl," 803.

¹⁶ To my knowledge, there is no monograph devoted solely to the study of Raúl's musical production. Although only tangentially, his work is included in Jacqueline Avila's book devoted to Mexican film music. See Jacqueline Avila, *Cinesonidos: Film Music and National Identity During Mexico's Época de Oro* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

¹⁷ Raúl Lavista's daughter, Paulina Lavista, a renowned photographer, has a vast number of photographs and documents relevant to her father in her collection. See Alida Piñón, "Raúl Lavista, el genio musical de cine mexicano," *El Universal*, October 30, 2013, <http://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/cultura/2013/raul-lavista-el-genio-musical-del-cine-mexicano-961762.html>, accessed June 23, 2023.

¹⁸ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, January 10, 2005.

¹⁹ Mario fondly recalled that he inherited Raúl's collection of some of Debussy's orchestral pieces, such as *La Mer* and the *Prelude to the Afternoon of a Faun*.

²⁰ Since Porfirio Díaz's (a Francophile) second presidential term (1884–1911), the Mexican upper class has shown a strong admiration for all things French: language, architecture, art, and culture in general.

²¹ Lavista, discussion, January 10, 2005.

to gather a better understanding of Raúl's style of orchestration—a field in which the older composer had achieved substantial experience—and Mario would later ask for his uncle's advice regarding his own orchestrations. Also, on several occasions, young Mario played the piano in Raúl's orchestral ensemble, which allowed him to put his keyboard skills to use as well as earn some money.

Their collaborative efforts reached a peak when they worked together on producing the music for Gabriel Retes's film *Flores de papel* (1978). Retes had asked for a soundtrack that included both acoustic and electronic components. Thus, it was arranged that Raúl would be in charge of the instrumental (acoustic) sections and Mario the electronic ones. Their joint efforts on this film score won them a prestigious award, *La Diosa de Plata*, given by the Asociación de Periodistas y Críticos de Cine Mexicano (Association of Mexican Film Journalists and Critics). Mario remembered that the most important lesson he learned from his uncle about writing film scores was the understanding that music should merge with the image rather than draw attention to itself.²²

Prior to collaborating with his uncle on *Flores de papel*, Mario had provided the music for *Judea: Semana Santa entre los coras* (1973), directed and produced by his close friend Nicolás Echevarría, former member of their improvisational group Quanta.²³ Mario composed the score for *Judea* using the synthesizer located at the National Music Conservatory. In contrast to the most common method for composing film music, in which the director gives the composer specific time slots and sequences to insert music, Mario would offer Echevarría fragments of music for a specific sequence, and Echevarría would expand or cut the scenes accordingly to fit the music. This approach was the main methodological difference between the way Mario and his uncle wrote music for film.

Loosing his uncle Raúl on October 19, 1980, deeply affected Mario. Through writing a piece in his memory, Mario was able to process his grief. In composing a work honoring both his father figure and his musical mentor, Mario metaphorically built a spiritual bridge between himself and his uncle. Choosing the bass flute for this memorial piece derived in part from an old Japanese legend which holds that the sound of the flute is the only sound the dead can hear. "As I believe any legend has some truth in it," Mario maintained, "I am convinced that this *Lamento* is heard by Raúl Lavista every time it is played."²⁴ He wrote this piece in close collaboration with flutist Marielena Arizpe, who was his partner at the time. As discussed in Chapter 4, Arizpe was a leading exponent of extended techniques for the flute and, arguably, was the only flutist in Mexico performing the bass flute in the 1970s and 1980s.²⁵ Therefore, *Lamento* is a sonic embodiment of a collaborative intimacy between the composer

²² Lavista, discussion, January 10, 2005. In his own words: "La mejor música de cine es la que no se oye en primer plano, sino la que simplemente ayuda a la imagen."

²³ For more about the collaboration between Lavista and Echevarría, see Chapter 2.

²⁴ Mario Lavista, quoted in Juan Arturo Brennan, liner notes for *Mario Lavista: Cuaderno de viaje*, Siglo XX, vol. XII, Conaculta, INBA, Cenedim, UNAM, 1994, compact disc.

²⁵ For more about the collaboration between Arizpe and Lavista, see Chapter 4.

and his partner, and a bridge of spiritual communion between the composer and his uncle. At the beginning of the score Lavista inserts the following epigraph:

*No me atrevo a elevar la voz en este silencio
porque temo turbar a los moradores del cielo.*

I do not dare to raise my voice in this silence,
for I fear to disturb the dwellers of heaven.

These lines come from the second half of a poem by Li Po (Tang Dynasty), translated to Spanish by Marcela de Juan. The first half, not included in the score, reads as follows:

*Esta noche duermo en el templo situado en la cumbre del Monte Sagrado.
Desde aquí podría coger las estrellas con la mano.*²⁶

Tonight I sleep in the temple situated at the top of the Sacred Mountain.
From here I could grasp the stars with my hand.²⁷

Narrating in the first person, almost touching the sky, the poet hesitates to raise his voice. This poetic moment connects two realms. One realm is bound by earthly time and space; it is night, and the poet is located in a high, sacred place. The other is a heavenly realm, where the stars extend and the dwellers are at peace. The poet reaches out into the sky surrounded by silence. While words may disturb the dwellers, a melody may establish the desired connection with those in heaven. This is the sentiment the poem communicated to the piece's intended performer, Arizpe. To her, the epigraph situates the performer in the "correct" poetic space from which to perform. As she describes it:

From stillness and crystalline silence emerge the first sweet and mournful notes, forming a sequence of sonorous reflections that unfold like a rainbow. *Lamento* can't be defined with words. It is an intimate song born from the depths of the heart—it is pure beauty. In that motionless, crystalline space, I don't dare raise my voice, for I fear perturbing the dwellers of the sky.²⁸

²⁶ Marcela de Juan, trans., *Segunda antología de la poesía china* (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1962), 79.

²⁷ Shigeyoshi Obata's English translation reads as follows: "To-night I stay at the Summit Temple. Here I could pluck the stars with my hand, I dare not speak aloud in the silence, For fear of disturbing the dwellers of heaven." Shigeyoshi Obata, trans., *The Works of Li Po, the Chinese Poet* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1992), 43.

²⁸ Marielena Arizpe, WhatsApp message to author, December 17, 2020. Translation by Marielena Arizpe. [Desde la quietud y el silencio cristalino emergen las primeras notas enlutadas y dulces, formando una secuencia de reflejos sonoros que se despliegan sutilmente como un arcoíris. El *Lamento* es un canto íntimo, que nace desde el punto más profundo del corazón y no puede ser definido con palabras. Lo que emerge de ese silencio cristalino, es belleza pura. Es un canto en el que uno no se atreve a elevar la voz, porque teme turbar a los moradores del cielo.]

One could read the poem's two realms or realities as reflected in the two main sections of the piece, each of which could be subdivided into two large phrases. The score's opening indication reads: *Lento sostenuto, con un intimissimo sentimento* (slow, sustained, and with the most intimate feeling). The very first note of the piece, placed in the instrument's low register is meant to be played very softly, and its short *fermata* perhaps alludes to the poet's hesitation. Will the voice be raised? The first two musical gestures introduce the core elements Lavista uses throughout the first section: the predominance of the perfect fourth and minor third; the isolation of musical gestures, framed by silences; the lyrical quality of the melodic lines drawing waves through the low-middle register of the bass flute, and the intimate nature of the melody, which never reaches a loud volume (see Example 6.1). Lavista uses the interval of the perfect fifth in significant moments: as a pivot between the first and second sections—where the melodic movement is abandoned and supplanted by polyphonic sonorities in a high register that conveys an ethereal atmosphere—and at the very end of the piece. The perfect fifth works as a symbol of the spiritual—that which is not bound by earthly rules or defects; that which is perfect.

As Example 6.1 shows, the opening melodic idea presents two consecutive ascending perfect fourths (C–F–Bb), followed by a descending major second (Bb–Ab) that is succeeded by an augmented second (B). This gesture, therefore, outlines a melodic line spanning a major seventh (C–B). It is then followed by a silence that encapsulates the feeling of incompleteness or expectation. From the very first sound, in the low register of the bass flute, Lavista invites the flutist to ponder by assigning a *fermata* to the first note. This first, inconclusive gesture is answered by another melodic idea that emphasizes the interval of the minor third in the inner and outer pairs of notes ending on Eb, which brings the register down again, outlining another minor third with the opening note C.

In the second phrase (the second system in the score), the interval of the perfect fifth is introduced for the first time (C#–G#). It is the first polyphonic sound to appear in the piece (the upper pitch is sung by the performer), and its introduction comes as a surprise. There is an expansion of the register that concludes with a sustained D, which, after a pause for breath, is taken up again an octave lower, and concludes the phrase and the section with a fifth added (which is sung). Therefore, the interval of the perfect fifth functions both as the concluding element of the first section and also as the starting point of the second. This pivot perfect fifth (D–A) is presented in

Example 6.1 Lavista, *Lamento*, opening. D.R. © Mario Lavista Camacho and Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, A.C., 2nd ed., 1999. Used by permission.

Lento sostenuto, con un intimissimo sentimento
[♩ = 46-50]

corta

Flauta baja

pp poco p morendo

Example 6.2 Lavista, *Lamento*, second section (third stave). D.R. © Mario Lavista Camacho and Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, A.C., 2nd ed., 1999. Used by permission.

the highest register encountered thus far in the piece. Lavista inverts this interval (A–D), which brings to light the importance of the perfect fourth in another dimension, emphasizing it not only horizontally but also vertically.

The second section presents a change of texture, with the melodic movement now abandoned and supplanted by polyphonic sonorities in a high register. Lavista retains the prominent intervals of the first section: the minor third, the perfect fourth (and its inversion, the perfect fifth). These sonorities convey an ethereal atmosphere; they bring to mind the second realm illustrated in the epigraph—the heavenly/spiritual realm. Appropriately, the indication in the score reads *come una plegaria* (as a supplication), and the gesture is to be played softly, *dolcissimo, dolente* (slow, painful). Through a sung prayer, the poet raises his pain to heaven (see Example 6.2).

We are unable to ascertain whether the change of texture and register in the second section signifies the voice of the one who is reaching toward the sky or the voice of the spirit of the dead speaking from above, but the terrestrial realm seems to have been abandoned. As flutist and scholar Alejandro Escuer points out in his detailed analysis of the piece, the relationship between the two sections could be thought of as a solo passage and a “choral” response:

Thus, the second part is a response to the first, just as a choir would respond to a recitative; just as the sky dwellers would respond to the earth dwellers who are lamenting. That is why the second part is in a much higher register, the sound is transcending its regular thickness, weight and concreteness, transforming its own natural body into lighter textures in search of a magical reality that remains lifted almost by ethereal spirituality.²⁹

The perfect fifth—a symbol of the spiritual—that concludes *Lamento* foreshadows the perfect state of the loved one who traveled from this terrestrial realm to the

²⁹ Alejandro Sánchez Escuer, “The Interpretation of Selected Extended Techniques in Flute Solo Compositions by Mexican Composers: An Analysis and Performance Recommendations” (PhD diss., New York University, 1995), 60.

Example 6.3 Lavista, *Lamento*, ending. D.R. © Mario Lavista Camacho and Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, A.C., 2nd ed., 1999. Used by permission.

spiritual one. Tellingly, the score's indication for the last sonority of both the first and the last sections is *perdendosi* (dying away), which in this sense does not mean a lack of sound or a sudden death, but rather brings to mind the image of the dweller of heaven whose spirit becomes lost as he returns to the sky. In the second section, Lavista explores the high register. Nevertheless, when the piece comes to a conclusion, the register drops and returns to the lowest note of the bass flute (C), this time forming a perfect interval with a G above, sung by the performer. This return to the same note that began the piece could very well symbolize an emphasis on the earthly reality. But the fact that it ends in a polyphonic sonority tells us that once the earthly creature's voice was raised, and once it has touched and inhabited the sky dweller's realm, it cannot be the same again (see Example 6.3). As Daniel Catán explained, "if the previous hesitation was in daring to raise the voice, now it is in contemplating the descent, the vertigo. Solitary, without support, the notes of the flute seem to float in the emptiness left by the chords while disappearing. The music therefore shrinks rapidly until it returns to the initial range."³⁰

Lamento inaugurated a series of religious pieces in Lavista's compositional trajectory. That his engagement with religious music emerged via a desire to honor a family member and foster collaboration with his partner is very closely aligned with his understanding of music as a bridge—or a space for communion—with the people closest to him. As Lavista once stated, "The music's main role . . . is inspired by the idea that it leads and guides the separation of the soul from the body. . . . When the body dies, the soul must find a path to leave it behind, and the music helps in the search for such a path."³¹

³⁰ Daniel Catán, "La flauta mágica de Mario Lavista," in Cortez, *Mario Lavista*, 60. Text originally written in 1985. [Pero si el titubeo anterior fue ante el atrevimiento de elevar la voz, ahora es ante la contemplación del descenso, ante el vértigo. Solitarias, sin sostén, las notas de la flauta parecen flotar en el vacío que los acordes han dejado al desaparecer. La música se contrae entonces rápidamente hasta regresar al registro inicial.]

³¹ Mario Lavista, "Words and Music Lecture," Latin American Music Center, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, June 28, 1994, quoted in Sánchez Escuer, "The Interpretation of Selected Extended Techniques," 40.



Figure 6.3 *Rodolfo Halffter en el Homenaje a Rodolfo Halffter en sus 80 años.* Fundación Juan March, Madrid, Spain, February 13, 1980. Courtesy of Fundación Juan March.

Lavista's second memorial piece was written in memory of the Spanish-born, naturalized Mexican composer, Rodolfo Halffter (1900–1987). Halffter came to Mexico in May 1939 as a voluntary exile after the Spanish Civil War and immediately incorporated himself into the concert music scene as a composer, editor, and educator (see Figure 6.3). As mentioned in Chapter 2, Halffter was Lavista's most influential instructor during his time as a student at the Conservatory, where he taught for thirty years. He is widely credited for having introduced the so-called Second Viennese School and the twelve-tone method to his Mexican students, and it was Halffter who exposed Lavista to the analytic study of Arnold Schoenberg's music. Beyond his pedagogical role, Halffter was an active music critic. As one of the co-founders of the group *Nuestra Música*, he created and edited the music journal *Nuestra Música*. Furthermore, he directed what would be the first and only publishing house devoted to Mexican concert music, Ediciones Mexicanas de Música.³² Halffter's multifaceted career and his commitment not only to composing but also

³² For more about Rodolfo Halffter's professional career, see Xochiquetzal Ruiz Ortiz, *Rodolfo Halffter: Antología, introducción y catálogos* (Mexico City: Conaculta, INBA, Cenedim, 1990); José Antonio Alcaraz, *Rodolfo Halffter con garbo: Catálogo de Rodolfo Halffter* (Mexico City: INBA, Cenedim, 2005); and Consuelo Carredano, *Ediciones Mexicanas de Música: Historia y catálogo* (Mexico City: Conaculta, INBA, Cenedim, 1994).

to promoting, publishing, writing, and teaching music, made him a strong role model for Lavista. After his death, Lavista wrote *Responsorio* (in memoriam Rodolfo Halffter), in 1988—a chamber piece for bassoon, two bass drums, and four tubular bells—in his honor.

In *Responsorio*, Lavista creates an imaginary space of local and international overtones. “In this piece,” he explained, “I tried to aurally create the image of a memory I keep of funerals in remote towns of Mexico, in which a small music band leads the coffin to the cemetery. The bass drum, or any other drum, marks the funeral rhythm, and church bells toll as the procession passes by, to summon contemplation, and to ward off evil spirits.”³³ Although inspired by what could appear to be a local ritual (a funeral procession somewhere in rural Mexico), Lavista’s recollection is more imaginary than real, as he was never able to remember the origin of that memory.

Whether this memory was of actual events or a product of Lavista’s imagination, writing this piece allowed him to build a bridge between a sense of the local (or national) and the international (or cosmopolitan). He explained that, during *those funereal ceremonies*, music has the function of helping the human soul to separate from the body.³⁴ When that process occurs, “music creates a kind of sonorous geography for the soul to follow and separate itself from the body.”³⁵ Lavista informs us that the structure of *Responsorio* “is conceived in such a way that it gives the impression of a funeral procession that gradually approaches, passes in front of the listener, and moves away until it disappears.”³⁶ Reimagining a Mexican ritual without a defined local context allowed Lavista to bring this image to an international level. As he explained, including music as an integral part of funeral rituals is a global tradition.

In *Lamento* Lavista built a bridge that allowed him to connect with the earthly and the heavenly, himself and his uncle, and himself and his partner, and in *Responsorio* we find a similar three-fold bridge. This memorial piece not only functions as a space of communion between Lavista and his teacher and mentor Rodolfo Halffter, but also represents his connection with bassoonist Wendy Holdaway (b. 1955), who commissioned the piece and collaborated with him on its creation, and to whom it is dedicated. Since settling in Mexico in 1982, U.S.-American bassoonist Holdaway has been a relevant figure in the contemporary music scene of the country as both soloist and

³³ Lavista, in García Bonilla, *Visiones sonoras*, 107. [En esta obra traté de crear auditivamente la imagen del recuerdo que guardo de algunos funerales en remotos pueblos de México, en los que una pequeña banda de música guía al ataúd hacia el camposanto. El bombo o algún otro tambor marca el ritmo fúnebre, y las campanas de las iglesias doblan al paso de la procesión para convocar a la contemplación y alejar a los malos espíritus.]

³⁴ Lavista, in García Bonilla, *Visiones sonoras*, 107.

³⁵ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, July 30, 2009. [La música crea una especie de geografía sonora para que el alma siga y se separe del cuerpo.]

³⁶ Lavista, in García Bonilla, *Visiones sonoras*, 107. [La estructura de la obra está concebida de tal manera que dé la impresión de una procesión fúnebre que se acerca poco a poco, pasa frente al oyente y se aleja hasta perderse.]

chamber musician.³⁷ The collaboration between Holdaway and Lavista in the compositional process for *Responsorio* was characterized by an interest in mutual discovery and an exchange of ideas rooted in deep friendship.

Soon after her arrival in Mexico, Holdaway became one of Lavista's close friends. "We are family," she said. While she now considers herself the "queen of multiphonics," she recalls that the first time she worked with extended techniques was precisely during the creative process behind *Responsorio*, which comprised multiple sessions at either her house or Lavista's. For Holdaway, becoming comfortable with performing multiphonics in a piece that was also very demanding in terms of its range was an extremely challenging but rewarding task. Given their close friendship, the nature of their collaboration, and her own technical growth because of the extended techniques explored, Holdaway considers *Responsorio* to be hers.³⁸

The image of a funeral procession with a group of musicians leading the casket was foreign to Holdaway when she began working with Lavista. It only came to life when she witnessed a procession in the town of Santa María Tlahuitoltepec, Oaxaca. On that occasion, she saw how "the body of the deceased was carried on the door from his house, not a coffin, and was taken around his land, his school, to all places of his life until they reached the church for a Mass, and then was taken to the cemetery."³⁹ To think of *Responsorio* as the imaginary music that accompanies a person's soul when they die gives the piece a powerful mysticism. As Holdaway remarked, "this piece has something very special. It is magical." Indeed, she claims that certain performances of *Responsorio* have been accompanied by supernatural occurrences. On one occasion, when performing the piece at the Salón del H. Consejo General Universitario at the Universidad de Guanajuato—a space established as a chapel in 1556 that later functioned as a tomb for the remains of "illustrious dignitaries"—she and the ensemble's two percussionists saw movement in the curtains over windows that were more than 3 meters above the floor. People in attendance also reported that the walls of the venue—where the remains were buried—oscillated during the performance of the piece.⁴⁰

³⁷ About Holdaway, Lavista expressed: "Gracias a ella el fagot en México ha tenido no un renacimiento, sino un nacimiento. . . . Fue ella la que ha encargado obras, las ha tocado y las ha grabado." Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, via Zoom, December 7, 2020. As a way to honor Holdaway's professional career in Mexico, Lavista published a short essay about her. See Mario Lavista, "Wendy Holdaway y su fagot," in *Memoria de El Colegio Nacional 2009*, ed. Ramón Xirau (Mexico City: Colegio Nacional, 2009), 223–26. This text was first read during the presentation of Holdaway's recording, *De tus manos brotan pájaros: Música mexicana para fagot*.

³⁸ When referring to *Responsorio*, Holdaway says, "It is my baby." Wendy Holdaway, in discussion with the author, via Zoom, December 2, 2020.

³⁹ Holdaway, discussion. [Yo fui presente para uno en Tlahuitotepec, que llevan el cuerpo sobre la puerta de su casa y lo llevan a visitar a sus terrenos, su escuela, todo de su vida, se van a la iglesia, sobre la puerta de su casa, no es un ataúd, a la iglesia para hacer una misa y después al cementerio.]

⁴⁰ Holdaway, discussion. Holdaway claims that she and the two percussionists saw ghosts when they were rehearsing *Responsorio* at the Universidad de Guanajuato. It is interesting to note that the sense of supernatural mysticism Holdaway expresses about *Responsorio* has also been shared by others. For instance, when describing the sonic dimensions of the bassoon line, Todd Goranson insists that "[t]he resulting effect is hauntingly beautiful." Todd Goranson, "New Latin American Music for the Bassoon (1975–2006): An Annotated Bibliography of Selected Works" (DMA diss., West Virginia University, 2006), 46. In a recent video of her performance of *Responsorio*, Mexican bassoonist Rocío Yllescas portrays a

To Holdaway, the magical mysticism surrounding the piece is also reflected in its epigraph. As in *Lamento*, Lavista appends a poem by Li Po (translated by Marcela de Juan) at the top of the score for *Responsorio*:

*El que vive es un viajero en tránsito
el que muere es un hombre que torna a su morada.*

He who lives is a traveler in transit
he who dies is a man returning to his abode.⁴¹

For Holdaway, this epigraph is about “the Oriental idea of reincarnation” and the belief that music aids in the soul’s separation from the body.⁴² She reads the epigraph aloud before each performance and incorporates it in all program notes. To me, this epigraph, like the one included in *Lamento*, also reflects the existence of two realms: that of the living and that of the dead. This duality is reflected in the two contrasting sections of the piece. In the first section, marked *Lento, sereno* (slow, serene), there is no time signature. The bassoon’s lyrical line explores the middle-high range of the instrument, while the presence of the drums is only secondary. For the entire first section of the piece the tubular bells are silent. The bassoon’s opening melody begins with an ascending minor third (F#–A) and a gesture that revolves around A, which becomes the pitch center of the first phrase.⁴³ The descending notes of the first melodic line (C–B–A–G–F#) function as a motif that is present in several instances (complete or incomplete) throughout the piece (see Example 6.4).⁴⁴ The bassoon’s lyrical opening line, in terms of range and melodic contour, brings to mind the beginning of Igor Stravinsky’s *Rite of Spring*.

The second phrase (starting on page 2 of the score) emphasizes G as a central point, and the third phrase functions as a transition to the following section. After reaching F# at the end of page three, the trill in the bass drum (I) creates expectation and prepares the atmosphere for the contrasting multiphonic sonorities of the bassoon, which are then presented for the first time in the piece. The arrival on D at the end of page 4 in the bassoon line functions as a pivot sonority for the following section, and the tubular bell at the end of the bassoon line signals change—it sustains the pitch D with a *fermata*, and it marks the beginning of a new, metered section (see

narrative framed by the celebration of “Día de Muertos,” when it is believed that the souls of the dead awaken and return to the world of the living. See Rocío Yllescas, “Responsorio para fagot y percusiones de Mario Lavista,” YouTube video, 12:02, January 14, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_FaoOIFM4, accessed June 23, 2023.

⁴¹ De Juan, *Segunda antología de la poesía china*, 97.

⁴² Holdaway, discussion. [Para mí, [la pieza] es mucho más [acerca de] la idea oriental de reencarnación . . . hacen estos ritos, según ellos, para que el alma pueda separarse del cuerpo, pueda decir adiós y moverse.]

⁴³ As can be seen in Example 6.4, the pitch A could be identified as the pitch center of the phrase since it is emphasized through repetition; it also marks arrivals and departures of melodic gestures.

⁴⁴ Another iteration of this descending line starts with C#; hence, C#–B–A–G–F#.

Example 6.4 Lavista, *Responsorio*, opening. D.R. © Mario Lavista Camacho and Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, A.C., 2nd ed., 1994. Used by permission.

El que vive es un viajero en tránsito,
el que muere es un hombre que torna a su alrededor.

Lento, sereno $\text{♩} = 58-58$

Fagot

Bombo
2 Campanas tubulares (Re y Mi graves) Perc. I Bombo

Bombo
2 Campanas tubulares (Re y La y graves) Perc. II Bombo

Flg.

I

II

Mario Lavista

Example 6.5 Lavista, *Responsorio*, beginning of page 5. D.R. © Mario Lavista Camacho and Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, A.C., 1994. Used by permission.

(Ced.)

(6)

Da lontano $\text{♩} = 60$

(Sord.)

Flg.

Campana I

Bombo

Campana II

Bombo

Mario Lavista

Example 6.5). Lavista chose the same pitch, D, in both *Lamento* and *Responsorio* as a pivotal sonority that connects two contrasting sections. In both works, the D is first isolated and presented in different octaves while it serves as transition and marker for a shift in texture.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ This centrality of the pitch D allowed for optimal recording conditions when the piece was performed at UNAM's Sala Nezahualcōyotl, which according to Holdaway naturally reverberates in D. Among the various commercial recordings that include Holdaway's performance of *Responsorio* are *Mario Lavista: Cuaderno de viaje*, and *Mario Lavista: Stabat Mater y otras obras sacras*, Tempus, 2015, compact disc.

The second section introduces not only the new sonority of the tubular bells, but also the triple-meter time signature in which the bassoon abandons the lyrical quality of its melody and presents mainly multiphonic sonorities. This section incorporates several isorhythmic sequences and canonic passages between the bells and the bass drums. According to Lavista, the rhythmic patterns of the bells were taken from the *taleae* of sections from the Credo of Machaut's *Messe de Nostre Dame*.⁴⁶ He presents the *taleae* in augmentation by giving the notes longer values. This borrowing, therefore, is not easily recognizable when one is listening to the piece. While this section also presents a static atmosphere, the polyphonic sonorities in the bassoon simultaneously evoke tension and ambiguity. After a series of multiphonics, the bassoon line returns to the melodic lyricism of the first section, albeit now metered. This activity then ceases, bringing the piece to its conclusion.

While *Responsorio*'s premiere did not take place in a funereal context—it was first performed at the Museo Tamayo during the tenth iteration of the Foro Internacional de Música Nueva—the piece was performed thirty years later in a kind of street funeral procession that Lavista might have had in mind when he first envisioned it. This procession, however, did not take place in a remote town in Mexico, nor was it performed in memory of Halffter or any other human, for that matter. In 2018, largely thanks to the initiative of Ricardo Gallardo and the percussion ensemble Tambuco, *Responsorio* formed part of a procession to mourn the *vaquita marina* (*Phocoena sinus*), a species of porpoise endemic to the Gulf of California, Mexico, which is on the brink of extinction.⁴⁷ This pilgrimage, led by artist and conservationist Patricio Robles Gil, took place in the heart of Mexico City. A syncretic ritual that merged traditions from Indigenous and Judeo-Christian religions, the procession involved children, activists, artists, scientists, performers, and community organizers. Coincidentally, what connected the 1988 and 2018 performances of *Responsorio* was the location; while in 1988 the piece was performed *inside* the Museo Tamayo, in 2018 the piece began *outside* of the museum and traveled alongside the *peregrinos* until reaching the lobby of the Museo de Antropología.⁴⁸ During a procession in which a *vaquita*'s cranium was carried by hand, Tambuco and other musicians performed only the percussion part of the piece. They repeated the rhythmic patterns until the procession reached the Museo de Antropología where Holdaway and Tambuco then performed the piece in its entirety.

Performing *Responsorio* for an event meant to raise awareness about one of the most endangered marine mammals, the *vaquita*, opened up unexpected possibilities for the function of this piece. In a context that involved hundreds of people congregating to denounce the illegal fishing practices that have driven the mammal to

⁴⁶ The medieval terms *color* and *talea* (pl. *taleae*) designate melodic and rhythmic units, respectively. The modern term *isorhythm* is used when referring to the repetition of both color and talea in fourteenth- and early fifteenth-century compositions, especially motets.

⁴⁷ Ricardo Gallardo, in discussion with the author, via Zoom, August 7, 2020.

⁴⁸ For more about the *vaquita marina* procession, see Patricio Robles Gil, "Procession to Honor the Vaquita: A Ritual to Heal our Relationship with Nature," WILD Foundation, September 18, 2018, <https://wild.org/blog/honoring-the-vaquita/>, accessed June 23, 2023.

near-extinction, the cry of the bassoon could have been understood as an urgent plea for action. Ultimately, the organizer's main goal for this event was to make a global call to action to change consumerist patterns, to reduce the ecological damage, and to protect all species that humans have endangered.⁴⁹ This educational and ritualistic public demonstration reached its climax the moment Holdaway intoned the first pitch of *Responsorio* while standing next to the sculpture Robles Gil had created for the occasion.

Interestingly, Holdaway has always regarded *Responsorio* "an animalistic piece." She understands the bassoon's line as representing the howling of wolves, "those wolves that cry at two in the morning in the cold of night. To me, [*Responsorio*] is more animalistic or more about the Earth screaming than about a person's lament."⁵⁰ Perhaps it is this animalistic aspect (or the incredible wide range of sound effects called for in the score) that has made this piece a favorite among bassoonists. Its ritualistic aspect continues to inspire musicians to present the piece in imaginative, theatrical ways that instigate a sense of mystery in the audience. As San Francisco-based critic Jeff Dunn remarked after a performance of *Responsorio* by bassoonist Beverly McChesney, "I was beginning to feel more at a *séance* than a concert."⁵¹

Whether imaginary or real, particular performance spaces serve as points of departure for composers to sonically conceive a new composition. To this end, Lavista commented: "There's no doubt that composers imagine not only the sounds that make up a piece of music, but also the acoustic space that the piece requires for appropriate listening. It may be that . . . this space is utopian, but the physical and auditory image persists, and its presence is fundamental in the conception and construction of the musical work."⁵² The utopian performance space Lavista imagined for his next memorial piece, *Lacrymosa*, dedicated to the memory of Gerhart Muench, was a medieval Gothic church.

In one of the first conversations I had with Lavista, I asked him when his interest in medieval and Renaissance music had started. He responded:

I had a very good friend, Gerhart Muench, top-notch German composer and pianist who lived in Mexico. He was one of those musicians you meet very seldomly, with

⁴⁹ "Realizan procesión de concientización en honor a la vaquita marina," Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, Gobierno de México, February 17, 2018, <https://inah.gob.mx/en/boletines/6924-realizan-procesion-de-concientizacion-en-honor-a-la-vaquita-marina>, accessed July 15, 2022.

⁵⁰ Holdaway, discussion. [Para mí son gritos de lobo. Esos lobos que están gritando a las dos de la mañana en el frío en la noche. . . . Para mí es más animalística o más de la tierra gritando que un lamento de una persona.]

⁵¹ Jeff Dunn, "Overtones from Across the Border," *San Francisco Classical Voice*, January 8, 2008, <https://www.sfcv.org/reviews/overtones-across-border>, accessed June 23, 2023. This concert by Quinteto Latino was mostly devoted to Lavista's music.

⁵² Mario Lavista, "Música y arquitectura," *Memoria de El Colegio Nacional 2000*, ed. Ramón Xirau (Mexico City: Colegio Nacional, 2000), 146. [No hay duda de que los compositores no sólo imaginamos los sonidos que conforman una pieza de música, sino también el espacio acústico que la obra requiere para su correcta audición. Tal vez, en no pocas ocasiones, se trata de un espacio utópico, pero la imagen física y auditiva persiste, y su presencia es fundamental en la concepción y en la construcción de la obra musical.]

a profoundness of thought, with that tragic vision of German artists, a tragic life perspective. He was a very important person in my life, for my own vision of art and music. And, he taught classes in the Conservatory. In one of our conversations, he started talking about Machaut, who I only knew by name, as part of music history, but was not familiar with his music. I told him, “No, Gerardo, he [Machaut] is just another name.” And, very politely, he responded, “Then, you’re an idiot! You should know Machaut’s music deeply, because he is a fantastic musician.”⁵³

Followed by laughter, Lavista’s anecdote about his friendship with Muench was meant to answer my question about his interest in medieval music and thought. It was Muench, therefore, who challenged Lavista to study the music of fourteenth-century poet and composer Guillaume de Machaut. Specifically, Muench directed Lavista to Machaut’s *Messe de Nostre Dame* (ca. early 1360s), a piece that has gained a prominent place in historical narratives of Western European music as the first unified polyphonic setting of the Ordinary of the Mass attributable to a single composer. Some aspects of Lavista’s assimilation of this particular piece were present (though veiled) in *Responsorio*, and others would appear more evidently in future pieces.

Muench, who lived in Mexico from the 1950s until his death, became Lavista’s mentor and friend. Although Muench did not live in Mexico City but rather in the state of Michoacán, he would visit the capital frequently (see Figure 6.4). Lavista recalls that Muench would often stay at his house and that he would also visit Muench and his wife Vera in Tacámbaro. For years, they would write letters to each other and, following this tradition, they decided to co-write a piano piece by sending each other fragments in their letters. Appropriately, they titled the piece *Correspondencias* (1983).

Acting on Muench’s advice, Lavista devoted himself to studying Machaut’s music. Not only did he adopt some of Machaut’s compositional tools, such as isorhythm and canonic devices, but he also assimilated the Mass’s *cantus firmus* in a profound way, even alluding to it in the main motto of his own Mass. As I discuss shortly, this assimilation was unconscious, since Lavista was not using Machaut’s Mass as a model for his own. Yet, the striking similarity between Machaut’s motto and Lavista’s reflects the kind of memory that emerges out of a deep engagement with musical works.

Lacrymosa was not the first piece Lavista wrote in honor of Muench. He also wrote the solo piano piece *Simurg* for his German friend (see Chapter 5). However, it is in *Lacrymosa*, and not *Simurg*, where Lavista incorporates compositional procedures

⁵³ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, August 27, 2004. [Yo tuve un gran amigo, Gerhart Muench, compositor y pianista alemán de primer orden que vivió en México. Uno de esos músicos que rara vez te encuentras en la vida en cuanto a profundidad de pensamiento, [con] esa visión trágica que tienen los artistas alemanes, una visión trágica de la vida. Él fue una persona muy importante para mi vida, para mi visión del arte y de la música. Y él daba clase en el Conservatorio. En una conversación, él me empezó a hablar de Machaut, a quien yo conocía solamente como parte de la historia de la música, pero yo no conocía bien su música. Y le dije “No, Gerardo, para mí [Machaut] es un nombre más,” y él me dijo de manera muy educada: “pues eres un pendejo, porque deberías conocer profundamente a Machaut, porque es un músico fantástico.”]



Figure 6.4 Gerhart Muench, ca. 1973. Courtesy of Paulina Lavista.

of music from the Middle Ages to which Muench introduced him. When addressing some characteristics of *Lacrymosa* in an interview largely centered on religious music conducted (and later published) by Roberto García Bonilla, Lavista explained that

[*Lacrymosa*] is a religious piece that tries to recover certain stylistic characteristics, certain structural features of medieval polyphonic music. In this work, besides a preference for the interval of the fifth, considered at that time to be one of the perfect consonances, there is also a quite free application of some of the formal elements that ruled the *organum* and the *discantus* of the Notre Dame School, and the use of isorhythmic techniques of the French *Ars Nova*, based on melodic (*color*) and rhythmic (*talea*) patterns.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ Lavista, in García Bonilla, *Visiones sonoras*, 108. [Se trata de una pieza de carácter religioso que pretende recuperar ciertos rasgos estilísticos, ciertos rasgos estructurales de la música polifónica medieval. Hay en esta obra, además de una preferencia por el intervalo de quinta considerado en esa época como una

More than a compositional exercise, Lavista's incorporation of procedures from medieval and Renaissance music is connected to his own sense of tradition, memory, and spirituality.

In *Lacrymosa*, Lavista alludes not only to aspects from the medieval liturgy, but also to the sonic resonances of medieval Catholic churches. Attempting to bring the vibrating dimension of that ideal venue into a more realistic concert hall, Lavista isolates a small string orchestra "in such a way that we always have the illusion of listening to the resonance, the echo of whatever happens in the orchestra."⁵⁵ This second string orchestra (Orchestra B) with fourteen string players (violins, violas, cellos, and double basses) is placed behind the main string orchestra (Orchestra A) and the wind section, surrounded by the trombones on one side and the gongs on the other.⁵⁶ At the very back, he places the tubular bells and the drums. The role of Orchestra B is to sustain a harmonic tapestry that covers the low and high registers by using natural string harmonics, while the rest of the ensemble interweaves its own melodic and rhythmic material. The sonorities played by Orchestra B reflect the harmonic events of the rest of the ensemble. Overall, the harmonic rhythm of *Lacrymosa* is very slow, almost static. Unlike *Lamento*, the score does not include moments of complete silence, yet the piece reflects the introspective character of Lavista's previous memorial pieces. In this score for large ensemble, as in *Responsorio*, Lavista tries to provide a sacred context for a ritual to emerge.

Instead of using Chinese poetry as he did for the epigraphs of both *Lamento* and *Responsorio*, in the score for *Lacrymosa* Lavista quotes a verse from fifteenth-century Castilian poet Jorge Manrique (1440–1479) which, like *Lamento's* epigraph, is a reflection on life after death:

<i>Nuestras vidas son los ríos</i>	Our lives are the rivers
<i>que van a dar en la mar</i>	that flow out into the sea
<i>que es el morir.</i>	that is death.

These lines come from a series of couplets Manrique wrote known as the *Coplas de Jorge Manrique a la muerte de su padre*—a funeral eulogy dedicated to the memory of his father. As it happens, the poet wrote them toward the end of his own life, two years before he died at age thirty-nine. The fact that Lavista chose this as the epigraph for *Lacrymosa* reflects the paternal loss he felt when Muench died, as well as his very explicit predilection for the medieval. Coincidentally, Lavista was also thirty-nine years old when he wrote this piece.

de las consonancias perfectas, una aplicación bastante libre de algunos elementos formales que regían al *organum* y al *discantus* de la llamada Escuela de Notre Dame, y el empleo de la técnica isorrítmica del *Ars Nova* francés, basada en patrones melódicos (*color*) y rítmicos (*talea*.)

⁵⁵ Lavista, in García Bonilla, *Visiones sonoras*, 108. [De tal manera que siempre se tiene la ilusión de escuchar la resonancia de los acordes que es el eco de lo que sucede en la orquesta.]

⁵⁶ The instruments that comprise Orchestra A are two oboes, Bb clarinet, bassoon, contrabassoon, four tenor trombones, two tubular bells, two bass drums, gong, timpani, and strings.

Lacrymosa, like *Lamento* and *Responsorio*, is a sectional piece that explores the interval of the perfect fifth contrasted with the tritone. As in *Lamento*, the indication at the beginning of the piece emphasizes a sense of intimacy, and at the same time it suggests a religious atmosphere: *Adagio Religioso—statico e con serenità*. The overall form of *Lacrymosa* is ternary (A B A), with an introduction and a coda. Orchestra B begins by presenting the interval of the perfect fifth. In an introductory passage of seven measures, cellos, trombones (using harmon mutes), bassoon, and contrabassoon delicately enter on the two pitches of the perfect fifth E–B—the symbol of perfection, as Lavista describes it. Nevertheless, that perfect atmosphere is soon broken by the entrance of the tubular bell on the note F (m. 2). The sonority that results functions as a seminal chord for the entire work.⁵⁷ The entrance of the F natural in the bells precedes the piece's main theme, first introduced in m. 8 by Orchestra A, and subsequently presented with voice crossing, expansion, compression, and ornamentation. The melodic movement of the theme revolves around F and outlines the interval of a descending minor third (F–D) in the first part, and it continues by outlining an ascending diminished fifth (D–Ab), as seen in Example 6.6. At the same time, Orchestra B and the double basses of Orchestra A sustain the harmonic pedal from the beginning of the piece (E–B), which, together with the dyad Bb–F from the second violins, forms the familiar sonority of two fifths separated by a tritone.⁵⁸

Even though the work exhibits a marvelous continuity and unfolds without drastic changes of texture, there is a middle section that presents a much more intimate character than the two outer parts of the work. The piece approaches this intimate section in a remarkably delicate manner. As previously noted, the interval of the perfect fifth is sustained by Orchestra B from the very beginning of the piece. The first instance of a clear isolation of the fifth that forms a motif happens in m. 22, where a reiteration of the main theme accompanied by a countermotif is presented in natural harmonics by the cello of Orchestra A (see Example 6.7).

After extending the main theme into a slightly higher register, Lavista compacts or compresses a version of the theme in m. 42, where there is only an outline of the tritone F–B. Simultaneously, the clarinet plays the countermotif of the perfect fifth, which is presented with sustained notes (B–F#). The activity diminishes while the clarinet sustains the B, supported at the same time by a gentle pedal of the fifth E–B. One by one, the instruments of Orchestra B fade away, and the clarinet presents a lyrical melody that revolves around B (see Example 6.8), emphasized by the natural harmonics of the double basses of Orchestra A.

During the entire middle section, Orchestra B is absent, while Orchestra A gently accompanies the clarinet. Over the course of the section, other instruments enter to accompany or supplement the melody until m. 73, where there is a

⁵⁷ The intervallic content, or pitch-class set, of this chord is [017].

⁵⁸ The intervallic content, or pitch-class set, of this chord is [0167].

Example 6.6 Lavista, *Lacrymosa*, mm 8–12.

The musical score for Example 6.6, Lavista's *Lacrymosa*, measures 8–12, is presented in a standard orchestral format. The score includes parts for Oboe I, Clarinet, Contrabass, Trombones I-II and III-IV, Cymbals, Violins I and II, Viola, Violoncello, and Double Bass. The music is in 4/4 time and features dynamic markings such as *mf*, *p*, *pp*, and *molto p*. A circled '10' is above the Oboe I staff at the start of measure 10. The tempo marking 'molto collando' is at the top right. The score shows a return of material from the beginning of the piece, with muted trombones and Orchestra B playing a harmonic pedal of the perfect fifth E-B.

sense of return to the beginning of the piece. In this instance, the material that was introduced by the muted trombones at the beginning of the piece returns, as does Orchestra B with the harmonic pedal of the perfect fifth E–B. Lavista makes use of multiphonics in the oboes, creating a contrasting color effect. The main theme

Example 6.7 Lavista, *Lacrymosa*, mm. 22–28.

The image displays a page of a musical score for Example 6.7, Lavista's *Lacrymosa*, measures 22–28. The score is arranged in a standard orchestral format with multiple staves. The instruments listed on the left include Oboe I, Clarinet, Bassoon, Contrabass, Trombones I-IV, Trumpets I-IV, Violins I-II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The score features various dynamic markings such as *p*, *mf*, *f*, and *pp*, along with performance instructions like *cantabile* and *rit.*. A circled measure number '25' is visible at the top of the page. The notation includes notes, rests, and articulation marks.

is reintroduced in m. 79, with the first violins in parallel harmony with the violas. The work ends with recurrences of the main motif, along with an emphasis on the piece's initial chord.

There are several common threads in *Lamento*, *Responsorio*, and *Lacrymosa* that I would like to outline now, as they are also present in Lavista's subsequent religious music: first, the inclusion of epigraphs that suggest or portray the theme of death as a transition to a spiritual realm (rather than a mere cessation of existence); second,

Example 6.8 Lavista, *Lacrymosa*, mm. 50–56.

50

Più lento
(solo) *senza rigore*
cantabile con malinconia

55

Più lento

Sol.G
(p)

I
Vln.

II

Vln.

Vc.

Cb.

the predilection for slow *tempi* corresponding to the slow harmonic rhythms that portray an intimate atmosphere; third, the use of specific intervals to convey symbolic meaning, such as the perfect fifth to represent the spiritual realm, eternity, and perfection, the tritone as an element of rupture or death, and the minor third as symbolic of humanity, imperfection; fourth, the crafting of thematic material that centers on a particular pitch; fifth, the use of extended techniques; and finally, the predilection for isorhythmic and canonic structures (imitative or proportional). All of these elements remained present in Lavista's religious music throughout his career. Ultimately, writing these three memorial pieces, rooted as they are in Western

European Catholic tradition, led Lavista to compose a Mass, a project he had long wanted to undertake.⁵⁹

Medieval Imaginaries, Divine Encounters: Writing a Mass

The opportunity for Lavista to write a Mass, thus fulfilling one of his “greatest desires,” was the result of a commission from Venezuelan-American conductor Carmen-Helena Téllez (1955–2021). They met in 1993, during the 7th Festival Latinoamericano de Música, in Caracas, Venezuela, directed by composer and conductor Alfredo Rugeles (b. 1949).⁶⁰ At the time, Téllez was head of Indiana University’s Latin American Music Center (LAMC) and director of the Contemporary Vocal Ensemble. Thanks to a grant Téllez received from the U.S.-Mexico Fund for Culture, she was able to commission Lavista to write a choral piece and to fund a residency for him to work with her choir. This would be the first time Lavista had the opportunity to work closely with a vocal ensemble.⁶¹ Having such a competent choir with vast experience in performing unconventional vocal techniques at his disposal was extremely appealing, given his predilection to collaborate with performer(s) during the compositional process.⁶²

Lavista’s Mass calls for the standard four voice-texture (SATB) with *divisi* in certain places for a total of eight parts. It is an *a cappella* setting of the Ordinary of the Mass, divided into the usual five sections: Kyrie, Gloria, Credo, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei. Lavista and Téllez jointly decided that three of the Mass’s movements—Kyrie, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei—should not be as demanding as Gloria and Credo, so that they could be performed by a medium- to high-level choir. According to Téllez, the entire piece is quite challenging, especially due to its intricate polyphonic writing, constant presence of perfect fifths and fourths, and rhythmic complexities.⁶³

While Lavista followed some general parameters that Téllez had given him for her ensemble, such as their vocal ranges, the composer emphatically requested one thing: the choir was not to use vibrato, only pure and clear vocal sounds, a sonority meant to emulate an imaginary medieval aesthetic of a church choir with children

⁵⁹ Mario Lavista, quoted in Juan Arturo Brennan, liner notes for *Mario Lavista: Cuaderno de viaje, Siglo XX*, vol. XII, Conaculta, INBA, Cenidim, UNAM, 1994, compact disc. In Lavista’s words: “Estas obras de música fúnebre religiosa me van a llevar tarde o temprano a componer una misa, que es uno de mis grandes deseos.”

⁶⁰ A photograph of this first encounter in Venezuela can be found on the companion website for this book.

⁶¹ Although the collaboration with Indiana University’s vocal ensemble was a first for Lavista, the Mass was not the first piece he wrote for chorus. That distinction goes to *Homenaje a Samuel Beckett* (1968) which, to this date, has never been performed.

⁶² For more about Lavista’s compositional process in collaboration with performers, see Chapter 4.

⁶³ Carmen-Helena Téllez, in discussion with the author, via Zoom, November 19, 2020.

singing the upper parts.⁶⁴ Lavista took up his residency with Téllez's group at Indiana University in early 1995. All matters of tempo, dynamics, and articulations were worked out in the rehearsals during that time. The group premiered the piece on April 11, 1995, at Indiana University's Jacobs School of Music. While the choir worked with Lavista's manuscript during the process, Téllez later prepared an edition of the score, which she published under her label, Aguavá New Music, in 1999.

The artistic and intellectual challenges of this piece compelled Téllez to perform it on multiple occasions and to record it multiple times.⁶⁵ Given the work's complexity and the fact that it requires a minimum ensemble of twelve singers, Téllez saw the need to make a transcription for fewer singers that she could take on tour. She transcribed the Mass for four solo singers and four instruments (flute, clarinet, viola, and double bass) and organized national and international tours to perform it (see Figure 6.5).⁶⁶ Téllez fondly recalls that the piece was received with great acclaim when she conducted it at the 2000 Tempus Fugit Music Festival in Tel Aviv, Israel. Far removed from U.S. prejudices, she observed that Israeli audiences did not burden Latin American composers with the expectation of writing music that sounded Latin American or that alluded to popular dances or tunes.⁶⁷ In contrast to these expectations, Téllez emphasized that Lavista's *Missa Brevis* represents another face of Mexicanness, one that is connected to a type of aesthetic refinement and intellectualism characteristic of twentieth-century Mexican modernist poetry.

In Lavista's opinion, using Latin as the language for his Mass removed any national association and reflected the type of cosmopolitan ideal he practiced.⁶⁸ In this vocal

⁶⁴ Téllez recalled that Lavista was adamant about this particular point; he wanted nonvibrato singing throughout. She emphasized that Lavista had an excellent rapport with her students. Although they were immensely challenged, at the technical level, they enjoyed the collaborative process with Lavista. Téllez, discussion.

⁶⁵ The first live recording of Lavista's Mass directed by Téllez was released in 1996. However, this recording was not intended for commercial distribution. It was reissued by Tempus in 2009. In 2010, Téllez released another recording pairing Lavista's Mass with Lavista's *Stabat Mater* through IUMusic and LAMC. Téllez's chamber version for four solo voices, flute, clarinet, viola, and double bass, was included in the album *Canticum Novum: Sacred Vocal Music from the Late 20th Century*, released in 2001 by Aguavá New Music.

⁶⁶ For a performance of Téllez's chamber version of the *Missa Brevis* at the Festival Internacional Cervantino, Lavista wrote polyphonic versions of chants from the Proper of the Mass of Our Lady of Mercy for solo voice and four instruments (flute, clarinet, viola, and double bass). Lavista wrote polyphonic versions of the following chants: Introitus, Graduale, Offertorium, Communio, and *Ite missa est*. Regarding these arrangements, Téllez summarized, "Son obras cortas pero exquisitas." She had planned to include them in her new edition of the *Missa Brevis* for solo singers and instruments; however, she did not get to complete it, to the best of my knowledge. Carmen-Helena Téllez, email message to author, December 23, 2020.

⁶⁷ Téllez, discussion. [Admiraron mucho la obra. Allá no tienen esos prejuicios que tienen en EE.UU., de que la obra tiene que sonar latinoamericana y aludir a danzas populares.]

⁶⁸ The prevalent use of Latin in the composition of Catholic masses throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century is in part due to the language's perceived "universality." For instance, English composer Edmund Rubbra once stated: "The Latin words . . . release me from any allegiance to national traditions, and I approach them with, perhaps, greater awe, but certainly with less inner restrictions, emotional and musical." Edmund Rubbra, quoted in Robert Stephan Hines, ed., *The Composer's Point of View: Essays on Twentieth-Century Choral Music by Those Who Wrote It* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1963), 103–4.



Figure 6.5 Aguavá New Music Studio, directed by Carmen-Helena Téllez, performing Téllez’s chamber version of Mario Lavista’s *Missa Brevis* at El Colegio Nacional. D.R. © El Colegio Nacional, Luis González Obregón 23, Mexico City, 2003. From El Colegio Nacional’s Collection. Used by permission.

work, as in the previous pieces discussed in this chapter, Lavista was striving to build bridges to facilitate intimacy and communion. “Whether a Mass, a *Lacrymosa*, or a *Stabat Mater*,” Lavista held that the purpose of religious music was ultimately “to establish a profound dialogue with divinity, to attempt to create a sacred acoustic space through sounds. And I am certain that, within that sacred space, a very profound dialogue, a true communion is taking place between man and divinity.”⁶⁹ Therefore, in his Mass, Lavista first fostered a connection with the divinity. However, as was the case in other pieces, the bridges Lavista built always included people close to him. Although the piece lacks a dedication, its title, *Missa Brevis ad Consolationis Dominam Nostram* (*Misa a Nuestra Señora del Consuelo*), not only alludes to Our Lady of Consolation, but was also named after Lavista’s wife at the time he composed it, music historian Consuelo Carredano, who is a devoted Catholic.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Lavista, in García Bonilla, *Visiones sonoras*, 109. [Debo añadir que para mí la música religiosa, sea una misa, una lacrimosa o un *Stabat Mater*, no tiene otro fin que buscar establecer un diálogo muy profundo con la divinidad, tratar de crear por medio de los sonidos un espacio acústico sagrado. Y dentro de ese espacio sagrado tengo la certeza de que se está llevando a cabo un diálogo muy profundo entre el hombre y la divinidad, una verdadera comunión.]

⁷⁰ Lavista and Carredano’s relationship lasted from the late 1980s to the early 2000s.

The idea was to write a piece that would initiate a dialogue between humanity and divinity, but how would that be accomplished? One way Lavista saw to accomplish it was by using certain intervals symbolically. While in his youth he was hesitant to overtly use perfect fifths, fourths, or octaves because of their potentially tonal connotations, after his study of medieval music and thought, these perfect intervals acquired a spiritual symbolism. In his own words:

The perfect fifth as it was used in the Middle Ages is very important for me because when you hear it, it gives you the feeling that it is not man who speaks through the interval; another being, which is not the creative logos, is speaking. The creative logos, the personality emerges when the major or minor third is introduced; it is there where we begin to feel the presence of man.⁷¹

Although Lavista remained distant from the institution of the Church, he did not consider himself an atheist. “I believe in the mystery of creation,” he expressed, “I believe that life itself emanates from a depth of mysteries, from that kind of dark, hidden, intimate reality that corresponds to what we call ‘sacred.’”⁷² Lavista believed in the divine in abstract terms, in the sense of the eternal mystery of a Creator. While he did not attend religious services or practice religion in any traditional way, emulating medieval musicians by creating music in the service of God was a way for Lavista to practice his own beliefs. Writing music using medieval and Renaissance procedures became his ritual, his religion.

Setting the Ordinary of the Mass to music allows composers to think of themselves as belonging to a particular lineage, namely, that of Western European composers whose Masses have been preserved through notation. After all, as many music history textbooks reveal, composing polyphonic Masses has been consistently practiced without significant interruption since the Middle Ages. With such a long lineage, composers are confronted with centuries of accumulated tradition when they set out to compose their own Masses. Lavista did not take this confrontation lightly; what was important to him was to ensure the genre’s continuity. Employing a musical form that originated in the fourteenth century was very attractive to him. Not only did he draw a lineage back to Machaut, but he also saw himself as part of a line of twentieth-century Mexican composers who wrote Catholic Masses, including Manuel de Jesús Aréchiga, Miguel Bernal Jiménez, Hermilo Hernández, and Gerhart Muench.⁷³ Writing a Mass allowed Lavista to become part of that tradition. Therefore, his Mass

⁷¹ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, August 14, 2004. [Para mí es muy importante la quinta vacía tal como se empleaba en la edad media porque, al oírla, se tiene la sensación de que no es el hombre el que habla a través del intervalo; habla otro ente que no es el logos creador. El logos creador, la personalidad, comienza cuando se introduce la tercera mayor o menor, es ahí donde comenzamos a sentir la presencia del hombre.]

⁷² Lavista, in García Bonilla, *Visiones sonoras*, 107. [Yo creo en el misterio de la creación, creo que la vida misma emana de un fondo de misterios, de esa especie de realidad oculta, escondida, íntima, que corresponde a lo que llamamos “sagrado.”]

⁷³ Lavista, in García Bonilla, *Visiones sonoras*, 109.

Example 6.9 Guillaume de Machaut, *Messe de Nostre Dame*, Kyrie, beginning of the tenor line (*cantus firmus*).



Example 6.10 Lavista, *Missa Brevis*, Kyrie, Soprano I “motto,” mm. 1–3.



is, on one hand, a testimony to his adherence to a consciously chosen lineage and, on the other, a compositional challenge in which he demonstrated to himself that he had something to contribute to that lineage. To better grasp how this took place, in the following I offer some descriptive analytical considerations that inform my understanding of the piece.

The *Missa Brevis ad Consolationis Dominam Nostram* (hereafter *Missa Brevis*) has a motto or main melodic cell that is present throughout all the movements. The motto opens and closes the work, and it is present in several permutations in different sections, which perhaps situates this Mass under the rubric of “motto Masses.” In one of my first conversations with Lavista, he told me he had taken Josquin des Prez’s *Missa Pange Lingua* as a model for his own Mass because of Josquin’s way of unifying the Mass sections with a recognizable motto. This took me somewhat by surprise since in my own analysis I had found that the melodic contour of the main motif that permeates Lavista’s *Missa* is strikingly similar to the plainchant Kyrie melody Machaut gives to the tenor (*cantus firmus*) in his *Messe de Nostre Dame* (see Example 6.9).⁷⁴ Because I knew about Lavista’s deep study of this particular piece, I was under the impression that this resemblance was intentional. When I pointed out the similarities between Machaut’s line and the *Missa*’s motto, Lavista was happily surprised and ventured to explain the similarity as an “unconscious influence” (see Example 6.10).⁷⁵

Lavista’s main motto first appears in the very first measure of the Kyrie, in Soprano I. This theme is taken by Soprano II in a proportional canon at the unison

⁷⁴ As scholars have pointed out, the melodic content of Machaut’s *cantus firmus* comes from the widely distributed Kyrie *Cunctipotens genitor*. The way Machaut sets this melody, following isorhythmic principles, makes it rather difficult to hear. For more about Machaut’s Mass, see Anne Walters Robertson, *Guillaume de Machaut and Reims: Context and Meaning in His Musical Works* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

⁷⁵ Lavista, discussion, August 27, 2004.

Example 6.11 Lavista, *Missa Brevis*, Kyrie, mm. 1–8.

♩ = 36-40
Sostenuto e mesurato

mp
Sopranos
Ky - ri - e

pp pochiss. marcato
Altos
Ky - ri - e

pp pochiss. marcato
Tenores
Ky - ri - e

Bajos
Ky - ri - e

S. I
S. II
A.
T.
B.

(in augmentation), reminiscent perhaps of the music by fifteenth-century Franco-Flemish composer Johannes Ockeghem. Lavista groups the voices into pairs (a characteristic feature of Josquin's masses, among others); while Sopranos I and II present the melody in canon, Alto and Tenor move in prolonged notes in parallel fourths, presenting the main theme in inverted proportional canon in augmentation (see Example 6.11).⁷⁶ In addition to introducing the motto, the very beginning of the *Missa Brevis* presents, in a concentrated manner, certain important features that Lavista explores throughout the entire work: imitative and canonic entrances in different permutations (what Lavista called the “mechanical” elements); a symbolic use of the vocal registers; and the outlining of two main intervals—the perfect fifth, as presented in the lower voices, and the minor third, which opens the motto.

⁷⁶ I extend my deepest gratitude to the late Carmen-Helena Téllez for granting me permission to reproduce the musical examples from Lavista's *Missa Brevis* and to Arcángel Castillo Olivares for his help in preparing the examples of Lavista's Mass included in this chapter. In collaboration with Castillo Olivares, Téllez prepared a new edition of the score. Unfortunately, both Lavista and Téllez passed away before this new version was published.

Example 6.12 Lavista, *Missa Brevis*, Kyrie, mm. 17–19.

The image shows a musical score for four vocal parts: Tenor I (T. I), Tenor II (T. II), Bass I (B. I), and Bass II (B. II). The music is in 3/4 time and begins with a piano (*p*) dynamic. The lyrics are "Chri - ste". Tenor I and Tenor II enter in the first measure with a melodic line. Bass I and Bass II enter in the second measure with a lower, more rhythmic line. The score shows the first three measures of this passage.

Throughout the *Missa Brevis*, Lavista highlights instances of word painting by assigning a specific symbolism to the use of specific textures or intervals.⁷⁷ At the beginning of the piece, we have the impression that what we hear is a three-voice texture—which could symbolize the Trinity—due to the parallel movement between Alto and Tenor. The way Lavista employs range is also distinctive. In the beginning of the Kyrie, he uses the upper voices, but in the second section of the movement, which introduces the person of Christ, Lavista turns to the low register (male voices only). In this section, Tenor I enters with a permutation of the main theme, which is confirmed by Tenor II in the next measure, while Basses I and II move with a rhythmic displacement, presenting the same theme in augmentation (see Example 6.12). The use of low register when introducing the person of Christ might bring to attention his *descent* from heaven and, at the same time, the belief that he is the foundation of the world.

The third section of the Kyrie presents a different organization of the material. Voices are paired again, this time in such a way that the melodic material from Soprano I (which is derived from the main theme) is taken by the Tenor two beats after, in a canon at the fourth below. Similarly, the Alto presents the pitch sequence (or *color*) of Soprano I in augmentation, which is then picked up by the Bass two beats later in a canon at the fourth below. Even though the processes that Lavista chooses are the ones he considered “mechanical,” there is a degree of liberty in his choice of certain accidentals (see Example 6.13).⁷⁸ The movement ends at the interval of a perfect fourth (G–C). One could infer that by selecting this texture for the last section of the Kyrie, Lavista highlights the “mechanical” nature of human pleas: in the Catholic tradition, the repetition of prayers is found to be a vehicle for supplication.

A symbolic use of range and texture is also found in the next movement, Gloria, where Lavista continues to emphasize the presence of the Father and the Son with the selection of specific ranges and by splitting the voices. The movement begins with

⁷⁷ Tim Carter defines the term *word painting* as “the use of musical gesture(s) in a work with an actual or implied text to reflect, often pictorially, the literal or figurative meaning of a word or phrase.” Tim Carter, “Word-painting,” *Grove Music Online*, <https://www.oxfordmusiconline.com/>, accessed June 23, 2023.

⁷⁸ Lavista regarded certain compositional procedures such as canon and isorhythm as “mechanical” as they are driven by fixed patterns, with little deviation.

Example 6.13 Lavista, *Missa Brevis*, Kyrie, mm. 32–36.

Example 6.14 Lavista, *Missa Brevis*, Gloria, mm. 9–12.

an intonation of a monophonic chant (“Gloria in excelsis Deo”) by the Tenor.⁷⁹ The chant is immediately followed by Soprano I, who enters with the main theme, while Alto, Tenor, and Bass enter successively at the fifth below with the same material in inverted canon (although the Bass only presents the descending interval of a minor third and then sustains F# as a pedal). The voices build up to a climactic point where they reach the same pitch in different octaves (for the first time in the piece) to announce in unity the proclamation of “bonae voluntatis,” good will, as the ideal of perfection for humanity. It is also the first time in the work where the register is expanded (see Example 6.14). The next phrase, “Laudamus te, Benedicimus te,” is declamatory in nature, being almost syllabic, and presents a quasi-parallel movement of the voices.

An interesting texture is found in m. 51 with the entrance in parallel thirds between Soprano and Alto: “Qui tollis peccata mundi miserere nobis.” Lavista chooses the minor third to emphasize humanity—the melodic material that is introduced at the beginning of the Gloria has the minor third as its main structural horizontal

⁷⁹ Téllez suggested that Lavista use certain Marian melodies from the *Liber usualis*.

interval. This time, however, the minor third functions harmonically to represent the sinful condition of all humanity, as declared by the text. The parallel voice leading is even more emphatic at the entrance of Soprano and Alto in parallel octaves in m. 57, where the melodic line begins with an ascending minor third; a statement of the main theme. This parallel movement foreshadows the climactic point of the movement, starting in m. 66, where Soprano and Tenor are in octaves while Alto and Bass are also in octaves (with the interval of a tritone in between) bringing all of the voices into another unison in m. 70 that emphasizes the perfection of the Father. The main theme appears in m. 75 in the Soprano. Tenor and Bass are in parallel fifths resembling the beginning of the Kyrie. The superimposition of two perfect fifths separated by a tritone, a device Lavista widely used in *Lacrymosa*, appears in m. 84: Bb–Eb in Soprano and Alto, and E–A in Tenor and Bass. To end the movement, Lavista chooses to repeat the pairing of the voices by having the Soprano and Tenor present the same line in quasi-parallel octaves, while Alto and Bass move in octaves with a slight rhythmic displacement. A last appearance of the main motif appears in m. 89 as a closing thought and the four voices drop to a low register, sealing the prayer in unison on the word “Amen” (G#).

Credo is similarly rich in symbolic allusions and word painting, yet the texture is much more dynamic and fluid than the previous two movements. The text is set syllabically and in a predominantly homophonic texture. The lengthy text of the Credo presents a challenge to the composer to devise instances of word painting and music symbolism. Lavista divides this movement into three sections. The first, marked *Energico, ma ben articolato*, starts with a monophonic intonation followed by the three upper voices in almost parallel movement singing the phrase, “Pater omnipotentem, factorem caeli et terrae.” Lavista uses the number and register of voices in a symbolic way: on one hand, the choice of three voices symbolizes the Trinity (see Example) and, on the other, the higher register symbolizes the omnipotent nature of the Father. To create contrast, Lavista then uses the three lower voices where the text pronounces the belief in Jesus as the Son of the Father.

For the next statement, “Et ex Patre natum ante omnia saecula,” Lavista again uses the three upper voices—a reminder of the omnipotent nature of the Father—all

Example 6.15 Lavista, *Missa Brevis*, Credo, mm. 1–3.

Energico $\text{♩} = 80-92$

p *ma ben articolato*

Sopranos
 Pa - trem o - mni - po - ten - tem, fa - cto - rem cae - li et ter - rae,

Altos
 Pa - trem o - mni - po - ten - tem, fa - cto - rem cae - li et ter - rae,

Tenores
 Pa - trem o - mni - po - ten - tem, fa - cto - rem cae - li et ter - rae,

Bajos

arriving at the same pitch (F) to emphasize the word “saecula” (eternity is associated with perfection). He then breaks the three-voice texture, pairing Tenor and Bass for the line “Deum de Deo,” followed by the upper voices with “lumen de lumine,” reflecting the text’s paired phrases. For the statement “Deum verum de Deo vero” Lavista uses all four voices to present the opening melodic material of the movement in inversion. It is a strong statement, as it carries the interval of a minor third in all voices and it arrives with a cadence on a perfect fifth, as if he wanted to show, at different levels, the importance for humans to believe in the *true* nature of God.

For the statement “Genitum, non factum, consubstantialem Patri,” Lavista uses the material from the beginning of the movement, albeit slightly modified; for instance, m. 32 and m. 2 (“Pater omnipotentem”) have the same musical material, which emphasizes that Son and Father have the same nature. At m. 38 we find, for the first time, the four voices in parallel motion arriving at a cadence in octaves in m. 42 with the statement “et propter nostram salutem descendit de caelis.” This phrase declares the core of the Christian faith and the main purpose of believing in the Trinity: the salvation of humankind (see Example 6.16). Surprisingly, Lavista chooses an ascending motion for the word “descendit,” which might be interpreted as foreshadowing Christ’s ascension.

The second section, marked *Meno mosso, sotto voce*, begins at m. 43 where there is a change in tempo and an expansion of the range. Lavista chooses a four-voice texture to mark the introduction of the person of the Holy Spirit, and he introduces a fuller chord (F#–G–B–C#), as if to represent the plenitude of the Holy Spirit. In the next

Example 6.16 Lavista, *Missa Brevis*, Credo, mm. 38–42.

The image displays a musical score for four voices (Soprano, Alto, Tenor, Bass) in parallel motion. The score is divided into two systems. The first system (mm. 38-42) shows the four voices in parallel motion, with the lyrics 'et pro - pter no - stram sa - lu -'. The second system (mm. 40-42) shows the four voices in parallel motion, with the lyrics 'tem de - scen - dit de cae - lis.' The score includes dynamic markings such as 'cresc.', 'f', and 'cedendo', and tempo markings such as 'Meno mosso, sotto voce'.

Example 6.17 Lavista, *Missa Brevis*, Credo, mm. 51–54.

51 *ancora meno mosso* ♩ = 69

S. *piu pp possibile*
ex Ma- ri - a

A. *piu pp possibile*
ex Ma- ri - a

T. Vir - gi - ne

B. Vir - gi - ne

phrase, starting at m. 51, there is a change in tempo to introduce the Virgin Mary (*ancora meno mosso*). Lavista chooses a delicate two-voice texture in the upper register, which could symbolize the union between Mary and the Holy Spirit. The pitch content and voicing that introduce the figure of the Virgin Mary present, in the words of Argentine composer Pablo Ortiz, “a play of realities: something that is and is not at the same time.”⁸⁰ The two voices move in and out of unison, with the unisons on the stressed syllables “ex” and “ri.” While these unisons might represent the purity of her virginity, the emphasis on the melodic interval of the minor third is there as a reminder of her human condition. In “Virgine” the two lower voices exchange pitch content. This almost imperceptible exchange might be interpreted as Lavista’s skepticism of Christ’s immaculate conception (see Example 6.17).

Lavista begins the phrase “et homo factus est” with a perfect fifth in Alto and Soprano, and a perfect fourth between Tenor and Alto, but ends it with an augmented fourth, which could symbolize Christ’s divinity and Christ’s humanity. The word “crucifixus” is stated only by the lower voice, in a declamatory way, almost like a recitative, as the Basses intone the text on one pitch, Bb. There is a change in tempo, *Poco piu mosso* for the next portion with the lower voices starting “etiam,” followed by all the voices declaring “pro nobis sub Pontio Pilato.” Here, the melodic lines emphasize the interval of the minor third, as if the figure of Pilate were the epitome of humanity’s imperfection. At the end of the phrase, “et sepultus est,” Lavista emphasizes the augmented fourth. This phrase does not end with silence as the tenor sustains a pedal note for the next phrase, implying that, even though Christ was laid in the tomb, there was still life in him—a sign of his coming resurrection.

In the third section, marked *Tempo I, ben articolato*, Lavista sets the phrase “et resurrexit” in a remarkable way, by bringing back the main melodic cell in Soprano and

⁸⁰ Pablo Ortiz made this comment to me when I was a graduate student at the University of California, Davis (ca. 2006). He was, at the time, one of my professors and had been a long-time friend of Lavista’s. It was clear to Ortiz that the voice exchange between Tenors and Basses in measures 53–54 was a way for Lavista to question, in a very subtle way, the veracity of the Catholic dogma of Mary’s immaculate conception.

Alto. This could be understood as the core purpose of the ritual: to plea for mercy to a resurrected Christ, a figure who transcended both spiritual and earthly realities. In the beginning of this section, all the voices ascend in range, and the texture becomes rhythmically busier. For the phrases “ascendit in caelum: sedet ad dexteram Patris,” Lavista pairs the voices; Soprano and Tenor are set in almost parallel movement, as are Alto and Bass. At the end of that phrase, a climax is reached. For “et iterum venturus est cum gloria,” Lavista divides the Alto section within a very close range. In “judicare vivos et mortuos,” the Tenor is absent, and the register is very open between Bass, Alto, and Soprano. The vertical harmony remains the same, as if there were no distinction in the judgment; both the living and the dead will be judged. There is a change of tempo that signals the entrance of the Soprano with the phrase “cujus regni non erit finis.” Here Alto, Tenor, and Bass create a harmonic pedal, sustaining long notes to illustrate the unending kingdom of Christ. The cadence is prolonged and finally arrives in m. 94.

In m. 95 there is another return to the musical material from the beginning of the movement, although now the melodic lines are exchanged. The Tenor takes up the Soprano’s melody from before, and the Bass assumes the Tenor’s. The section of the text corresponds to the belief in the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. By choosing the same musical material for this entrance, Lavista asserts that the three persons are one God. Lavista illustrates the line “Et unam sanctam catholicam et apostolicam Ecclesiam” using two musical symbols: the minor third, which permeates the different melodic lines, and the inversion of the main motivic cell. The interval of the minor third, as we have seen, has acted as a symbol of humanity; in this case, it is a reminder of the imperfect human Church. Furthermore, the appearance of the main motif serves as a reminder of the human need for mercy, as portrayed in the Kyrie. Yet, at the end of the phrase, the voices end with a perfect octave; according to the symbolism set up earlier in the piece, we can conclude that this arrival suggests the existence of a perfect (or ideal) Church (see Example 6.18).

Lavista divided “Confiteor unum baptismum in remissionem peccatorum” between the voices. The Tenor presents an allusion to the main melodic cell in m. 118, recalling the Kyrie’s prayer for mercy. The phrase “Et expecto resurrectionem mortuorum” is a variation of mm. 1–7, which evokes a sense of completion that prepares the ear for the movement’s conclusion. In the very last phrase “et vitam venturi saeculi, Amen,” all four voices are present; the three upper voices state the line while the Bass keeps a pedal on the word “saeculi.” The main melodic cell appears again in Soprano and Alto, and the piece resolves at last into the symbol of eternity: a perfect octave.

The next movement, Sanctus, presents intricate contrapuntal procedures. The voices are paired in the first section of the movement (Soprano with Alto, and Tenor with Bass). Soprano and Alto present a variation on the main motif, and almost two measures later, Tenor and Bass enter in parallel fifths. The word “Sanctus” is echoed throughout the voices for the first twelve measures (see Example 6.19). In m. 13 the word “Dominus” is introduced with a three-voice texture in Soprano, Alto I, and Alto II, representing the Trinity. The first cadence happens in m. 26 with two superimposed

Example 6.18 Lavista, *Missa Brevis*, Credo, mm. 109–14.

Example 6.18 shows a vocal score for Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), and Bass (B.). The music is in 3/4 time and consists of two systems. The first system (mm. 109–111) features a vocal line with lyrics: "Et u-nam san-ctam, ca-tho-li-cam et". The second system (mm. 112–114) features a vocal line with lyrics: "a-pos-to-li-cam Ec-cle-si-am. Con-fi-". The score includes dynamic markings such as *mp*, *poco cresc.*, and *mf*, as well as articulation markings like *articolato*.

Example 6.19 Lavista, *Missa Brevis*, Sanctus, mm. 1–8.

Example 6.19 shows a vocal score for Soprano (S.), Alto (A.), Tenor (T.), and Bass (B.). The music is in 3/4 time and consists of two systems. The first system (mm. 1–8) features a vocal line with lyrics: "San-ctus, San-ctus, San-ctus". The second system (mm. 9–16) features a vocal line with lyrics: "San-ctus, San-ctus, San-ctus". The score includes a tempo marking of quarter note = 54 (half note = 108) and the instruction "forte e vigoroso". The score includes dynamic markings such as *non dim.*

fifths separated by a tritone. The parallel movement between voices remains until the end of the second section (m. 56). In m. 57, “Hosanna in excelsis,” there is a dramatic change of texture; the voices are still working in pairs, but this time the four voices enter in canon. Soprano and Alto have almost the same pitch sequence (*color*) at the distance of an octave, separated by a fourth from Tenor and Bass, who also enter in canon. This free double canon dissolves as the voices arrive at a cadence in m. 85.

In the next section, *Benedictus*, we find a parallel movement in sixths between Alto and Tenor, who carry the main motif for two measures. Here we can appreciate what Lavista calls the “mechanical” aspect of the movement in the use of double canons as well as in a distribution of musical material that is reminiscent of the Notre Dame School; the upper voices present imitative polyphony, while the two lower voices create a harmonic pedal with a sustained interval of a perfect fifth D–A, a device that Lavista used in *Lacrymosa* to create an atmosphere of spirituality. One could read the use of this harmonic pedal not only as a way to signal the conclusion of the movement but also to foreshadow the very end of the Mass.

The last movement, *Agnus Dei*, gives the listener a sense of return. It begins with a variation of the main melodic cell with a very close range between Altos I and II and Tenor. The movement is divided into three sections. In the first section, there are constant allusions to the main theme. In the second, the Bass abandons the text to recite only the letters “m e m” with a sustained pedal on A. Soprano I enters two measures later with the main motif presented in its original form (as in the *Kyrie*), followed in canon by the Alto after six measures as a last supplication for mercy (see Example 6.20). Lavista wanted a pedal in the bass that would change color; therefore, he chose a closed sound, “m,” and an open one, “e.” This is a clear departure from the Mass tradition and illustrates the keen ear Lavista had for matters of timbre. The letters of the pedal in the Bass “m e m” signal the very end of the piece and are an allusion to the word “pacem.” By having similar structural and melodic material in the outer movements, the Mass closes in on itself with a sense of circularity.

What conclusions can be made with the analytical descriptions just provided? Before attempting an answer to that question, I should remind the reader that all these

Example 6.20 Lavista, *Missa Brevis*, *Agnus Dei*, mm. 30–32.

The image shows a musical score for four voices: Soprano I, Alto, Tenor, and Bass. The score is in 3/4 time and consists of four staves. The tempo is marked "pochiss. piu mosso" with a metronome marking of 52. The dynamics are marked "molto p e delicato". The lyrics "Agnus Dei" are written under the vocal lines. The Bass line features a sustained pedal of "m e m" on the note A. The Soprano I line has a melodic motif that is followed in canon by the Alto. The Alto line has a melodic motif that is followed in canon by the Tenor. The Tenor line has a melodic motif that is followed in canon by the Bass. The Bass line has a sustained pedal of "m e m" on the note A.

observations come from my own subjective listening experience and are rooted in my own musical background. While not comprehensive or exhaustive, my description of passages from the five movements of the *Missa Brevis* intends to show how Lavista achieved, musically, his dream of creating a dialogue with the divinity. By following procedures from late medieval and Renaissance music, such as canonic permutations, and by assigning specific symbolisms to certain sonorities and textures, Lavista engaged not only with Catholic dogma but also with centuries upon centuries of accumulated tradition. He was able to establish yet another bridge between the past and the present, and the local and the global, thus reinforcing his cosmopolitan ideal.

Lavista's fascination with late-medieval music allowed him to articulate his own compositional purpose and ultimate goal. Within medieval thought, "music was not a medium through which composers would express their most intimate and profound feelings," Lavista maintained. "Music was about something much more important than that. It was one of the seven liberal arts in the Middle Ages, a subject of the *quadrivium*. As an art form, music was conceived as a mirror of the universe, of theology, of the very structure of thought and of the universe." The idea that music mirrors the universe was at the core of Lavista's compositional thinking, driving his compositional goals. "Music [was conceived] not as entertainment . . . but as a way of living and knowing the world." In medieval thought, "the very structure of the world could be known through music."⁸¹

The first time I attended a live performance of Lavista's *Missa Brevis* was during a symposium organized by Carmen-Helena Téllez in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the Indiana University Latin American Music Center, in October 2011. After an intense week of lectures, recitals, and panels, the last event of the entire celebration concluded with Lavista's Mass. Sitting in one of the front rows of Auer Hall, a strange sensation invaded me. On one hand, I felt absorbed by the experience of—finally—being able to hear this piece live, after I had studied it for such a long time. On the other hand, I felt there was some sort of disconnect. While my own engagement with the piece had been in the private sphere of my house and was informed by my own sense of spirituality and religion, hearing the piece in a secular context, after an academic meeting, felt somewhat odd. I was very much aware that, although Lavista composed this piece thinking it could be performed in a sacred context, he wrote it knowing that ultimately, a scenario such as Auer Hall was, most likely, the setting in which his work would be performed.⁸² I imagined, however, that in spite of

⁸¹ Lavista, discussion, August 27, 2004. [La música no era un medio de expresión, no era un medio por el cual el compositor expresaba sus sentimientos más íntimos y profundos; la música no era eso, era algo mucho más importante que eso. Era una de las siete artes liberales en la Edad Media, formaba parte del *quadrivium*. La música era un arte concebido para ser un espejo del universo, de la teología, de la estructura misma del pensamiento y del universo. . . . La música [era concebida] no como una diversión, o como un medio para, sino como una forma de vivir y de conocer al mundo. . . . La estructura misma del mundo la podías conocer a través de la música.]

⁸² Lavista was able to hear his *Missa Brevis* in a sacred space thanks to Téllez, who conducted the piece at the University of Chicago's Rockefeller Memorial Chapel (an ecumenical chapel) in 1998. For the rest of his life, Lavista remembered that occasion very fondly. He considered churches to be ideal venues for the performance of his religious music.

the secular context, the audience in attendance might have thought Lavista was a religious person. I also kept wondering whether the audience would perceive the work differently if they knew religion had no place in Lavista's daily life and that he regularly voiced his utmost disgust for the Catholic Church. Would they be puzzled, as I had been at an earlier point, about Lavista's immersion into composing music that was deeply ingrained in Catholicism, given that he himself eschewed religious dogma?

Years later, I experienced a similarly unsettling feeling while listening to Lavista give a lecture about his religious music in the context of a Sacred Music Symposium organized by Téllez at another impressive Midwestern venue, McKenna Hall at the University of Notre Dame. An event that should have gone smoothly, I thought, turned uneasy when Lavista began to criticize the Catholic Church. Not only did he condemn the problem of pedophilia within the Church and its history of corruption, but he ultimately concluded that, given the "musical poverty" (*pobreza musical*) characteristic of contemporary Catholic services, "God had abandoned the Church." At that moment, a tense silence filled the hall. Lavista's remarks were received with a degree of discomfort and irritation by the majority of an audience comprising composers, conductors, theologians, and music scholars gathered by Téllez. Téllez later confided in me that several of the theologians present were infuriated and blamed her for having invited "such a heretic." To make things even more awkward, the *Missa Brevis* was also performed in the context of that sacred music colloquium.⁸³ An extraordinarily challenging piece, with a text that was very familiar to the audience in attendance, was decontextualized after being preceded by Lavista's poignant criticism of the very Church that institutionalized the Mass. To me, this moment clarified that, after all, Lavista's "religiosity" had nothing to do with the Catholic religion and everything to do with another type of religion, one that adheres faithfully to modernist tenets, to the belief in art for art's sake.

This was also what Téllez hinted at when she expressed that what distinguished Lavista's aesthetic position from that of other contemporary composers was precisely the fact that he attempted to represent a spiritual world that exists *only* through art. She recalled Lavista's thoughts on the subject: "When seeing a painting by Fra Angelico, he knew God existed because Fra Angelico convinced him. [To him] *that* is the importance of art."⁸⁴ Lavista's framing such a "canonic" text as the Mass Ordinary

⁸³ I'm recalling this event solely from memory. I had been well aware of Lavista's severe rebuke of the Catholic Church. His expressed criticisms of the Church had appeared in multiple published interviews easily available online. In 2006, for instance, he was quoted as saying that the Catholic Church "has allowed the demons of *chabacanería* (vulgarity) and bad taste to enter with the *estudiantinas*, mariachis, and superficial and lame music." Therefore, at the time, I thought that the comments he made in his lecture at the University of Notre Dame were, after all, somewhat measured in comparison. However, pronounced in front of a mostly religious audience, Lavista's criticism must have felt to them like a slap in the face. See Ángel Vargas, "Mario Lavista: En épocas de crisis, como la de hoy, la mediocridad toma el poder," *La Jornada*, February 24, 2006, <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2006/02/24/index.php?section=cultura&article=a05n1cul>, accessed June 23, 2023.

⁸⁴ Téllez, discussion. Emphasis in original conversation. [Cuando veía una pintura de Fra Angelico, él sabía que Dios existía porque la pintura de Fra Angelico lo convencía. Y que *eso* era lo importante del arte.] Often, when addressing the communicative power of the visual arts, Lavista mentions the paintings

within a secular, modernist religiosity grants singularity to his Mass among the repertoire of choral Latin American music. In Téllez's appraisal, Lavista's *Missa Brevis* "claims a place among the most important Latin American choral works of our time."⁸⁵ Téllez made this proclamation when she premiered the piece in 1995, but fifteen years later she still estimated this to be true. Given her vast experience as a choral conductor dedicated to the performance and promotion of Latin American music, this evaluation carries significant weight. To Téllez, Lavista's posture, though rare in Latin America, was coherent with who he was and what he tried to communicate. "It is a conceptual posture in which he tries to emulate the universe's perfections, it's not an emotional stance," Téllez explained, "it's about contemplation. To contemplate certain perfections of the universe. Therefore, the artist is like a mirror that tries to represent that. This [posture] is not common in Latin America. Or if [that attitude] had been latent, Lavista is the first to express it openly."⁸⁶

The Many Lives of the *Missa Brevis*

"At last, the 'musical brontosaurus' awakes tonight," was the heading of an announcement published in the newspaper *El Universal* on October 26, 2000.⁸⁷ The *musical brontosaurus*—a term coined by Lavista—refers to the Órgano Monumental del Auditorio Nacional (OMAN), a large pipe organ with 15,633 flutes, five manuals (each with 61 keys) and a pedal keyboard, which, after undergoing significant restoration work, was ready to be played again.⁸⁸ The occasion was not an insignificant event. The venue that houses this instrument, the Auditorio Nacional (National Auditorium), located in the heart of Mexico City, has a seating capacity of 10,000 and is regarded as one of the main concert venues in the country. Attended by thousands, this monumental and lengthy event included the participation of five organists, one tenor, and two orchestras. The piece that crowned this lavish event was Lavista's *Mater dolorosa*, which he wrote specifically for the occasion.

This Adagio for organ was another opportunity for Lavista to explore the unusual timbral possibilities of traditional instruments by working in close collaboration with

of Italian Renaissance artist Fra Angelico (born Guido di Pietro and known by his contemporaries as Fra Giovanni da Fiesole), especially his altarpieces representing the Annunciation.

⁸⁵ Carmen-Helena Téllez, liner notes for *Mario Lavista: Missa Brevis ad Consolationis Dominam Nostram*, Indiana University School of Music, Latin American Music Center, 1996, compact disc. This recording was named the best recording of Mexican classical music by the journal *Viceversa* in 1998. It was later reissued by Tempus in 2009.

⁸⁶ Téllez, discussion. [Es una postura conceptual de tratar emular esas perfecciones del universo. No es una postura emocional ... se trata de contemplar. Contemplar ciertas perfecciones en el universo. Entonces, el artista es como un espejo, que trata de representar eso. Eso no es común en Latinoamérica. O si estaba ahí latente, [Lavista] lo manifiesta por primera vez.]

⁸⁷ Elda Maceda, "Por fin, hoy despierta el 'brontosaurio musical,'" *El Universal*, October 26, 2000, <https://archivo.eluniversal.com.mx/cultura/7017.html>, accessed June 24, 2023.

⁸⁸ Currently, the principal organist for this instrument is Victor Urbán. For more about the organ's history and reconstruction, see "Órgano Monumental del Auditorio Nacional," Auditorio Nacional, Secretaría de Cultura, <http://www.auditorio.com.mx/oman/>, accessed June 24, 2023.

a performer. It is dedicated to organist Gustavo Delgado (b. 1962), who collaborated with Lavista in both the exploration of tone colors and the mechanics of notation. Delgado commented that the slow harmonic unfolding of the piece represented a challenge for the performer, as they must maintain a certain “tension” throughout the work (due to its slow tempo), and at the same time keep a good command of the different stops and manuals.⁸⁹ For nonorganist composers, writing for the “king of instruments,” the most complex of Western musical instruments, is a daunting task: mastering matters of orchestration and notation is quite a challenge. During their collaborative sessions, Delgado’s assistance was crucial in introducing Lavista to the outstanding timbre variety made possible by the organ’s multitude of stops. He showed Lavista different manuals and various registration combinations to obtain the desired sonic atmosphere. They were able to have collaborative sessions working with a Dutch organ located at the Palacio de Bellas Artes—a smaller instrument than that of the National Auditorium. Equally important was Delgado’s help in preparing the score for publication, since all matters of registration needed to be carefully notated. The score was published by Ediciones Mexicanas de Música in 2002.

In spite of Lavista’s distance from the Catholic Church, he continued to draw from Catholic genres in his compositions, and most of them alluded either to the musical material or the text of his *Missa Brevis*. In *Mater dolorosa*, for example, some of the Latin lines of the Stabat Mater and the Gloria appear above the organ’s staff. Lavista organized the rhythmic structure of this Adagio based on the text lines; he assigned the value of a quarter note to each syllable of the text. Example 6.21 shows the assigned rhythmic sequence following the text: a dotted half note (three-syllable

Example 6.21 Lavista, *Mater dolorosa*, beginning of second system, page 3.

Tpo. I
 (Domine Fili Unigenite Jesu Christe)

sempre pp

(,)

(Ped: - Flûte, Bourdon 8, Violoncelle 8)

⁸⁹ Gustavo Delgado, in discussion with the author, Xalapa, Veracruz, July 15, 2006.

word, “Do-mi-ne”), followed by a half note (two-syllable word, “Fi-li”), a whole note tied to a quarter note (five-syllable word, “U-ni-ge-ni-te”), a half note (two-syllable word, “Je-su”), and another half note (two-syllable word “Chris-te”).

Lavista places the lines of text only as a guide, and he indicates that they are not meant to be spoken or sung. Why would Lavista incorporate lines from two sacred texts, the Gloria and the Stabat Mater, in a piece to be performed in a venue used mostly for massive secular events? More intriguing are the choices he made in using only certain lines of such texts while omitting others. In an essay Lavista published in El Colegio Nacional’s 2001 *Memoria*, he explained in broad terms his view of the organ as an inherently religious instrument. For centuries, Lavista says, the organ has been “an essential part of Christian rites,” and as such, the instrument is the “depository of man’s religious spirit.” The sound of the instrument, therefore, “penetrates the deepest layers of the human soul and, along with the human voice, is one of the most ideal vehicles for religious music.”⁹⁰ Although in this essay Lavista did not elaborate on his selection of particular verses, this rhetorical explanation allows us to understand the piece as yet another opportunity for Lavista to carve out a space for spirituality, religion, and memory, and to build a bridge of communion between himself and the divine. Writing for the organ while using selected lines from sacred texts was his own way of practicing (a modernist) religion.

While in *Mater dolorosa* Lavista alludes to the text of the Ordinary of the Mass, he drew musical material directly from his *Missa Brevis* in *Cristo de San Juan de la Cruz* (Tropo para Salvador Dalí), a piece for instrumental ensemble he wrote in 2003–2004. Here, entire passages from the *Missa* are inserted into the instrumental piece in the manner of medieval tropes.⁹¹ In doing this, Lavista opened musical parentheses that interrupted the linear timeline of the instrumental piece by incorporating remembrances of the vocal piece. The past comes into the present and transforms the future. The way Lavista does this is very explicit. In the score, he indicates in boxes which section of the Mass he is borrowing material from. Even though Lavista was transposing choral music into purely instrumental terms, the music still reflects the gestures of the text. It is as if Lavista never stopped thinking about the text that was originally set with the musical lines. Something important to note is that, besides including portions from the Mass, Lavista incorporated fragments from *Lacrymosa* and *Responsorio*, making this work a summation of his religious music up to that point.

This instrumental piece was commissioned for the 53rd iteration of the Festival Internacional de Música y Danza de Granada, directed by Enrique Gámez. It was premiered by the Frankfurt-based Ensemble Modern during the summer of 2004. As

⁹⁰ Mario Lavista, “*Mater dolorosa* (Adagio para órgano),” in *Memoria de El Colegio Nacional 2001*, ed. Ramón Xirau (Mexico City: El Colegio Nacional, 2001), 191. [... ha sido, durante siglos, parte esencial de los ritos cristianos y el depositario del espíritu religioso del hombre. Su sonido penetra en las capas más profundas del alma humana y creo que es, junto con la voz, uno de los vehículos ideales de la música religiosa.]

⁹¹ The medieval term *trope* was used for music that consisted of additions to preexisting chants. The verb “to trope” refers to the process of adding another section to a plainchant.

noted in the previous chapter, Lavista composed the piece in honor of the centenary of the birth of Spanish visual artist Salvador Dalí and was inspired by Dalí's conversion to the Catholic faith in the 1950s, as portrayed in his 1951 painting *Cristo de San Juan de la Cruz*. Dalí's painting shows Christ crucified from an angle where he can be seen from above. The head is bowed down in such a way that we cannot see his face, and his body does not show any damage—it is impeccable, immaculate.⁹² Lavista's identification with the religious mysticism of the painting led him to choose it as the point of departure for his piece for chamber orchestra.

Dalí's painting is not the only intertextual reference found in Lavista's piece. The title he gave each of the three movements come from the *Oda a Salvador Dalí* written in 1926 by the Spanish poet Federico García Lorca (1898–1936): I. “Una rosa en el alto jardín” (A rose in the high garden); II. “El espejo redondo de la luna” (The moon's round mirror); III. “Siempre la rosa” (Always the rose). Choosing García Lorca's poetic lines as titles for music written in honor of Dalí exhibits, once more, the significant emphasis Lavista placed on relationships and collaborations. Moreover, it signals the bridges that he constantly built, which have been mentioned throughout this chapter. In this piece, Lavista pays homage not to a single individual, but to the friendship and alleged romance between Dalí and García Lorca. Celebrating collaboration and personal bonds was at the core of Lavista's output; he constantly addressed aspects of interpersonal relationships in his speeches, writings, and dedications of his works.

The first movement, “Una rosa en el alto jardín,” begins with a two-measure introduction that is strikingly similar to the introduction of *Lacrymosa* in terms of texture and harmony. The strings present a harmonic pedal of a perfect fifth played in natural harmonics. In contrast with *Lacrymosa*, the pedal is not held throughout but is played in rapid rhythmic figures by violin I and violoncello. The muted trombones enter with the same rhythmic figure that marked their entrance in *Lacrymosa*. At m. 3 the crotales along with the clarinets signal the entrance of melodic material from the Kyrie (see Example 6.22).

While presenting allusions to *Lacrymosa*, the movement continues by interpolating (troping) the Kyrie of the *Missa Brevis* and concludes with a section of contrasting texture labeled Cauda I, borrowed from Lavista's fourth string quartet *Sinfonías* (1996). This section explores diverse rhythmic motifs and presents a long canon between violin and viola (see Example 6.23). The movement concludes with a repetition of the opening material—a final reference to the motto of the Kyrie above the same harmonic pedal heard at the beginning of the piece.

In the introduction of the second movement, “El espejo redondo de la luna,” certain elements recall *Responsorio*: the use of tubular bells and bass drums, the triple meter, and the use of multiphonics in the bassoon (see Example 6.24 and compare it with Example 6.5). In this central movement, Lavista interpolates the section “Et

⁹² A digital reproduction of Dalí's *Cristo de San Juan de la Cruz* can be found here: <https://www.thedaliuniverse.com/es/cristo-de-san-juan-de-la-cruz-salvador-dali-pintura>, accessed July 15, 2023.

Example 6.22 Lavista, *Cristo de San Juan de la Cruz*, I. “Una rosa en el alto jardín,” mm. 1–3.

Adagio Religioso [$\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 42$]
Kyrie

The musical score is arranged in a standard orchestral format. The woodwinds (Flauta, Oboe, Clarinetes B♭ 1 & 2, Fagot) and strings (Corno F 1 & 2, Trombones 1 & 2, Violas, Violoncellos, Contrabajos) play a complex, rhythmic accompaniment. The strings feature a prominent plunger effect, indicated by the 'plunger' marking and the 'p' dynamic. The woodwinds and strings enter with a forte piano (*fp*) dynamic, with some parts marked as *cantabile*. The score includes various performance markings such as accents, slurs, and dynamic changes, reflecting the intricate texture of the piece.

incarnatus” of the *Missa Brevis*’s Credo. He respects the range, the individuality of the lines, and even the emphasis that had been placed on certain words of the original. For example, he retains the intimate texture that he used in the Credo of the Mass for the line “ex Maria Virgine,” where there was a voice crossing between Alto and Soprano, and Tenor and Bass (see Example 6.25 and compare it with Example 6.17).

Example 6.23 Lavista, *Cristo de San Juan de la Cruz*, I. “Una rosa en el alto jardín,” mm. 36–37.

The image displays a page of a musical score for a symphony orchestra. The staves are arranged vertically from top to bottom: Cl. 1, Cl. 2, Cor. 2, Tpt., C. T., Vln. I, Vln. II, Vla., Vc., and Cb. The music is in a minor key and features a complex rhythmic pattern. Key performance markings include *ppp* (pianississimo) and *pp* (pianissimo). Specific instructions for the strings include *arco sul pont. (scord.)* and *sempre pp e legato*. The score shows a melodic line in the strings and woodwinds, with some woodwinds playing a rhythmic pattern of eighth notes.

For the section drawn from the “crucifixus” line, Lavista uses trombone I, violoncello, and double basses to carry the emphatic Bb that was present in the Mass. Interestingly, the troping of that section of the Credo ends with the line “et sepultus est”—emphasizing the concept of Christ’s death and not his resurrection, recalling Christ’s crucifixion as portrayed in Dalí’s painting. The movement ends with a second Cauda that could be considered a derivative of the first; we find the same canonic procedure, this time introduced by the viola, in pizzicato and violin sul ponticello, with almost the same melodic material as Cauda I. The melodic line moves in small intervals and has a static nature because of its circular melody. At the end of Cauda II, Lavista incorporates another part of the Mass, the Benedictus, from the Sanctus. The insertion here gives the piece another degree of unity, presenting and repeating the main motto of the Mass on top of a harmonic pedal in the cellos and basses that recalls not only the Benedictus, but also the pedal from the introduction of both the *Lacrymosa* and the *Cristo*.

In the third and last movement, “Siempre la rosa,” Lavista tropes the *Missa*’s Agnus Dei. This time Lavista does not use another Cauda to finish the movement, nor does he end the movement with the last section of the Agnus Dei, as one might

Example 6.24 Lavista, *Cristo de San Juan de la Cruz*, II. “El espejo redondo de la luna,” mm. 1–8.

The musical score is for a full orchestra and includes parts for Oboe, Clarinets B \flat 1 and 2, Bassoon, Horns F 1 and 2, Trombone, Tubular Bells, Violins I and II, Viola, Violoncello, and Contrabass. The tempo is "Lento estatico" (♩ = ca. 44) and the mood is "Et incarnatus". The score features various dynamics such as *fpp*, *sf*, *f*, and *sfz*, along with performance instructions like "sord.", "sempre pp", and "f ma sempre delicato".

expect. Instead, he brings back the coda of *Lacrymosa*. In my view, he does this for several reasons: the functional purpose is to open up the intimate texture of the end of *Agnus Dei* III (as portrayed in the Mass) and to bring back the tensions and resolutions caused by the juxtaposition Eb–B \flat and E–A (see Example 6.26). But perhaps he also brings back the end of *Lacrymosa* to emphasize that memorial pieces are celebrations of artists he admired. In this sense, *Cristo de San Juan de la Cruz* echoes other religious pieces and calls to mind the multiple bridges of communion Lavista built through them. Here, he commemorates Dalí’s relationship with García Lorca by choosing the poet’s *Oda* to the visual artist. But he also borrows material from his own memorial pieces, and in doing so he pays homage once again to Raúl Lavista, Halffter, and Muench—his friends and mentors.

Example 6.25 Lavista, *Cristo de San Juan de la Cruz*, II. “El espejo redondo de la luna,” mm. 16–20.

poco più lento [$\text{♩} = \text{ca. } 36$]

Fl. *sempre pp*

Cl. I *sempre pp*

Cl. 2 *sempre pp*

Tbn. 1 *p*

Tbn. 2 *p* *pp*

B.

Crot. *p* with bow con arco

C. T. *p*

Vln. I *mf delicato* *p*

Vln. II *mf delicato*

Vla. *mf delicato* *p*

Vc. *mf delicato*

Cb. *mf delicato* *p*

Another successor of the *Missa Brevis* is Lavista’s *Stabat Mater*, composed in 2004–2005, for eight cellos and mixed chamber choir (SATB with three singers per part). The opportunity to write this work came after a commission Lavista received from Spanish conductor Elías Arizcuren to write a piece for his cello ensemble, Octeto Ibérico de Violonchelos. Adding a choral component was possible thanks

Example 6.26 Lavista, *Cristo de San Juan de la Cruz*, III. “Siempre la rosa,” mm. 69–76.

The musical score for Example 6.26, Lavista's "Siempre la rosa" (mm. 69–76), is a complex orchestral work. It features a full orchestra with parts for Flute (Fl.), Oboe (Ob.), Clarinet 1 (Cl. 1), Clarinet 2 (Cl. 2), Bassoon (Fgt.), Cor 1, Cor 2, Trumpet (Tpt.), Trombone 1 (Tbn. 1), Trombone 2 (Tbn. 2), Bassoon (B.), Contrabassoon (C. T.), Violin I (Vln. I), Violin II (Vln. II), Viola (Vla.), Violoncello (Vc.), and Contrabass (Cb.). The score includes dynamic markings such as *p*, *mf*, *mf dim.*, and *pp*, and performance instructions like "rallentando poco a poco" and "molto lungo". A "Tim-tam" drum is also indicated. The score is written in a single system with multiple staves.

to the conjunctive effort of the Institut Valencià de la Música (Valencian Musical Institute) and the Festival Internacional Cervantino.⁹³ The piece was premiered in Alicante, Spain, by Arizcuren’s ensemble and the chorus of the Generalitat Valenciana

⁹³ Both the Festival Internacional Cervantino and the Institut Valencià de la Música provided the finances for this commission.



Figure 6.6 Carmen-Helena Téllez directing Mario Lavista's *Stabat Mater* at the Art Institute of Chicago, 2010. From Téllez's personal archive. Courtesy of Carmen-Helena Téllez.

in September 2006, and it was recorded by Carmen-Helena Téllez and the Indiana University's Contemporary Vocal Ensemble in 2012 (see Figure 6.6).⁹⁴ In this piece, Lavista continued to explore certain late-medieval and early-Renaissance contrapuntal techniques, such as isorhythmic principles (the use of *talea* and *color*), imitative and canonic entrances in different permutations, the symbolic use of vocal registers, and the outlining of two main intervals: the perfect fifth and the minor third. The *Missa Brevis* motto also reappears, shaping the main melodic themes. Lavista weaves an exquisite texture of chromatic implications in the vocal parts and the cello's natural harmonics throughout, which reminds us of his string quartet *Reflejos de la noche*. Glimpses of other pieces also appear, such as *Cuaderno de viaje* and *Gargantúa*.

Throughout its history, the *Stabat Mater* has been used in the Roman liturgy as both a sequence and a hymn. The earliest copy of the text dates from the thirteenth century, and it is of Franciscan origin. In terms of its form, the poem contains twenty stanzas of three lines (tristiches) of eight, eight, and seven syllables following trochaic

⁹⁴ Lavista's *Missa Brevis* and *Stabat Mater* are included in the recording *Mario Lavista: Missa Brevis & Stabat Mater*, James MacMillan: *Sun-Dogs*, performed by Indiana University's Contemporary Vocal Ensemble directed by Carmen-Helena Téllez, IUMusic/LAMC, 2012, compact disc. This recording of the *Stabat Mater* was reissued as part of the album *Mario Lavista: Stabat Mater y otras obras sacras*, Tempus, 2015, compact disc.

tetrameter. The rhyme scheme of each pair of stanzas is aab ccb. As discussed earlier in the chapter, Lavista's use of Latin responds to a cosmopolitan universalist ideal and at the same time represents a way for him to insert his music into a particular lineage of Western European art music composers who have used Latin texts. Moreover, as he asserted, "in all the [sacred] music I've written I've used Latin, for I believe it's God's language."⁹⁵

When explaining his reasons for writing a *Stabat Mater*, Lavista stated: "from a compositional standpoint, the *Stabat* is a clear example of the fine and sharp tension that exists in sacred music between its overtly religious message and its artistic expression. Even Saint Augustine is not certain if the soul, when listening to a chorale, is comforted by faith, or by the sound itself. At times, that tension is resolved by the supremacy of the text, at others, by the music."⁹⁶ For Lavista, establishing an imaginary encounter between text and music configured a sonic space of mysterious borders. In the piece, these borders are delineated by waves of natural and artificial harmonics by the cellos that intermingle with imitative textures sung by the voices. The painful nature of the text—a meditation on the Virgin Mary's suffering during Christ's crucifixion—is therefore woven by both words and sounds.

Although traditional musical settings of the *Stabat Mater* are not preceded by monophonic chant, Lavista begins and ends the piece with a sequence for the Virgin taken from the *Liber usualis*, which Téllez suggested. In contrast with the austerity of the a cappella setting of his Mass Ordinary, Lavista's *Stabat Mater* presents a fuller texture and a warmer color, due to the presence of the cellos. Additionally, in contrast with other pieces based on religious subjects written by Lavista, the *Stabat Mater* presents itself as a grandiose architectonic edifice, as at times the voices and cellos reach intense sonorities generated by full chords in high volume. In this regard, the overall aesthetic of the *Stabat Mater* is much more theatrical than the austerity of the *Missa Brevis*. This theatrical dimension is also enhanced by the solo passages given to four singers throughout. In terms of its rhythmic quality, *Stabat Mater* is as rigorous as the *Missa Brevis* and equally demanding for the singers. Compared to the *Missa Brevis*, in Téllez's opinion, the *Stabat Mater* "is more lyrical, like evoking a later Renaissance."⁹⁷

The emotional charge of the piece is incessant; during its more than twenty minutes of duration, the listener is not given a moment's rest. Full of both vocal and instrumental pedals (with an effective use of circular bowing given to the lowest cello part), this introspective musical reflection of the anguish and pain a mother suffered

⁹⁵ Lavista, in Mares, "Inaugura el compositor." [En toda la música que he compuesto he utilizado el latín, ya que creo que Dios habla latín.]

⁹⁶ Mario Lavista, "Versiones del *Stabat Mater*," *Letras Libres*, August 31, 2005, <http://www.letraslibres.com/revista/artes-y-medios/versiones-del-stabat-mater>, accessed June 24, 2023. [Desde el punto de vista compositivo, el *Stabat* es un claro ejemplo de la fina y aguda tensión que hay en la música religiosa entre el mensaje propiamente religioso y la expresión artística. El mismísimo San Agustín no está del todo seguro de que el alma, al oír un coral, sea confortada por la fe o por la belleza del sonido. En ocasiones, la tensión se resuelve por la primacía del texto, en otras, por la música.]

⁹⁷ Téllez, discussion. [El *Stabat Mater* es más lírico, como evocando un renacimiento más tardío.]

for her son's brutal death is sublimely piercing. As Mexican composer Leonardo Coral comments, "The auditory experience when listening to Lavista's *Stabat Mater* is precisely that of the perception of having some sort of tapestry built on different layers of delicately woven colors. This musical tapestry is apparently static, but it contains an internal contrapuntal movement and contrasts of color and density that provoke two crucial climaxes."⁹⁸

In the first climax (mm. 143–183), Lavista superimposes two strophes, one of which is given to the upper and lower voices (Sopranos 1, 2, and 3, and Basses 1, 2, and 3), and the other to the tenors (Tenors 1, 2, and 3) in a highly polyphonic texture. These two superimposed strophes divided by voice range read as follows:

S1, S2, S3 + B1, B2, B3

*Pia, Mater, fons amoris
me sentire vim doloris
fac, ut tecu lugeam.*

Loving mother, fount of love
let me feel your pain
so that I may cry with you.

T1, T2, T3

*Pro peccatis suae gentis
vidit Jesu in tormentis,
et flagellis subditum*

For the sins of the world
she saw Jesus in torment
and subdued with whips.

The emphasis on the number three, which is already present in the structure of the poem's stanza, is also the result of Lavista's use of symbolic numerology. The number three, in Catholic dogma, represents the nature of a Trinitarian God. This numerical emphasis on three is not only present in this passage but, as Coral demonstrates in his analysis, it also permeates this work at various levels.⁹⁹

In terms of lyrical content, the superimposition of stanzas juxtaposes two different temporal realities. On one hand, told in first person, the first stanza invites us to experience the singer's desire to share Mary's pain, to empathize with her, to be like her in her pain. On the other, told in the third person, the second stanza reveals the ultimate purpose of Christ's death: human salvation through forgiveness of sin. Sopranos and Tenors, which share melodic contour by imitative counterpoint with slight variation, arrive at a resounding unison at the end of the first line of their respective stanzas, with the simultaneous singing of the words *amoris / gentis* (see Example 6.27). In

⁹⁸ Leonardo Coral, "Impresionismo, música medieval y técnicas extendidas en el *Stabat Mater* para coro y octeto de violonchelos de Mario Lavista," *Sonus Litterarum*, November 14, 2021, <https://sonuslitterarum.mx/impresionismo-musica-medieval-y-tecnicas-extendidas-en-el-stabat-mater-de-mario-lavista/>, accessed June 24, 2023. [La experiencia auditiva al escuchar el *Stabat Mater* de Lavista es precisamente la de la percepción de una especie de tapiz formado por diferentes capas de colores finamente tejidos. Este tapiz musical se mantiene aparentemente estático pero tiene movimiento contrapuntístico interno y contrastes de color y densidad que provocan dos puntos climáticos culminantes.]

⁹⁹ As Coral indicates, the piece asks for three singers per range and presents three tonal centers. He also mentions other instances of Lavista's symbolic use of the number three at various levels. See Coral, "Impresionismo, música medieval y técnicas extendidas."

Example 6.27 Lavista, *Stabat Mater*, mm. 143–51.

Deciso (♩ = ca. 76)

150

S. 1 Pi - a Ma - ter for - tu a - mo - ris

S. 2 Pi - a Ma - ter for - tu a - mo - ris

S. 3 Pi - a Ma - ter for - tu a - mo - ris

T. 1 Pro - pec - ca - tis su - ae gen - tis

T. 2 Pro - pec - ca - tis su - ae gen - tis

T. 3 Pro - pec - ca - tis su - ae gen - tis

B. 1 Pi - a Ma - ter

B. 2 Pi - a Ma - ter

B. 3 Pi - a Ma - ter

Vc. 1 ff

Vc. 2 ff

Vc. 3 ff

Vc. 4 ff

Vc. 5 ff

Vc. 6 mf

Vc. 7 mf

Vc. 8 mf

my subjective listening, this arrival announces the work's central message: a love for people.

As can be seen in Example 6.27, the nine vocal lines share the same melody with slight ornamental variations, a texture that, as Coral signals, could be described as heterophonic.¹⁰⁰ The presence of a single melody shared by nine different voices is illustrative of the unity of a single, central message: love. The opening word of the stanza given to the sopranos and basses, “Pia,” reflects the importance of the message. Lavista decides to use this text variation in contrast with many settings of the *Stabat Mater* by composers such as Josquin, Vivaldi, Pergolesi, Rossini, Verdi, and Pärt, who use the exclamation “Eja/Eia” as the first word of that stanza. Therefore, Lavista’s

¹⁰⁰ Coral, “Impresionismo, música medieval y técnicas extendidas.”

emphasis on “Loving Mother,” as opposed to “Oh, Mother,” could be interpreted as drawing attention to the devoted—and godly—nature of the mother. Directing a plea to her, a source of love, the poet asks to be allowed to share her pain. The extension of the word “Pia” by the three lower voices (B1, B2, B3) for a total of five measures grants this word even more prominence.

With a forceful passage marked *forte / fortissimo* and a vocal texture based on fourths and fifths, the piece reaches a second climax also marked by a superimposition of two strophes:

<i>Fac ut portem Christi mortem,</i>	Let me bear Christ's death
<i>passionis fac consortem,</i>	the fate of his passions
<i>et plagas recolere.</i>	and to commemorate his wounds.

<i>Fac me plagis vulnerari,</i>	Let me suffer the wounds
<i>cruce hac inebriari,</i>	inebriated by the cross
<i>ab amorem Filii.</i>	by love for your son.

Both stanzas share the same tone and the same plea; in this case, the poet asks the Virgin to share not her suffering and pain, but Christ's. From the twenty stanzas of the poem, this pair shares a focus on Christ's wounds, passion, and overall destiny. Coral characterizes this climax as a violent rupture, as it is the first time in the piece that the cellos play a whole section in real pitches, as opposed to the natural harmonics played until this moment. To him, the parallel movement in fourths and fifths resemble medieval organum.¹⁰¹ In this passage, voices and cellos alternate in a call and response manner, with the cellos forcefully holding a chord based on perfect fifths and thirds: C–G–B–D–F#–C#, the harmonic backbone of the piece. In Lavista's intervallic symbology, the perfect fifth symbolizes divinity, while the third represents humanity (see Example 6.28).

Lavista repeats the last pair of lines, “et plagas recolere / ab amorem Filii,” to close the vocal participation of the section. This repetition stresses the importance of the moment and emphasizes the piece's message. The word “recolere” could be translated as “to venerate or reflect upon,” however, this action is not *just* about remembering or commemorating; the Latin verb “recoló” in Catholic dogma means to relive. When a believer relives, there is a merging of the biblical past—in this case, Christ's crucifixion—and the present. The plea is utterly corporeal: the believer is asking to relive Christ's wounds (or to be wounded by them). In the performative dimension of the sacred ritual, these two different temporalities become one.¹⁰²

The juxtaposition of temporalities present in this commemoration is made musically possible by the superimposition of the two lines. In the line “ab amorem Filii,”

¹⁰¹ Coral, “Impresionismo, música medieval y técnicas extendidas.”

¹⁰² I want to extend my gratitude to musicologist Ileri Chávez-Bárceñas for her input in this matter.

Example 6.28 Lavista, *Stabat Mater*, mm. 291–300.

The image shows a page of a musical score for Example 6.28, Lavista's *Stabat Mater*, measures 291–300. The score is arranged in two systems. The first system contains the vocal parts: Soprano (S. 1), Alto (A. 1), Tenor (T. 1), and Bass (B. 1). The second system contains the string ensemble parts, numbered Vc. 1 through Vc. 8. The vocal parts have lyrics in Latin: 'et pla-gas re-cu-le-re', 'ab-amo-ni-fi-li', and 'ab-imo-ni-fi-li'. Dynamic markings include *f* (forte) and *pp* (pianissimo). The string parts are marked with *ff* (fortissimo) and feature rhythmic patterns with accents.

note the text variation Lavista uses (which Rossini also uses in his *Stabat Mater*): the phrase starts with the preposition “ab” instead of “ob,” which is most commonly used. While “ob” takes an accusative object (on account of, for the sake of), “ab” takes an ablative object and could be translated as by, from, origin, or departure. This slight text variation invites the listener to understand that the believer’s plea to be inflicted by Christ’s wounds has its origin in a love for Christ the Son. It is a love that demands not merely devotion of mind and soul but a total body subjugation, hence the repetition of the phrase “et plagas recolorere.” The fact that Lavista creates a climactic moment by emphasizing this corporeal plea in both text and music could be understood as signaling a central dogma in Catholicism: when the believer recalls or relives the pain of Christ’s crucifixion, he is also working out his own salvation. And reaching salvation is, at the same time, the ultimate climax of the Christian faith.¹⁰³

¹⁰³ Apart from my conversations with Chávez-Bárceñas, my understanding of Catholic dogma comes from my experience of having studied at a Catholic elementary school. Although I have a Christ-centered faith, I am not a practicing Catholic.

Praises and Supplications

Lavista continued to use Latin sacred texts to compose vocal music. One of his most frequently performed religious pieces, *Salmo* (2006–2007), is yet another lament, an elegy to the memory of composer and pianist Ramón Montes de Oca (1953–2006), one of Lavista’s former students and a very close family friend. A musician of great initiative, Montes de Oca founded a cycle of contemporary music within the Festival Internacional Cervantino, which he organized for twenty years. *Salmo* is written for soprano, four crotales (played by the singer), and double bass—a very unusual combination that was suggested by singer Lourdes Ambriz and her husband, bassist Luis Antonio Rojas, who commissioned the work and to whom it is dedicated. In this piece, Lavista sets to music the text of Psalm 150 (Latin Vulgate Bible) “Laudate Dominum,” which consists of a series of enunciations encouraging praise to God using myriad musical instruments.

Once again, Lavista decides to use the Latin version of this psalm because of its phonological potential and to convey a sense of ritual. Here, the idea of ritual is carried out not only through the text but also through the music. Because of the lack of a time signature, the voice seems to be moving freely. In this sense, the texture of the piece could be described as a long recitative over a slowly moving bass pedal. The initial indication in the score, *Come una plegaria* (which is also the opening indication in *Lamento*), suggests the character of the piece. What is written on the page is intended as a prayer, a supplication (see Example 6.29).

The exploration of extended vocal techniques, including nasal and throat effects, allows for a certain defamiliarization of the Latin text. For this piece, Lavista uses *scordatura* for the double bass, which is tuned as follows: Eb–A–D–Ab. This combination produces two perfect fourths and two augmented fourths separated by a semitone (or two perfect fifths separated by a tritone—a familiar sonority in Lavista’s oeuvre). The same intervallic content is also represented in the four crotales, assigned Bb–E–A–Eb, a perfect fifth above the tuning of the double bass. Throughout the piece, the double bass carries long drones that, by using circular movements of the

Example 6.29 Lavista, *Salmo*, beginning.

Example 6.29 shows the beginning of the musical score for *Salmo*. The score is for Soprano, 4 crotales, and Contrabajo (Double Bass). The Soprano part begins with the instruction "Come una plegaria" and a tempo marking of quarter note = ca. 88. The lyrics "Lau da te lau da te" are written under the vocal line. The 4 crotales part is marked "f" and the Contrabajo part is marked "fp". The Contrabajo part includes performance instructions: "poco ad. lib. comenzar sul pont. begin sul pont." and a bracketed note: "[Arco circular] continuo e flessibile [on the sul pont y sul tasto between sul pont. and sul tasto]".

bow (from *sul tasto* to *sul ponticello*), produce slight changes of timbre. The alternation between the intervals of perfect fifths and tritones provides the main harmonic tension of the piece.

Salmo reappears, albeit transformed, in a later piece, *Plegarias* (2009), for bassoon and electronics. In terms of pitch content, the bassoon melody is largely based on the soprano melody of *Salmo*. It is as if the instrument sings the text of Psalm 150, “Laudate Dominum in sanctis ejus” without using words. However, through the use of alternative fingering and other effects, the bassoon’s melody is distorted. The gamut of colors obtained by the instrument takes the *plegaria* (supplication) of the Psalm to a different realm. Furthermore, from the first section of *Plegarias*, the electronics include various subtle effects that highlight, on one hand, the meditative and religious quality of the work (long drones and resonant bells), and on the other, an alternative reality by introducing a sound motif that Lavista labels “birds/pájaros.”

Plegarias stands out in Lavista’s oeuvre as his only mixed piece (live instrumental performance combined with prerecorded tape). He had previously created a series of electronic works in the late 1960s and 1970s and returned to composing for that medium after a hiatus of forty years. This renewed interest might have come in part from the opportunity he had to work at the Centro Mexicano para la Música y Artes Sonoras (CMMAS), an academic space for sound and technology founded and directed by composer Rodrigo Sigal in 2006 in Morelia, Michoacán. *Plegarias* was commissioned for the occasion of CMMAS’s 2009 Festival Internacional de Música y Nuevas Tecnologías Visiones Sonoras.¹⁰⁴ Lavista wrote this piece in close collaboration with Wendy Holdaway—who had previously collaborated with him for *Responsorio*—and with CMMAS’s technical director, composer Francisco Colasanto. The process of making this piece took two years, and both composer and bassoonist would travel regularly to Morelia to work with Colasanto. Most of the sounds that constitute the electronic track were largely derived from Holdaway’s playing (see Figure 6.7). Using different filters and manipulating the sounds of the bassoon, Colasanto created the sonic variants that Lavista selected for the piece.

According to Holdaway, Lavista was greatly inspired by the sonic atmosphere of the building where the CMMAS is located while composing the piece. A building that was constructed at the end of the sixteenth century, the complex that was known as the Church and Convent of Our Lady of Carmen now functions as Morelia’s Casa de Cultura, which hosts the CMMAS in its second floor. During their residency at the CMMAS working on *Plegarias*, Lavista and Holdaway spent time inside the church, which still holds religious services. According to Holdaway, the entire complex is filled with doves that fly when the church bells ring, and the birds indicated in the score are a reference to the doves that live in that space.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ See VMZ, “Compone Mario Lavista obra electroacústica luego de 40 años,” *La Razón*, November 5, 2009, <https://www.razon.com.mx/cultura/compone-mario-lavista-obra-electroacustica-luego-de-40-anos/>, accessed June 24, 2023.

¹⁰⁵ Holdaway, discussion.



Figure 6.7 Wendy Holdaway, 2009. Courtesy of Lourdes Almeida.

Lavista revisited some of the symbolism present in his *Missa Brevis* in *Plegarias*. The piece's final section (*Molto lento*) introduces the central motto of the Mass (which also corresponds to the last section of *Salmo*: “*omnis spiritus laudet Dominum*”), but it adds two more voices to the electronics, presenting the motto in imitative polyphony. The use of a three-voice texture at the end of this piece brings back the notion of the Trinity, reminding the listener that the prayers are directed to a tripartite God (see Example 6.30).

Although separated by twenty years, the two pieces Lavista wrote for Holdaway—*Responsorio* and *Plegarias*—present significant similarities. First, the titles of both pieces are inspired by religious rituals. In addition to the centrality of the bassoon in both pieces, one also finds the presence of tubular bells. And while *Responsorio*'s rhythmic drive is punctuated by the bass drums, in *Plegarias* we also find a percussive three-beat pattern that punctuates the sections (in this case, however, the source of the sound is not a drum but the bassoon itself, electronically manipulated). This three-beat pattern is intentionally symbolic of the Trinity. Holdaway remarks that both pieces are significantly demanding for the performer at a physical level. However, she also points out that, while *Responsorio* as a chamber piece was conceived as music to accompany a procession that would allow a degree of *tempo* flexibility, *Plegarias* is much more difficult because of the rigidity of the electronic component. For that reason, Holdaway notes that *Plegarias* is built like a church building “with stone walls.”¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁶ Holdaway, discussion. [Está escrito como una misa en una iglesia. Con una estructura, como con paredes de piedra.]

Example 6.30 Lavista, *Plegarias*, beginning of the third system, page 4.

The image shows a musical score for two parts: Fagot (Bassoon) and Senidos electrónicos (Electronic Sounds). The tempo is marked 'Molto lento' with a metronome marking of ♩ = ca. 76. The score is divided into three measures with time stamps: 9'42'', 9'56'', and 10'04''. The Fagot part is marked 'p' (piano) and 'poco' (poco). The Senidos electrónicos part is marked 'p' (piano). The Fagot part features a melodic line with slurs and ties, while the Senidos electrónicos part features a rhythmic accompaniment with slurs and ties.

The long list of compositions Lavista devoted to religious subjects culminated with a Requiem, the Mass offered for repose of a soul transitioning to the spiritual realm. He wrote his massive *Requiem de Tlatelolco*, for orchestra and children's choir, in 2018 and, coincidentally, it was the last large-scale work he completed before his passing. The piece was commissioned by the Cultural Division of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), directed by writer Jorge Volpi, as part of a series of events programmed in commemoration of the fiftieth anniversary of the student movement of 1968.¹⁰⁷ When asked what his plan would be for this commission, Lavista responded: "I don't pretend to offer any sort of propaganda or political or social protest through this *Requiem*. I consider it important to write a piece in memory of the dead of Tlatelolco and, not only in their memory, but of all of Mexico's dead. What I mean to say is that, compared to our current situation, what happened in 1968 seems like a child's play."¹⁰⁸ The piece premiered on December 8, 2018, at UNAM's Sala Nezahualcóyotl and was performed by the Orquesta Filarmónica de la UNAM (OFUNAM), conducted by guest director Ronald Zollman, and the Niños y Jóvenes Cantores de la Facultad de Música de la UNAM, directed by Patricia Morales.

According to Zollman, Lavista's decision to use a children's choir was meant to symbolize the innocence of the victims who were mercilessly killed in Tlatelolco—a great number of whom were college students.¹⁰⁹ When he composed choral music that was intended to be performed as part of a religious ceremony (at least in principle), Lavista had a preference for pure, nonvibrato singing, characteristic of how he imagined medieval choirs sounded. For example, and as I discussed earlier in the chapter, he made sure that Téllez's choir would follow this vocal style when performing his

¹⁰⁷ For more about the 1968 student movement and subsequent massacre, see Chapter 2.

¹⁰⁸ Lavista, in "Programa 7. OFUNAM. Tercera Temporada 2018." [Yo no pretendo a través de este *Requiem* ofrecer una especie de panfleto o de una protesta política o social. A mí me parece mucho más importante escribir una obra a la memoria de los muertos en Tlatelolco y, en este momento, no solamente a ellos, sino a todos los muertos que hay en México. Es decir, comparado con lo que sucede ahora, parece un juego de niños el 68.]

¹⁰⁹ Ronald Zollman, in "Programa 7. OFUNAM. Tercera Temporada 2018."

Missa. The *Requiem de Tlatelolco* was not the first piece Lavista composed for children's choir and orchestra; in 2002, he wrote *Gargantúa*, a multisection secular work scored for orchestra, children's choir, and narrator.¹¹⁰

Based on scenes from the novels by French Renaissance author François Rabelais, adapted to modern French by Michèle and Jean Villatte, *Gargantúa* stands out in Lavista's catalogue in various ways. In addition to being one of his longest works and the only in which he uses a text in French—a language he was fluent in and for which he had a special fondness—it is Lavista's only piece that incorporates the role of a narrator. As I will shortly discuss, these two pieces, *Gargantúa* and *Requiem de Tlatelolco*, not only present similarities in instrumentation but are connected at an intertextual level.

In the Roman Catholic tradition, the Requiem Mass (*Missa pro defunctis*)—a celebration of the Eucharist in honor of the dead—is mentioned as early as the second century, and the tradition of polyphonic Requiem Mass settings dates back to the fifteenth century. For the past six centuries, therefore, this text has been consistently set to polyphonic music by myriad composers from around the world in a variety of both sacred and secular contexts.¹¹¹ Being quite a lengthy text, composers often omit certain parts of it for their musical settings. Other than two texts from the Ordinary of the Mass (Kyrie and Agnus Dei), the sections that Lavista incorporates for his Requiem come largely from the Dies irae sequence. *Requiem de Tlatelolco* has a total of seven sections meant to be played without interruption: Introit, Kyrie, Dies irae, Recordare, Confutatis, Lacrimosa, and Agnus Dei. Lavista departs from traditional settings by incorporating the monophonic sequence of the Requiem both to begin and to end the piece.¹¹²

While Lavista might not have intended this work to be “political,” the centrality he grants to the Dies irae (Days of Wrath) sequence carries a powerful message of justice. The piece's climax coincides precisely with the lines of the poem that announce the deserved fate of the wrongdoers: they will ultimately be judged and condemned to the fierce flames. The section Confutatis (*Molto Allegro*) begins with rapid string passages marked *forte*, and the two-part choir introduces the first lines of the text, “Confutatis maledictis / Flammis acribus addictis” (When the damned are confounded and consigned to keen flames), in canon at the unison. This music, however, was not newly composed; here Lavista quotes an entire passage from *Gargantúa*. What can

¹¹⁰ *Gargantúa* was envisioned as a French-Mexican production commissioned by Amiens Métropole. There are two versions of the work, one in French and one in Spanish. Both versions were premiered in France and in Mexico with the Orchestre de Picardie, directed by Edmon Colomer. A bilingual recording co-produced by the Orchestre de Picardie, Amiens Métropole, and Les Couleurs du Monde was released in 2003. This recording, which took place in Amiens, included the Niños y Jóvenes Cantores de la Facultad Nacional de Música (UNAM), and the Choeur d'enfants d'Étouvie-Diapason (Amiens). Philippe Murgier performed the role of narrator in the French version and Guillermo Sheridan in the Spanish. Aurelia Álvarez translated the French text into Spanish.

¹¹¹ The most common texts used in a Requiem Mass are Introit: Requiem aeternam, Kyrie, Gradual: Requiem aeternam, Tract: Absolve, Domine, Sequence: Dies irae, Offertory: Domine, Jesu Christe, Sanctus + Benedictus, Agnus Dei, Lux aeterna, Pie Jesu, Libera me, and In paradisum.

¹¹² When incorporating these monophonic chants in the *Missa Brevis*, *Stabat Mater*, and *Requiem de Tlatelolco*, Lavista consulted Téllez, who chose the appropriate sequences from the *Liber usualis*.

the listener make of Lavista's decision to incorporate a section from a piece conceptually centered on the vulgar deeds of a giant in a sacred piece? Although coming from a seemingly irreconcilable source, I argue that the presence of the quote from *Gargantúa* in *Requiem de Tlatelolco* clarifies the latter's central message: the souls of those who were mercilessly killed in Tlatelolco will find peace once the criminals are condemned to the flames and justice is achieved.

The passage from *Gargantúa* that Lavista incorporates in his *Requiem* comes from the piece's sixth movement, "Gargantua et les cloches de Notre-Dame." At this point in the story, Gargantua has just arrived in Paris. After being harassed by "foolish Parisians," he seeks refuge in the bell towers of the Notre Dame Cathedral. From up there, to repay their hospitality, he decides to give them "the wine" they deserve, in jest, *par ris*: "Then, smiling, he unbuttoned his fair fly and pissed on them so merrily that he drowned two hundred and sixty-one thousand four hundred and eighteen of them, without counting women and children."¹¹³ The image of people killed by a flood of urine at the bottom of a church is, to me, an ingenious realization of a hellish punishment of evildoers. While in *Gargantúa* the children repeatedly sing "par ris," (jokingly), when the same melody appears in the *Requiem* they sing, "oro" (I pray). Given that my listening was already informed by the incessant motif from *Gargantúa*, "par ris," I understand its appearance in the *Requiem* with the new text, "oro," as an internal joke that acts as an incessant plea for the floods of urine to eradicate the killers of the students at Tlatelolco.

Near the end of the piece, in a magical and eerie atmosphere granted by the delicate string harmonics sustained over heavenly harp and celesta arpeggios in the high register, the two-part children's choir sings, "Lamb of God, grant them everlasting rest." At this point, while the strings sustain a high F in natural harmonics played in *pp*, a solo trumpet is heard announcing the military tune, "Toque de silencio," followed by a second trumpet.¹¹⁴ The choir, now in unison, elevates the petition that opened the piece for the last time, punctuated by the tubular bells: "Grant them, oh Lord, eternal rest" (see Example 6.31). The unmistakable ascending perfect fourth that opens the well-known "Toque de silencio," in this context, brings the audience back to the motivation behind the concert. It had been fifty years from the horrific event that changed the history of Mexico forever. And this event is never to be forgotten. As Mexicans still chant, "dos de octubre no se olvida."

This solemn trumpet melody, which is performed daily in Mexican military spaces at twelve noon, is recognized as a sonic symbol meant to honor fallen heroes. After an entire year of commemorations of the 1968 student movement, during the performance of Lavista's *Requiem* that night in December 2018, the audience present at the

¹¹³ François Rabelais, adapted by Michèle and Jean Villatte, liner notes for *Mario Lavista: Gargantua*, Triton, 2003, 2 compact discs. (Co-production: Orchestre de Picardie—Amiens Métropole—Les Couleurs du Monde, 2003), n/p. English translation by José E. Alonso Minutti. [Alors, en souriant, il détacha sa belle braguette, et les compissa si allègrement qu'il en noya deux cent soixante et un mille quatre cent dix-huit, sans compter les femmes et les petits enfants.]

¹¹⁴ This is the same as "Taps," used in the U.S.-American military tradition.

Example 6.31 Lavista, *Requiem de Tlatelolco*, beginning of last page.

The musical score for the beginning of the last page of *Requiem de Tlatelolco* by Mario Lavista. The score is for Trompeta en C, Percusión, Campanas tribulares, Coro, Violin I, and Viola. It features a Gregorian chant sequence with "Molto lunga" and "Molto lento" markings. The lyrics "Re-qui-em a-me-nem in-ex-tremam a-me-nem" are written below the choir parts.

Sala Nezahualcóyotl had the opportunity to observe a minute of silence in remembrance of those who lost their lives while protesting for justice and freedom. The ten seconds of absolute silence that Zollman held after the last sound from the choir and orchestra faded, felt overwhelmingly charged with wordless sensations. The return to the monophonic chant that opened the piece granted the listeners a sense of circular time, as they were brought back to an endless plea for rest. Perhaps it was this powerful conclusion that led music critic Iván Martínez to write that Lavista's piece "shakes the doubt of the non-believers while reaffirming the faith of the religious."¹¹⁵

In a newspaper article devoted to the national premieres of concert music held in 2018, Martínez granted Lavista's *Requiem* a prominent place: "Intimate and profound, not only for its technical forcefulness but by the moral relevancy of its musical and religious message, the premiere that seeps more deeply in the national culture and spirit is Mario Lavista's *Requiem de Tlatelolco*."¹¹⁶ I wasn't present at the premiere, so my initial exposure to the piece came through OFUNAM's YouTube video. While listening to it in the middle of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic—a season in which

¹¹⁵ Iván Martínez, "Mario Lavista: Réquiem de Tlatelolco," Confabulario, *El Universal*, December 15, 2018, <https://confabulario.eluniversal.com.mx/mario-lavista-requiem-de-tlatelolco>, accessed June 24, 2023. [... artísticamente mueve a la indefinición a los no creyentes y reafirma la fe de los religiosos.]

¹¹⁶ Iván Martínez, "Música clásica: un año de estrenos," Confabulario, *El Universal*, December 22, 2018, <https://confabulario.eluniversal.com.mx/musica-clasica-2018>, accessed June 24, 2023. [Íntimo y profundo, no sólo por su contundencia técnica sino por la relevancia moral de su mensaje musical y religioso, el estreno que más hondo cala en el espíritu y la cultura nacionales, es el del *Réquiem de Tlatelolco* de Mario Lavista, comisionado por la OFUNAM.]

the “Toque de silencio” was performed daily in homage of those killed by the virus and in honor of the indefatigable health workers—I felt emotionally overwhelmed. The image of the children’s faces, as projected on my computer screen, and the sound of their pristine voices accompanied by the string harmonics coming through my speakers, stimulated in me a sense of unity, empathy, and belonging. Far from home and saddened by the many lives taken by the pandemic, I joined the children’s voices in spirit and elevated a silent prayer for eternal rest.

The fact that a Requiem was the last large-scale piece Lavista wrote might seem ominous to some. However, considering the many bridges Lavista built between the physical and spiritual worlds, this coincidence makes sense somehow. Toward the end of his life, and perhaps unknowingly, Lavista was able to deeply engage in the composition of a piece for the repose of souls, including his own. If we consider that he deeply believed music mirrored the universe and that his religious pieces opened spaces for communion with the spiritual realm, then we can understand Lavista’s *Requiem* to be a mirror into his own transition from being an earthly creature to what his daughter Claudia called *luz sonora*, sonic light.¹¹⁷

Composing music that contains a religious subject at its core remained a constant in Lavista’s work. By fostering a conceptual affinity with composers from the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, Lavista situated himself as part of a specific tradition and revealed something about his own vision of history: “Tradition for me is not a burden. For me it is something liberating because I choose my ancestors, I choose my grandparents. It is they who have influenced me.”¹¹⁸ The fact that Lavista chose his own musical ancestors provided him with the liberty to have both distance from and closeness to a particular tradition. Through memory and assimilation, those ancestors did not remain in the past but functioned as his contemporaries: “Josquin des Prez is as contemporary to me as Ligeti, and I have an extraordinary admiration for both.”¹¹⁹ While early in his career Lavista was very hesitant to use perfect fifths, fourths, or octaves because of their potentially tonal connotations, it was in his religious music that he felt liberated to use them as a result of the symbolic meaning attached to consonant intervals in medieval thought.

These statements invite further exploration into the composer’s self-positioning *outside* of a modernist paradigm. While modernism is a term that is hard to define, music scholars tend to agree on certain aspects that characterize modernism as a condition: a search for originality and newness, an intellectualization of music through

¹¹⁷ On Thursday, November 4, 2021, Mario Lavista passed away. That same day, his daughter posted an announcement on her Instagram account: “Amigos queridos, mi papito abrió sus maravillosas alas y emprendió el vuelo a lo más luminoso del universo... Ahora es luz sonora.” Claudia’s quote was included in the obituary published by *Sonus Litterarum*. See “Mario Lavista (1943-2021). Obituario,” *Sonus Litterarum*, November 4, 2021, <https://sonuslitterarum.mx/mario-lavista-1943-2021>, accessed June 24, 2023.

¹¹⁸ Lavista, discussion, January 10, 2005. [La tradición para mí no es algo que estés cargando, para mí es algo liberador, porque yo elijo a mis antecesoras, yo elijo a mis abuelos... Ellos son los que me han influido.]

¹¹⁹ Lavista, discussion, January 10, 2005. [Tan contemporáneo mío es Josquin des Prez como Ligeti, y a los dos les tengo una profunda admiración.]

an emphasis on formal elements, a provoking and rebellious spirit paired with an impulse for experimentation, and an engagement with high levels of difficult listening experiences that tend to alienate the general public. After discussing some of Lavista's religious pieces, we can observe that he challenged these tenets and situated himself outside of them; not only did he embrace music from the past in an intimate way, but he also challenged the concept of the autonomy of the work of art by using preexisting materials in new contexts. By insisting on using the technique of "troping" the *Missa Lavista* in subsequent religious pieces (including *Cristo de San Juan de la Cruz* and *Tropo para Sor Juana*), Lavista confronted this core paradigm rooted in modernist thinking.¹²⁰ On the other hand, by embracing transparent sonorities based largely on the use of perfect intervals (consonants), Lavista destabilized the urgency for novelty in the treatment of consonance/dissonance. His music stands elsewhere—in the realm of self-reflection and communion. It is in his religious pieces that he built bridges, spaces of communion with people from his past and present, and invited us to regard his music as a mirror of his own compositional trajectory.

¹²⁰ Richard Taruskin has indicated that using tropes challenges our expectations of a piece of music to stand on its own. See Richard Taruskin, *Music from the Earliest Notation to the Sixteenth Century*, vol. 1 of *The Oxford History of Western Music* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 64–67, <http://www.oxfordwesternmusic.com/view/Volume1/actrade-9780195384819-div1-002011.xml>, accessed June 24, 2023.

7

The Composer as Intellectual

Mario Lavista and El Colegio Nacional

Music is a way of living and relating to the world, it is a way of learning, a discipline that gives meaning to humankind and the world, a very important source of knowledge. But above all, music is the repository of humankind's memory.

—Mario Lavista¹

The year 2018 marked the seventy-fifth anniversary of El Colegio Nacional (National College). For this occasion, the institution and its members organized a series of commemorative events, both on site and throughout Mexico. Given my previous research on the institution, which began in 2012, I was commissioned by El Colegio Nacional via Mario Lavista to write a commemorative text providing a historical account of the musical activities carried out at the institution. Since El Colegio's foundation and during its eighty years of existence, the discipline of music has had a continuous presence in this intellectual circle. This is largely a result of the key role that Carlos Chávez played as one of El Colegio's founding members and as an arts administrator and cultural empresario. Chávez remained active in the institution until his death in 1978. He was succeeded by composer Eduardo Mata, who became a member in 1984 and remained active until his own premature death in 1995. Three years after Mata's death, Lavista became and remained an active member of El Colegio Nacional until his passing in November 2021. On April 4, 2022, El Colegio released an official online notification announcing that composer Gabriela Ortiz—one of Lavista's former students—had been elected as its newest member.

Intended for a general audience, the commissioned text I wrote for El Colegio's seventy-fifth anniversary was printed as a booklet and massively distributed to audiences at several concerts Lavista organized for the occasion.² My essay offered a

¹ Mario Lavista, in "La música da sentido; Mario Lavista," interview by Juan Carlos Talavera, *Excelsior*, September 12, 2016, <http://www.excelsior.com.mx/expresiones/2016/09/12/1116313>, accessed June 24, 2023. [La música es una manera de vivir y de relacionarse con el mundo, una forma de aprendizaje, una disciplina que le da sentido al hombre y al mundo, una fuente de conocimiento muy importante para el hombre. Pero, sobre todo, la música es la depositaria de la memoria del hombre.]

² It is my understanding that thousands of booklets were printed and distributed at the concerts. When I visited El Colegio Nacional in December 2018, a pile was kept in the entrance registration desk, free for visitors and passersby. The free distribution of this text served as a promotional strategy for the series of

general overview of the contributions Chávez, Mata, and Lavista made as members. The three musicians used the format of *conferencias–conciertos* (lecture–recitals) to institutionalize music as an intellectual activity and to advocate for the figure of the composer as intellectual. Given that my text was meant to have a celebratory tone, it was not the place to critically address this model or to expand on the central questions that have guided my inquiry into understanding the role music and musicians have had within the confines of El Colegio Nacional.

Since the beginning of my research on the place that music—as a field of knowledge—has had at El Colegio Nacional, I have been interested in examining the purpose and goal of the multiple events (concerts, lectures, colloquia, film screenings) that Chávez, Mata, and Lavista organized throughout the history of the institution. Who did they serve? What music and aesthetic ideologies were favored in these events? What repertoires were presented, and to whom did they cater? If the figure of the composer–intellectual was successfully established within this circle, how was this figure defined? What kind of intellectual activities have been carried out by the musicians who have belonged to this elite? In this chapter, I take these questions as a point of departure to examine the role composers have had in El Colegio Nacional. I explore how this institution has served as a platform for the promotion of contemporary music, which represents the greatest commitment these three composers equally embraced.

In the first part of this chapter, I offer a brief account of El Colegio's beginnings, addressing its purported goals and highlighting relevant aspects of its structure. As a founding member, Chávez had a truly significant role in securing a place for music within this institution and in establishing a pedagogical model that is still in use today. I provide an overview of Chávez's vast activities within El Colegio and follow it with a discussion of Mata's brief trajectory. In the second part, I address Lavista's activities and consider how his membership at El Colegio allowed him to fulfill a series of professional goals he set for himself. As a member, he was able to advocate for and promote twentieth- and twenty-first-century concert music (national and international), support performers mostly devoted to that repertoire (national, in particular), and cultivate his role as a public intellectual and educator. On-site archival research, as well as personal interviews and correspondence with some of El Colegio Nacional's members, staff, and performers, provide the groundwork for the chapter.³

concerts programmed by the Orquesta Filarmónica de la Ciudad de México (OFCM). See Niza Rivera, "La Filarmónica de la CDMX celebra con programa especial los 75 años de El Colegio Nacional," *Proceso*, January 25, 2018, <https://www.proceso.com.mx/cultura/2018/1/25/la-filarmonica-de-la-cdmx-celebra-con-programa-especial-los-75-anos-de-el-colegio-nacional-198888.html>, accessed June 24, 2023; also see Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, *La música en El Colegio Nacional* (Mexico City: El Colegio Nacional, 2018).

³ The Centro de Documentación of El Colegio Nacional was created in 2004 to function as an on-site archive and documentation center. Its staff is in charge of preserving audio and video documentation of all the events hosted at El Colegio, as well as filing all associated ephemera (including posters, program notes, and pamphlets). As this is a somewhat recent initiative, the documentation of events prior to 2004 is incomplete. This archive keeps most of the programs for the events Carlos Chávez organized, but only a handful of recordings of his lectures have been preserved.

Libertad por el saber: A Brief History of El Colegio Nacional

Adopting a somewhat positive stance, Antonio Gramsci once stated that “all men are intellectuals . . . but not all men have in society the function of intellectuals.”⁴ Any attempt to define the parameters that constitute an intellectual will necessarily have to consider the context in which that label is used. To Zygmunt Bauman, intellectuals “are constituted as a combined effect of mobilization and self-recruitment. . . . The line dividing ‘intellectuals’ and ‘non-intellectuals’ is drawn and redrawn by decisions to join in a particular mode of activity.”⁵ In Mexico, the formation of an intellectual class was associated with an ideological and political aim to modernize the country after the Revolution. To that end, the state supported the creation of institutions, periodicals, and award systems that provided the ideological and financial structure for developing an intellectual elite. Hence, El Colegio Nacional was founded in 1943 under the presidency of Manuel Ávila Camacho. At the core of its constitution lies the belief that the knowledge produced by its members (the intellectuals) will strengthen “the national consciousness.”⁶

The creation of El Colegio Nacional, as Ignacio Sánchez Prado and others have suggested, is the result of a long process of the institutionalization of culture emergent in Mexico during the 1920s and 1930s that provided a “definitive step towards the professionalization of the intellectual class of the country.”⁷ The primary objective of El Colegio Nacional has been to “disseminate and spread the philosophical, literary, and scientific culture of the Republic,”⁸ mostly through a series of free lectures given by its members to the general public. This open-access education represents the institution’s central mission and is also intended as the main difference between El Colegio and other academic institutions. As founding member Antonio Caso proudly announced during El Colegio’s inauguration ceremony in 1943, its unique

⁴ Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, ed. and trans. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1971), 140.

⁵ Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-Modernity and Intellectuals* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 2.

⁶ Original decree published on May 13, 1943: “Artículo 2º: El propósito general del Colegio será impartir, por hombres eminentes, enseñanzas que representen la sabiduría de la época; esforzándose porque el conocimiento especializado de cada una de las cátedras concorra, fundamentalmente, a fortalecer la conciencia de la nación, perpetuada en generaciones sucesivas de personas relevantes por su ciencia y virtudes.” Rosa Campos de la Rosa, coord., *El Colegio Nacional: 60 Años 1943–2003* (Mexico City: El Colegio Nacional, 2006), 13–14.

⁷ Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado, *Naciones intelectuales: Las fundaciones de la modernidad literaria mexicana (1917–1959)* (Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 2009), 144. [. . . instituciones de esta naturaleza significaron el paso definitivo hacia la profesionalización de la clase intelectual del país.]

⁸ Antonio Caso, “Libertad por el Saber,” in Campos de la Rosa, *El Colegio Nacional: 60 Años*, 71. [El H. Secretario de Educación Pública don Octavio Véjar Vázquez, con su cultura y entusiasmo, ha emprendido la obra de organizar, en nuestra sociedad, una escuela que se inspire en los propósitos del inigualado e inigualable Colegio de Francia y, dentro de la modestia de nuestra actividad, pretende que las nuevas cátedras, fundadas durante su ilustrada administración, sirvan para “difundir y divulgar la cultura filosófica, literaria y científica de la República.”]

educational offerings allow the general public to avoid the “indispensable set of formalities and essential circumstances . . . of regular academic courses.”⁹

The model and inspiration for the formation of El Colegio Nacional was the Collège de France, located in Paris. As Rick López states, “the country’s elite, like modernizers across the Americas, rebuilt their capital city in the image of Paris—the epitome of ‘universal’ civilization and modernity—and sent many of their finest artists, writers, and scientists to study in the City of Light.”¹⁰ In official ceremonies, members make sure to mention a correlation between El Colegio Nacional and the Collège de France. Declaring that “the history of French science and culture can be summarized in the list of professors of the Collège de France,”¹¹ during El Colegio’s fiftieth anniversary ceremony, Adolfo Martínez Palomo affirmed that “if the history of Mexican science and culture can be summarized . . . in the list of the members of El Colegio Nacional, then it will have had justified . . . its existence.”¹² Other members have made similar grandiose pronouncements about El Colegio’s relevance in efforts to defend the institution’s existence, assert its importance, and continue to promulgate its cultural value.

The similarities between El Colegio Nacional and its Parisian counterpart are more imaginary than real, however. While the Collège de France functions as a full-fledged research institution with laboratories operating in different interdisciplinary contexts, El Colegio Nacional is primarily a platform for disseminating its members’ scholarly and creative work. While the French institution’s library is regarded as one of the most prestigious of its kind in Europe, El Colegio’s library—which began operation only in 1994—serves primarily as a repository of publications by or about its members.¹³ Most importantly, these institutions operate within vastly different economic realities. As founding member Ignacio Chávez stated in 1968, El Colegio’s limited operations were a product of its stipulated regulations and resulted from the country’s financial constraints during the 1940s. In contrast to Mexico’s foremost research institution, the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), El Colegio would neither grant academic degrees nor be fully equipped for members to conduct research on site.

⁹ Caso, “Libertad por el Saber,” 70. [. . . la finalidad peculiar de El Colegio Nacional, estriba en ahorrar a los concurrentes a los cursos, el conjunto indispensable de formalidades y circunstancias imprescindibles en la sucesión rigurosa de los cursos regulares académicos.]

¹⁰ Rick A. López, *Crafting Mexico: Intellectuals, Artisans, and the State after the Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 4.

¹¹ Caso, “Libertad por el Saber,” 71. [. . . la historia de la ciencia y de la cultura francesa, se resume en la lista de profesores del Colegio de Francia.]

¹² Adolfo Martínez Palomo, “Sesión solemne de conmemoración de los 50 años de la fundación de El Colegio Nacional,” in Campos de la Rosa, *El Colegio Nacional: 60 Años*, 239. [Si la historia de la ciencia y la cultura mexicana se resume, en buena medida, en la lista de los miembros de El Colegio Nacional, esta casa habrá justificado, hasta hoy, su creación.]

¹³ The scope of materials held at El Colegio’s Biblioteca (library) is somewhat limited. The library mostly operates as a repository of the institution’s *Memorias* (annual reports) and works published by the members. On the second floor, the Biblioteca has a section devoted to special collections (Fondos Reservados) that include several file cabinets containing the personal documents of certain members—including Chávez and Lavista—that have yet to be catalogued. Access to these materials is extremely limited.



Figure 7.1 *Retrato de miembros fundadores* by Alberto Castro Leñero (oil on wood, 540 × 230 cm). Far left: Alfonso Caso. From left to right top: José Clemente Orozco, Diego Rivera, Isaac Ochoterena, Ignacio Chávez, Antonio Caso, Alfonso Reyes, Carlos Chávez; bottom: Manuel Uribe Troncoso Mariano Azuela, Ezequiel A. Chávez, Enrique González Martínez, Manuel Sandoval Vallarta, and José Vasconcelos. Far right: Ezequiel Ordóñez. Photo by Francisco Kochen. From El Colegio Nacional's Collection. D.R. © El Colegio Nacional, Luis González Obregón 23, Mexico City, 1994. Used by permission.

As stipulated in El Colegio's decree, the different disciplines of its members are meant to represent "all the ramifications of knowledge and culture." However, its founding members were significantly inclined toward the arts. Six of the fifteen founding members—chosen by the head of the Secretariat of Public Education at the time, Octavio Véjar Vázquez—were professionals working in artistic disciplines: novelist Mariano Azuela, composer Carlos Chávez, poets Enrique González Martínez and Alfonso Reyes, and visual artists José Clemente Orozco and Diego Rivera (see Figure 7.1).

A post held at El Colegio belongs to an individual and not to a particular discipline. The disciplines of the founding members are still represented today, and others have been gradually added, particularly from the natural sciences. According to member Miguel León Portilla, by 2003 a total of thirty-six disciplines were represented in the history of El Colegio, twenty-four of which belong to the natural sciences, eight to the social sciences, and four to the arts (literature, music, painting, and architecture).¹⁴

¹⁴ León Portilla listed the disciplines according to the following categories: "Ciencias duras: matemáticas, geología, geofísica, física, astrofísica, astronomía, ingeniería sísmica, físico-química, química, química

From its inception in 1943 up to the time of this book's writing, El Colegio has had a total of 110 members. The latest version of the institution's website groups all past and present members into four main categories: "Arts and letters" (31 members), "Biological and medical sciences" (23 members), "Exact sciences" (22 members), and "Social sciences and humanities" (34 members).¹⁵ Among the artistic disciplines (which includes architecture), music has been the only performing art represented at El Colegio. Artists working in dance, theater, and filmmaking are still absent at this institution.

The original number of members grew from fifteen to twenty within a year, in accordance with El Colegio's original decree. It was not until 1971, under the presidency of Luis Echeverría Álvarez, that the number was doubled to forty as a result of the "demographic growth of the Republic and particularly that of Mexico City, [and the] creation of new fields of study and specializations."¹⁶ As established in the 1971 decree, new memberships at El Colegio are made possible only when a current member either dies or resigns, and only after an internal nomination and evaluation. New members are chosen by the Council, which is formed by El Colegio's total membership. The selection process constitutes one of the Council's principal tasks.

During El Colegio's inauguration ceremony, Alejandro Gómez Arias declared: "To bring together the most prominent men of my homeland . . . is an act of unity that at the same time emanates optimism in the midst of darkness. . . . Not everything is dark and gray; there are superior men to whom Mexico is grateful for what they have given to and done for Mexico; it would seem that bringing them together has been a miracle."¹⁷ Based on this pronouncement, it would seem that one of the main responsibilities of El Colegio's Council has been to perpetuate the notion that individuals labeled as "intellectuals" constitute a class in itself—not just *any* class but a *superior* class. Needless to say, this class was originally intended to be a strictly a male dominion. According to the second clause of the 1943 decree, "The general purpose of El Colegio shall be for eminent *men* to impart teachings that represent the wisdom of

aplicada. Ciencias biomédicas: biología, bioquímica, biotecnología, fisiología, patología, biología celular, microbiología, gastroenterología, inmunología, hematología, medicina preventiva, ecología, psiquiatría. Ciencias sociales y humanidades: historia, historia del arte, arqueología, derecho, filosofía, demografía, pedagogía. Artes: literatura, música, pintura, arquitectura." See Campos de la Rosa, *El Colegio Nacional: 60 Años*, 7.

¹⁵ See "Nuestros Integrantes," *El Colegio Nacional*, <https://colnal.mx/nuestros-integrantes/>, accessed June 24, 2023.

¹⁶ Decree of 1971 reprinted in Campos de la Rosa, *El Colegio Nacional: 60 Años*, 17. [Que el crecimiento demográfico de la República y particularmente el de la ciudad de México, la proliferación de centros destinados a la difusión de la cultura y la creación de nuevas carreras y especialidades, han originado la necesidad de aumentar hasta cuarenta el número de sus miembros, lo que no sólo permitirá hacer más intensa su actividad académica, sino lograr una representación más completa en los diversos campos de la investigación humanística y artística.]

¹⁷ Alejandro Gómez Arias, "Discurso oficial (1943)," in Campos de la Rosa, *El Colegio Nacional: 60 Años*, 69. [Reunir a los hombres más destacados de mi patria . . . es un acto de unidad que al propio tiempo dimana optimismo en medio de las tinieblas. . . . No todo es oscuro ni gris; existen hombres superiores a quienes México tiene gratitud por lo que a México han dado y por lo que han hecho por México; parece que el reunir a estos hombres ha sido obra de milagro.]

the times.”¹⁸ Not surprisingly, during its first forty-two years of existence El Colegio was comprised solely of self-identified men. The institution admitted its first female member in 1985, art historian Beatriz de la Fuente, who remained the only woman until the inclusion of psychologist María Elena Medina Mora almost twenty years later (2006), followed by that of anthropologist Linda Rosa Manzanilla Naim in 2007. It was not until over a decade later that El Colegio admitted another woman, linguist Concepción Company Company, in 2017.

The lack of female members in El Colegio can be attributed to the myth that “exceptional women” are absent. Journalist and activist Lydia Cacho recalls hearing someone at an event say: “Well, there aren’t women in El Colegio Nacional because we haven’t found many deserving the merit.”¹⁹ This myth of absence is shared by various members and staff, as evidenced in casual conversations I have had with them during the past decade. The lack of female representation in El Colegio’s membership became a point of increased criticism in 2018—a response to the #MeToo movement that coincided with a series of events commemorating the institution’s seventy-fifth anniversary. Consequently, in the span of one year, El Colegio admitted biologist Julia Carabias Lillo and astronomer Susana Lizano Soberón, followed by virologist Susana López Charretón, admitted in 2021, and composer Gabriela Ortiz in 2022. These inclusions, however, have hardly begun to address the blatant gender imbalance of El Colegio’s membership. Of the thirty-four current members, only seven are women (20%), and among El Colegio Nacional’s total membership (110 members), the overall female constituency has been only 7%.²⁰

The federal government, through the Secretaría de Educación Pública (Secretariat of Public Education), provides each member a monthly allowance from mid-January to mid-November. In order to continue to receive the stipend during the winter break, members need to have fulfilled at least 75% of their projected annual lectures.²¹ Historically, this monthly allowance has been quite substantial. In the case of some members, it has allowed them the liberty to devote their time to carrying out research projects at universities or other research centers.²² While El Colegio’s decree stipulates that this monthly amount can only increase and never decrease, the administration of Andrés Manuel López Obrador—who took office on December 2, 2018—has brought about significant budget cuts. Current members have serious concern about

¹⁸ Decree of 1943, Article 2, reprinted in Campos de la Rosa, *El Colegio Nacional: 60 Años*, 13. Emphasis added. [El propósito general del Colegio será impartir, por hombres eminentes, enseñanzas que representen la sabiduría de la época.]

¹⁹ Lydia Cacho, “Un problema masculino... para ellas,” Opinión, *Aristegui Noticias*, May 30, 2016, <https://aristeguinoticias.com/3005/mexico/un-problema-masculino-para-ellas-articulo-de-lydia-cacho/>, accessed June 24, 2023. Also included in Lydia Cacho, *Ellos hablan: Testimonios de hombres, la relación con sus padres, el machismo y la violencia* (Mexico City: Grijalbo, 2018).

²⁰ The information provided here was last updated on June 24, 2023.

²¹ Decree of 1943, Article 11, reprinted in Campos de la Rosa, *El Colegio Nacional: 60 Años*, 16.

²² Elvia Elena Moreno Guízar, “Escorzo de la política cultural en México. Una mirada a través de los reconocimientos nacionales de ciencia y cultura (1940–2000)” (master’s thesis, Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Occidente, Jalisco, 2004), 65.

the significant decrease in the financial support El Colegio had previously granted them and about the future of the institution overall.

The Council of El Colegio holds monthly meetings during its ten-month calendar.²³ A different member is voted president of the Council every month in a rotating system that follows an alphabetical order. Some members carry out special tasks; for instance, specific members are in charge of editing the annual *Memoria* or managing the financial distribution of the budget. All activities at El Colegio are subject to a general budget granted by the federal government, and the allocation of funds is contingent on the Council's approval. In this sense, it is the state's funding of El Colegio that guarantees the professionalization of the Mexican intellectual class. As Sánchez Prado has pointed out, regardless of the inherent contradiction of being a state-funded institution of autonomous cultural practices, El Colegio has granted intellectuals a higher level of exposure to public spaces and has also exhibited a level of stability as an institutional platform that is unprecedented in the history of the country.²⁴

The intellectual activity inside the walls of El Colegio is limited to a number of lectures given by its members—a minimum of ten per calendar year.²⁵ Although members have complete liberty with regard to the topic and scope of their lectures, most follow a similar format consisting of a formal speech delivered in one of the rooms at El Colegio's building. In spite of being conceived as a collective of intellectuals, the institution functions mostly as a platform for individual enterprises. While there have been several multidisciplinary collaborative initiatives, most of the events are coordinated by a single member without fellow colleagues' participation or even attendance.

With some exceptions, the activities carried out by the members on site have limited exposure. The average pedestrian in downtown Mexico City, where the building of El Colegio is located, might not have any knowledge of the institution or its activities.²⁶ This contradicts one of the main objectives stipulated in El Colegio's rules: "In order to fulfill El Colegio's objectives, the members will aim to reach the greatest number of citizens from throughout the Mexican Republic and even abroad."²⁷ Although El Colegio does not release public records of the number of attendees, the partial documentation included in the institution's sixtieth anniversary commemorative publication shows that, while the number of lectures and presenters had increased, the number of attendees decreased.²⁸ In spite of the fact that El Colegio's visibility has

²³ My request to have access to the minutes of the Council's monthly meetings was denied.

²⁴ Sánchez Prado, *Naciones intelectuales*, 144–45.

²⁵ This requirement is waived, however, once the member turns 70 years old.

²⁶ During the extended periods during which I conducted research at El Colegio Nacional (summer 2012 and winter 2013/2014), it was surprising to note that none of the drivers of the taxis I rode in while in Mexico City knew where El Colegio Nacional was located or what type of institution it was.

²⁷ Internal Regulations, Section XI, reprinted in Campos de la Rosa, *El Colegio Nacional: 60 Años*, 31. [Para el cumplimiento del objetivo de El Colegio, los miembros buscarán abarcar el mayor número de ciudadanos, en todo el ámbito de la República Mexicana y aun en el extranjero, cuando la difusión cultural así lo amerite, previa autorización del Consejo.]

²⁸ Campos de la Rosa, *El Colegio Nacional: 60 Años*, 10. All visitors are required to show an ID and to sign the registration book upon entering El Colegio. Access to attendance records, however, was not

been enhanced by the advertisement of its activities on radio, TV, and, most recently, social media, the main communication platform for El Colegio has been its yearbook, titled *Memoria*. Each *Memoria* reports on all activities carried out at the institution, including official ceremonies, over a given year, and it also features a number of essays by the members. These substantial publications are distributed among the members and are also made available for consultation or purchase at El Colegio. In addition, the in-house editorial team regularly publishes material produced by members, which includes audio recordings and other multimedia work. These publications, however, are not widely distributed.

The first article of El Colegio's original decree defined the institution as representative of all schools of thought and ideologies, excluding "all interest pertaining to militant politics."²⁹ In a study published in the late 1980s, Roderic Ai Camp noted that El Colegio "has a decidedly establishment flavor, in the sense that most of its members are not outspoken critics of the government, or of contemporary social and economic problems in Mexico."³⁰ Although, by decree, the members are hindered from publicly adhering to an overtly political agenda, some have participated in political matters and have adamantly criticized governmental practices—especially in recent years.³¹ Since 1943 and up to Peña Nieto's administration (2012–2018), every Mexican president emphasized the "extraordinary" contributions of El Colegio's members to the nation's central issues, as illustrated by a pronouncement Peña Nieto made in 2014:

In addition to their professional merits, Mexico acknowledges in each of [El Colegio's members] their valuable contribution to the national transformation. Their reflections and proposals have been essential for understanding and addressing our country's challenges. With honesty and intellectual depth, they have promoted a serious, mature, and proactive discussion on central issues for the future of our country. As President, I value their extraordinary contribution to the arts, literature, sciences, and humanities.³²

granted during my research on this topic. Therefore, it is not possible for me to determine whether the number of attendees to the events has continued to decrease.

²⁹ Decree of 1943. Article 1, reprinted in Campos de la Rosa, *El Colegio Nacional: 60 Años*, 13. [...con estricta exclusión de todo interés ligado a la política militante.]

³⁰ Roderic Ai Camp, *Intellectuals and the State in Twentieth-Century Mexico* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985), 156.

³¹ Among the members who have publicly engaged in political criticism are Enrique Krauze, Diego Valadez, and José Ramón Cossío.

³² Enrique Peña Nieto, "Presidente Peña Nieto conmemora el 70 Aniversario del Colegio Nacional," Presidencia Enrique Peña Nieto, streamed live on October 28, 2013, YouTube video, 1:10:59, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eAZz-oE4h80&feature=share>, accessed June 24, 2023). [Además de sus méritos profesionales, México reconoce en cada uno de ellos su valiosa contribución a la transformación nacional. Sus reflexiones y propuestas han sido esenciales para la comprensión y atención de los desafíos de nuestro país. Con honestidad y profundidad intelectual han promovido una discusión seria, madura y propositiva en temas centrales para el futuro de nuestro país. Como Presidente, valoro su extraordinaria aportación a las artes, la literatura, las ciencias y las humanidades.]

In spite of Peña Nieto's enthusiasm, there is no substantial measure of the extent to which members of El Colegio have, as a collective, critically engaged in current political matters. This is the real limitation of *la libertad por el saber* (freedom of knowledge)—the slogan of El Colegio. As Sánchez Prado has pointed out, its apparent autonomy also helps to conceal any political rivalry between members on the left and those on the right.³³ This group of eminent intellectuals does not collectively engage in actions intended to generate political change. The economic stability afforded to its members, at least up to 2018, has prevented them from using El Colegio's resources to conduct serious examination and criticism of Mexican politics. The institution, therefore, is constrained by the fact that it was created, sustained, and ultimately restrained by the federal government. El Colegio's total economic dependency on the state has made its future uncertain, given the overt lack of support by the current administration of Andrés Manuel López Obrador.

While the members of El Colegio might be prevented from critically assessing political matters as members of the institution, they are free to exercise their pedagogical abilities. However, the extent to which their teachings have achieved the institution's primary goal cannot be fully measured. During El Colegio's twenty-fifth anniversary ceremony, founding member Ignacio Chávez raised the question: "What impact has [our teaching] had on the national culture? . . . I wouldn't know. . . . I only know . . . that its mission has been fulfilled with honor."³⁴ Interestingly, when providing an internal measure of its social impact, El Colegio highlights its musical endeavors' high levels of public engagement. For example, during El Colegio's fiftieth anniversary ceremony, Gabriela Guerrero Oliveros only mentioned the work of Octavio Paz and Carlos Chávez to address the ways members had contributed to national progress.³⁵

Carlos Chávez: Carving a Modernist Model

Among El Colegio Nacional's fifteen founding members, Carlos Chávez stands out as one of the most influential figures in the development and orientation of musical and cultural practices in Mexico.³⁶ Interested in securing a place for music within this circle, Chávez established the role of the composer as intellectual. In Chávez's model, the composer-intellectual follows a modernist ideology of musical progress, which

³³ Sánchez Prado, *Naciones intelectuales*, 140.

³⁴ Ignacio Chávez, "Discurso pronunciado en la ceremonia conmemorativa del 25 aniversario de la fundación de El Colegio Nacional," in Campos de la Rosa, *El Colegio Nacional: 60 Años*, 174. [¿Qué efecto ha tenido esta forma de enseñanza? ¿Qué impacto ha producido en la cultura nacional? . . . Yo no sabría decirlo. . . . Solo sé . . . que su misión ha sido cumplida con honor.]

³⁵ Gabriela Guerrero Oliveros, "Palabras de la diputada Gabriela Guerrero Oliveros del Partido Popular Socialista," in Campos de la Rosa, *El Colegio Nacional: 60 Años*, 268.

³⁶ A more developed version of this section devoted to Carlos Chávez's role in El Colegio Nacional was included in the volume *Carlos Chávez and His World*. See Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, "The Composer as Intellectual: Carlos Chávez and El Colegio Nacional," in *Carlos Chávez and His World*, ed. Leonora Saavedra (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2015), 273–94.

in turn serves as a support system for avant-garde practices. Eighty years later, the model he created is still operational. Chávez's successors have performed this role while guaranteeing state support for the creation and performance of Mexican contemporary concert music.

Chávez used El Colegio Nacional as a platform for cultivating a didactic modernity. He did so by institutionalizing the format of *conferencias–conciertos* (lecture–recitals) as a central pedagogical tool to enlighten the general public, and by incorporating a model of musical modernity aligned with a cutting-edge intellectuality. El Colegio's central mission resonated with Chávez's ongoing commitment to educating the people as a means to achieve social progress. If Chávez was to accomplish this mission, the central questions needed to be: What kind of music would adequately contribute to the education of the general public? And what topics would be suitable for establishing a particular type of musical intellectuality? Delineating the parameters of greatness in art was imperative for him, and the *conferencias–conciertos* became a useful platform from which to shape the musical practices he thought should be regarded as intellectual.

Chávez covered a great variety of topics within the subject of “classical music.” He believed Western art music was superior, following an evolutionary teleological perspective. In the context of his activities at El Colegio, he showed no interest in promoting any music outside this tradition.³⁷ What Chávez considered “great music” adhered to a very specific ideological frame, one that conveyed a modernist commitment to musical progress. The first major composer he discussed at El Colegio was Ludwig van Beethoven (1944).³⁸ Far from being an arbitrary selection, Chávez's emphasis on the Austro-German composer responded to a perceived need to set up a model for the “genius composer” whose arduous work is the result of an organicist compositional method. To Chávez, Beethoven symbolized the artist who endures and the solitary genius whose music enlightens. Using Beethoven as a metaphor allowed Chávez to configure the role of the composer–intellectual as a lonely and fiery soul within an institutionalized elite milieu.

It is not difficult to understand why Chávez would choose to focus on Beethoven as a model for the figure of composer as genius—a concept he perhaps equated with that of an “intellectual.” The rise of modernism in the later part of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth allowed for the figure of the genius composer, epitomized by Beethoven, to become the paradigm for understanding the role composers were expected to have in society. The modernist symbol of Beethoven allowed Chávez to frame his own role within this new intellectual circle. And once he established the

³⁷ Among the more than sixty events that Chávez organized at El Colegio from 1943 to 1976, only one attempted to venture outside the realm of “classical concert music.” Although this event was titled “El Jazz,” it consisted of a performance of the second trumpet concerto by French composer André Jolivet. This performance took place on August 17, 1966.

³⁸ Chávez's lecture of November 11, 1944, was titled “Beethoven.” Most likely, the lecture's content and scope might have derived from his previous essay, “Beethoven: Algunos apuntes,” published in *El Universal* on June 23, 1944.

model for the composer–intellectual within the mainstream lineage of Western art music composers, he proceeded to lay out the place of Mexican music within an international frame.

Starting in 1946, Chávez delivered a significant number of lectures intended to educate the general public about the production of art music in Mexico—a very specialized “Mexican music history.” Of the seventy lectures Chávez gave during his first decade at El Colegio (1943–1953), almost half (thirty-three) focused on this topic. Chávez’s choice to lecture on Mexican music was also the result of the prevailing political agenda in the country at the time that aimed to strengthen and define the notion of Mexicanness.³⁹ His inclusion of Mexican music within a cosmopolitan framework served this legitimizing purpose and contributed to the formation of historical narratives of Mexican music centered on “great masterworks” by “great (male) composers.”

Chávez also found in El Colegio a platform that could secure the necessary finances for the production and consumption of “contemporary music.”⁴⁰ Fully conscious of unwelcoming attitudes toward this repertoire, Chávez believed in the power of education to remedy the gap between general audiences and new music. From 1953 onward, Chávez programmed mostly post-1900 music and included regular performances of his own music—particularly works not associated with his nationalist or indigenist output.⁴¹ The works he selected, especially those from his European and U.S.-American counterparts, exerted significant influence on other Mexican composers. For example, according to Aurelio Tello, Chávez’s 1954 lecture on dodecaphony, which was followed by a program of works by Arnold Schoenberg, Alban Berg, and Anton Webern, generated a wider embrace of the twelve-tone method by “practically all young composers in Mexico.”⁴²

From the first series of recitals in 1953 to the last in 1976, Chávez organized a total of sixty-nine *conferencias-conciertos*, twenty-five of which were devoted solely to his music (a little over a third), while ten additional events included at least one of his works. This makes Chávez the composer whose work has been performed at El Colegio more than any other composer throughout the history of the institution. Eventually, the format of the *conferencia-concierto* became the perfect vehicle for Chávez to couple his own music with that of his international counterparts.

³⁹ According to Deborah Cohn, the period from the late 1940s to the 1960s “marked the height of national self-exploration in the form of the debate over *mexicanidad*” in which “a tightly-knit group of internationalizing intellectuals dominated cultural production through their monopoly of popular and elite media, seeking to legitimize a cosmopolitan definition of Mexican culture.” Deborah Cohn, “The Mexican Intelligentsia, 1950–1968: Cosmopolitanism, National Identity, and the State,” *Mexican Studies/Estudios Mexicanos* 21, no. 1 (2005): 142.

⁴⁰ For the purposes of this chapter, “contemporary music” should be understood as a constructed label representing music composed after 1900.

⁴¹ As Leonora Saavedra demonstrates, Chávez’s “process of constructing a unique style and persona was manifold, as it involved positioning himself vis-à-vis a number of different referents.” By programming music devoid of nationalist or indigenous associations at El Colegio, Chávez chose to provide a modernist reference for his Mexican audiences. Leonora Saavedra, “Carlos Chávez’s Polysemic Style: Constructing the National, Seeking the Cosmopolitan,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 68, no. 1 (2015): 142.

⁴² Aurelio Tello, “La creación musical en México durante el siglo XX,” in *La música en México: Panorama del siglo XX*, ed. Aurelio Tello (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, Conaculta, 2010), 514.

Being the only musician at El Colegio granted him complete power of decision in terms of repertoire and guest performers, and the lack of an admission fee meant he did not feel pressured to please a paying audience. Establishing the *conferencias-conciertos* as events focused on new music was also possible thanks to the substantial honoraria Chávez was able to secure for his guest performers. Through El Colegio's backing, Chávez was able to find yet another financial support system for Mexican performers—a responsibility he fully believed belonged to the state.

Although works by Latin American and U.S. contemporaries were often performed in Chávez's *conferencias-conciertos*, he rarely programmed works by younger composers. During a 1969 lecture titled "Avant-garde Composition in Mexico," Chávez concluded that among the younger generation of Mexican composers, only two had demonstrated a solid foundation, and therefore only they were worthy of national attention: Héctor Quintanar (1936–2013) and Eduardo Mata, both of whom had been his students at the National Music Conservatory's Taller de Composición.⁴³ Appropriately, at the end of his lecture, pianist María Teresa Rodríguez performed Mata's *Sonata para piano* (1960). This marked the only occasion Chávez programmed a piece by a young Mexican composer at El Colegio Nacional, hence strengthening the mentor–disciple relationship that characterized the configuration of this intellectual elite.⁴⁴ Furthermore, the fact that Chávez chose to program this piece at a time when Mata had largely abandoned composition to pursue his conducting career might also have strengthened the view of Mata as a potential composer–intellectual for being someone who was, in more than one way, following in his mentor's steps.⁴⁵

During the ceremony in honor of Chávez on May 11, 1981, Jaime García Terrés, then president of El Colegio's Council, focused his homage to Chávez on his extraordinary efforts as a cultural promoter. García Terrés felt compelled to explain that Chávez's devotion to the history of Western art music and his focus on Mexican music in the context of El Colegio's *conferencias-conciertos* responded to an ulterior motive: "Both fields of study converged in a unified goal: the consolidation of a *Mexican music*; the coming together of seeds capable to fructify in benefit of our country and of our future"⁴⁶ (emphasis added). In the eyes of this intellectual elite, Chávez had succeeded. He was able to configure what the goals of a composer–intellectual in a Mexican context should be: to adhere to modernist principles of progress, to establish

⁴³ Carlos Chávez, "Composición de vanguardia en México," audio transcription of lecture, El Colegio Nacional, Centro de Información, cat. No. 1359, August 14, 1969.

⁴⁴ Roderic Ai Camp, who spent more than three decades researching the processes behind the configuration of intellectual elites in Mexico, reported that nearly half of El Colegio's active members in the early 1980s were disciples of other members. See Camp, *Intellectuals and the State*, 156.

⁴⁵ Throughout his life, Mata was known as both composer and conductor. Much research still needs to be done on Mata's contributions to the Mexican music scene at home and abroad. See Gloria Carmona, *Eduardo Mata (1942–1995): Fuentes documentales* (Mexico City: Conaculta, 2001); and Verónica Flores, *Eduardo Mata a varias voces* (Mexico City: Conaculta, 2005).

⁴⁶ Jaime García Terrés, "Discurso de homenaje en memoria del Maestro Carlos Chávez," in *Memoria de El Colegio Nacional 1981*, ed. Andrés Cisneros Chávez (Mexico City: El Colegio Nacional, 1981), 109. [Es que ambos géneros de estudio convergían en una meta única: la consolidación de una música mexicana; el encuentro de semillas capaces de fructificar en provecho del país y de nuestro futuro.]

a place for Mexican music within a larger cosmopolitan frame of greatness, and to support the composition and performance of “new music.” García Terrés’s speech testifies to Chávez’s success in incorporating music as an intellectual discipline, and his goals were faithfully followed by the musicians who came after him.

Eduardo Mata’s Brief Tenure at El Colegio Nacional

After Chávez’s death in 1978, no musicians were inducted in El Colegio until 1984, when Mata was granted membership. By the early 1980s, Mata’s credentials as an internationally famous orchestra conductor (he led the Dallas Symphony Orchestra in the late 1970s and guest-conducted many other orchestras) would have been strong enough reason to earn him a nomination for membership. However, the fact that he was regarded as Chávez’s heir—Chávez had validated Mata by programming his music decades earlier—must have been a key factor for his admission into this intellectual elite. García Terrés made this clear in a speech given at Mata’s induction by recalling Chávez’s words from the early 1960s: “If Mata wanted, he could be the best prepared of my successors.”⁴⁷ In addition to having achieved national and international visibility as a composer, conductor, and promoter, Mata was already regarded by some as a public intellectual. Arts administrator Sergio Vela once stated that Mata “was a man with a great intellectual background. He was not the type of musician who concentrates all his energy on music.”⁴⁸

Given that Mata had a very active conducting schedule, his activities as a member of El Colegio during his decade-long tenure were quite limited. Like Chávez did before him, Mata provided a diagnosis of the state of contemporary art music in Mexico in his inaugural speech. In order to counteract its shortcomings, Mata deemed it imperative to promote the “great masters” so that the general public could then assume them as their own. Like Chávez, Mata was committed to the idea of the Western music canon and to the modernist imagery of the (male, white) genius composer. He faithfully adopted Chávez’s format of *conferencias-conciertos*, but during his tenure at El Colegio he only was able to coordinate four series.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Jaime García Terrés, “Respuesta al discurso de Eduardo Mata en el acto de su ingreso al Colegio Nacional, el jueves 9 de agosto de 1984,” in *Memoria de El Colegio Nacional 1984*, ed. Andrés Cisneros Chávez (Mexico City: El Colegio Nacional, 1984), 150.

⁴⁸ Sergio Vela, quoted in Flores, *Eduardo Mata a varias voces*, 171–72. [Eduardo era un hombre con una gran formación intelectual. No era el tipo de músico que concentra toda su energía en la música.]

⁴⁹ See Eduardo Mata, “Discurso de ingreso al Colegio Nacional el jueves 9 de agosto de 1984,” in Cisneros Chávez, *Memoria 1984*, 143–44. Mata’s series of *conferencias-conciertos* at El Colegio are as follows: “El intérprete musical en la segunda mitad del siglo XX” (1987), “Tres conciertos en homenaje a Carlos Chávez” (1988), “Tres gigantes de la música americana: Aaron Copland, Silvestre Revueltas y Julián Orbón” (1991), and “Concierto-conferencia: Homenaje a Carlos Chávez” (1994). This list does not include events he hosted outside of El Colegio.

It was not until three years after becoming a member that Mata gave his first series of three *conferencias–conciertos* (1987), held over three consecutive days: “The Music Performer in the Second Half of the 20th Century.”⁵⁰ Mata devoted these events to topics pertaining to historically informed performance practices of eighteenth-century music, and he programmed Giovanni Battista Pergolesi’s *Stabat Mater* and J. S. Bach’s Brandenburg Concerto no. 6. Like Chávez did before him, Mata invited some of the most remarkable musicians living in Mexico to perform at these events.

Mata dedicated a series of three *conferencias–conciertos* to Chávez the following year, 1988.⁵¹ For the third and last one, he programmed a concert of string quartets by living Mexican composers, performed by Cuarteto Latinoamericano. The inclusion of Lavista’s *Reflejos de la noche* marked the first time his music was heard at El Colegio.⁵² Mata’s programming of Lavista’s piece predicted the latter’s future membership in much the same way that Chávez’s programming of his *Sonata* foretold Mata’s membership. Appropriately, *Reflejos de la noche* was also performed during Lavista’s induction ceremony in 1998.⁵³

As part of El Colegio’s fiftieth anniversary celebrations, Mata conducted a concert performed by La Camerata and Tambuco in which Chávez’s *Toccata* for percussion instruments was performed. As seen in Figure 7.2, the distinguished guests included Carlos Salinas de Gortari, the president of Mexico at the time. Given Mata’s reduced activities at El Colegio, the disproportional predominance he gave to Chávez’s music in his events is noteworthy. In the only text Mata included in the *Memorias*, in 1994, he reinforced the vision of Chávez as “the greatest musician Mexico has produced.”⁵⁴ The label “musician” was meant to combine Chávez’s efforts as both conductor and composer, which resonated with Mata’s own trajectory. At this point in his career, Mata had already left his post as artistic director of the Dallas Symphony Orchestra and had expressed a desire to return to Mexico to devote more time to composition.⁵⁵ Unfortunately, those plans did not come to pass, as he was killed in a plane crash in January of the following year (1995). Even with such a limited presence at El Colegio Nacional, Mata successfully maintained the ideological system of modernist progress already outlined by Chávez and reinforced the institution’s validation of the kind of composer–intellectual he represented.

⁵⁰ The titles of the three events that constituted the series were: I. Las Disyuntivas; II. El intérprete ante la música del siglo XVIII (I); III. El intérprete ante la música del siglo XVIII (II). These events did not take place at El Colegio but at the Sala Hermilio Novelo of the Escuela Vida y Movimiento.

⁵¹ The first event was devoted to colonial vocal music and the second to Chávez’s piano music.

⁵² These three events were held at El Colegio Nacional’s Aula Magna on June 5, 6, and 7, 1988.

⁵³ The program for this concert also included pieces for string quartet by Federico Ibarra, Julio Estrada, Arturo Márquez, and Manuel Enríquez, all performed by Cuarteto Latinoamericano.

⁵⁴ Eduardo Mata, “Concierto-conferencia en homenaje a Carlos Chávez,” in *Memoria de El Colegio Nacional 1994*, ed. Ramón Xirau (Mexico City: El Colegio Nacional, 1994), 60. The event took place on October 25, 1994. The works Mata programmed for that night were *Energía* (1925), which Mata claimed anticipated Chávez’s theory of “no repetition,” the *Suite para doble cuarteto* (1947), written for Martha Graham’s ballet *Dark Meadow*, and *Xochipilli* (1940), written for the exhibition *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art* at the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

⁵⁵ Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, May 4, 2012.



Figure 7.2 Eduardo Mata conducting Carlos Chávez's *Toccata* at El Colegio Nacional's 50th Anniversary Ceremony. President Carlos Salinas de Gortari is seated at the center of the panel. D.R. © El Colegio Nacional, Luis González Obregón 23, Mexico City, 1993. From El Colegio Nacional's Collection. Used by permission.

Lavista's Intellectuality: Teaching, Promoting, Writing

In 1998, three years after Mata's death, Lavista was inducted as a member of El Colegio and was the only musician serving on its Council. By the time he was admitted, Lavista had already been accepted into the Academia de las Artes (1987),⁵⁶ had received a Guggenheim Fellowship (1987), and had obtained the Premio Nacional de Ciencias y Artes (1991).⁵⁷ Although Lavista's admission to El Colegio could be understood in part as the result of being Chávez's disciple, his nomination was also indebted to the mentorship he received early in his career from members of the literary

⁵⁶ The Academy of Arts was created following the presidential decree of Gustavo Díaz Ordaz in 1966. It consists of a group of up to thirty-five members organized in six sections: architecture, sculpture, art history and criticism, graphics, music, and painting. One of the Academy's founding members was Carlos Chávez.

⁵⁷ Awarded annually by the government, the Premio Nacional de Ciencias y Artes is considered the highest recognition granted to Mexican citizens for their contributions to either science, art, or technology. It was created following the presidential decree issued by Manuel Ávila Camacho in 1944. Only six composers had previously been granted this award: Manuel M. Ponce (1947), Candelario Huízar (1951), Carlos Chávez (1958), Blas Galindo (1964), Rodolfo Halffter (1976), and Manuel Enríquez (1983).

circle associated with Casa del Lago—especially from its director in the 1960s, writer Juan Vicente Melo.⁵⁸ Through Melo, Lavista became acquainted with other poets who would later become members of El Colegio, including José Emilio Pacheco, Jaime García Terrés, Octavio Paz, and Salvador Elizondo. Since early in Lavista's career, all of these poets had remained very close to Lavista (see Chapter 2).⁵⁹ In addition to his reputation as composer (and in contrast to Mata's career as a conductor), Lavista had attained national and international attention as a prolific writer and as the chief editor of the music journal *Pauta: Cuadernos de teoría y crítica musical* (see Chapter 4). Lavista's active involvement with literary circles and his avid writing activity for various platforms are some of the reasons why, according to Ruy Pérez Tamayo (1924–2022), a pathologist and a member of El Colegio, Lavista was “much more of a member of El Colegio than Mata himself, for Mata was primarily a conductor.”⁶⁰

In his inaugural speech, Lavista offered a brief examination of technical and aesthetic factors that gave shape to the panorama of Western art music during the twentieth century in order to contextualize his own compositional path (see Figure 7.3). After giving a preview of the multiple musical languages Western art music had adopted since the end of the nineteenth century, he stated his interest in exploring new timbres through the use of extended techniques in conventional instruments. In contrast to traditional historical narratives that solely center on the work of composers, here Lavista highlighted the fundamental contributions of the performers, whose virtuosity makes it possible for composers to imagine new sounds possibilities. As an example, he introduced two pieces that resulted from close collaboration with performers: *Reflejos de la noche*, a collaboration with Cuarteto Latinoamericano (see Chapter 4), and *Danza isorrítmica*, dedicated to the percussion ensemble Tambuco, “whose help was decisive during the writing process.”⁶¹

Lavista might have chosen these particular pieces to establish connections with his predecessors Chávez and Mata. On one hand, Mata had programmed *Reflejos de la noche* for a concert in homage to Chávez. On the other hand, *Danza isorrítmica* might have brought to memory Chávez's *Toccata*—another piece for percussion ensemble—which Mata had recently conducted during El Colegio's fiftieth anniversary ceremony. Appropriately, Lavista ended his inaugural speech paying homage to these two musicians who were once members of this selected group.

From the time of his admission and throughout his tenure at El Colegio, Lavista remained a very active member. From 1999 to 2019, Lavista organized 140 *conferencias-conciertos*, published sixty-six essays in the annual *Memorias*, and

⁵⁸ Lavista began teaching at Casa del Lago in place of Mata, who had recently left to conduct the Orquesta Sinfónica de Guadalajara (1966).

⁵⁹ Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, “Forging a Cosmopolitan Ideal: Mario Lavista's Early Music,” *Latin American Music Review* 35, no. 2 (Fall/Winter 2014): 169–96; and Luisa Vilar-Payá and Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, “Estrategias de diferenciación en la composición musical: Mario Lavista y el México de fines de los sesenta y comienzos de los setenta,” *Revista Argentina de Musicología* 12–13 (2012): 267–90.

⁶⁰ Ruy Pérez Tamayo, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, July 26, 2012.

⁶¹ Mario Lavista, *El lenguaje del músico* (Mexico City: El Colegio Nacional, 1999), 38.



Figure 7.3 Mario Lavista giving his inaugural speech at El Colegio Nacional. D.R. © El Colegio Nacional, Luis González Obregón 23, Mexico City, 1998. From El Colegio Nacional's Collection. Used by permission.

released about a dozen recordings with El Colegio's support. Although he did not program much of his own music for the events he organized, he was the first to publish some of his own scores for chamber and solo music in selected volumes of *Memorias*. Lavista regarded El Colegio as an extraordinary platform for presenting contemporary music that is not very well known in Mexico and have it performed by highly sought-after musicians. The *conferencias-conciertos* organized by Lavista can be grouped into four categories: (1) events devoted to the music of a single composer (or music written in homage of a single composer); (2) events in which a performer or an ensemble is the central focus; (3) events centered on particular topics; and (4) events devoted to the first three iterations of the Rodolfo Halffter Ibero-American Composition Award.⁶²

Most of the composers featured in Lavista's events from the first category (those devoted to the music of a single composer) were or have been active during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.⁶³ Not surprisingly, of a total of forty-three events in this category, Lavista dedicated eight to the music of his predecessor, Chávez. Apart

⁶² These concerts were only held during the years when Lavista acted as member of the selection committee for the composition prize.

⁶³ A chronological list of *conferencias-conciertos* organized by Lavista in El Colegio Nacional devoted to the music of a single composer (1999–2019) can be found on the companion website for this book.

from Chávez, the number of Mexican composers Lavista featured in these events was quite limited: Mexican-born Silvestre Revueltas, Mexican-naturalized Spanish-born Rodolfo Halffter, and U.S.-born Mexican-naturalized Conlon Nancarrow. Beethoven's prominence in the events is neither new nor surprising; Chávez had signaled Beethoven as a role model for the modernist ideology of the composer-genius-intellectual during his own tenure. It is also notable that, with the exception of Stefano Scodanibbio, Alberto Posadas, and G. F. Haas, all composers programmed in Lavista's events were born before him. There are two noticeable absences in the list of concerts devoted to a single composer: apart from the handful of Mexican composers, no other Latin American composers are represented, and, most notoriously, women composers are completely absent.

The total number of *conferencias-conciertos* that Lavista programmed to feature a performer or ensemble reveals his commitment to supporting performers—especially those devoted to new music. He firmly believed that the blossoming of compositional activity in Mexico was largely the result of the growing number of musicians committed to performing contemporary music.⁶⁴ As was to be expected, most of the musicians and groups that Lavista invited to perform at El Colegio are based in Mexico and are of Mexican origin. From over seventy *conferencias-conciertos* within this category, the chamber group that had the greatest number of appearances at the institution was Cuarteto Latinoamericano. In addition to this ensemble's remarkable international trajectory, the group remained close with Lavista from the 1980s until his death (see Figure 7.4).

Other groups that had recurrent appearances at El Colegio during Lavista's tenure are Quinteto de Alientos de la Ciudad de México, Sinfonietta Ventus, Tambuco, Ónix, Ensemble Cepromusic, and Cuarteto José White. Among the solo performers Lavista invited on various occasions are pianists María Teresa Rodríguez, Mauricio Náder, Jorge Federico Osorio, and Alberto Cruzprietto, violist Omar Hernández Hidalgo, flutists Asako Arai, Horacio Franco, and Alejandro Escuer, and clarinetist Fernando Domínguez.⁶⁵

Given that each member's projected budget must be approved by El Colegio's Council, it is not surprising that Lavista chose to program concerts that primarily featured solo and chamber music and worked within a manageable budget. On several occasions, however, external funding made it possible for Lavista to host ensembles from abroad, such as eight blackbird, BBC Singers, Aguavá New Music Studio, Ensemble Tempos Fugit, Notre Dame Vocale, and Trio d'Argent. Following Chávez's

⁶⁴ Mario Lavista, in "La verdadera dimensión de la música es sonido y tiempo, dice Mario Lavista," interview by Armando G. Tejeda, *La Jornada*, June 14, 2014, <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2014/06/14/cultura/a04n1cul>, accessed June 24, 2023. Tejeda reports Lavista as saying: "Tenemos una enorme cantidad de intérpretes que finalmente son contemporáneos de su música, por tanto, tenemos grupos y solistas que tocan la música contemporánea y naturalmente de los compositores del país."

⁶⁵ A chronological list of *conferencias-conciertos* organized by Mario Lavista in El Colegio Nacional programmed primarily to feature individual performers and/or chamber ensembles (1999–2019) can be found on the companion website of this book.



Figure 7.4 Cuarteto Latinoamericano performing Mario Lavista's *Reflejos de la noche* during the ceremony of Lavista's induction to El Colegio Nacional. From left to right: Saúl Bitrán, Arón Bitrán, Javier Montiel, and Álvaro Bitrán. D.R. © El Colegio Nacional, Luis González Obregón 23, Mexico City, 1998. From El Colegio Nacional's Collection. Used by permission.

model, Lavista was able to program international repertoires seldom performed in Mexico as well as host world premieres (see Figure 7.5).

These first two categories of events—those in homage of a single composer or featuring particular performers/ensembles—constitute the core of the events Lavista organized at El Colegio Nacional during his first two decades as member. Most of the events from the third category—those centered on selected topics—were in response to initiatives by El Colegio's Council to offer multidisciplinary and multi-day *encuentros* (gatherings) coordinated by several members. Some of these, co-organized by Lavista, are: “Pensar la vida” (2007), “Música y astronomía” (2008), “Determinismo y libre albedrío” (2012), “Mujeres en El Colegio Nacional” (2012), “Música y psicoanálisis” (2015), “Pensar la muerte” (2016), “Tiempos de revoluciones” (2017), and “1519: A quinientos años” (2019).

Of particular notoriety was the 2012 symposium “Mujeres en El Colegio Nacional,” co-organized by the only two female members at the time: María Elena Medina-Mora and Linda Rosa Manzanilla Naim. As part of this multidisciplinary event, Lavista organized an unprecedented concert featuring an all-female composer program. Right before the performance, Lavista and Medina-Mora moderated a panel with the three



Figure 7.5 Carmen-Helena Téllez conducting the Notre Dame Vocale at Iglesia Nuestra Señora del Pilar (former Convento La Enseñanza) during El Colegio Nacional’s event “Pensar la muerte.” D.R. © El Colegio Nacional, Luis González Obregón 23, Mexico City, 2016. From El Colegio Nacional’s Collection. Used by permission.

featured composers: Marcela Rodríguez (b. 1951), Ana Lara (b. 1959), and Gabriela Ortiz (b. 1964). I was able to attend this event, and I remember that, while the conversation touched on the challenges that women composers have faced in light of the gender biases of the male-centered field of “contemporary art music,” the three guests did not voice any significant concerns or admit to having been subjected to gender discrimination in their professional careers. While they discussed having faced certain difficulties, what surprised me was that none of them mentioned the blatant gender imbalance and gender disparity in the programming of music by female composers across the country. Neither of them pointed out the striking absence of women represented in prestigious societies, starting with El Colegio Nacional, but also including the Academia de las Artes, which by 2012 included no women working in the field of music.⁶⁶

Given that this event was the first and only occasion during which Lavista hosted a group of female Mexican composers and shared the stage with them to address the status of women composers in the country, the expectations were high. After listening to what Rodríguez, Lara, and Ortiz had to say, the audience might have gathered

⁶⁶ Composer Gabriela Ortiz would be nominated to the Academia de las Artes in 2014 and became an official member in 2019. Currently, she is the only female composer in the Academy.

that the gender dynamics in the field of concert music in Mexico are characterized by camaraderie and equal opportunity. However, multiple one-on-one conversations I have had with Mexican female composers over the years say otherwise. I expected Rodríguez, Lara, and Ortiz, three highly accomplished individuals, to address the hardships that female composers have faced and continue to face. Why did they choose not to?

The fact that two of them studied under Lavista and had benefited from his mentorship and support throughout their careers might have been sufficient reason not to instigate discord. Maybe they did not feel that the solemnity and perceived neutrality of El Colegio was an appropriate space for that type of conversation. I couldn't help but wonder if they were aware that they were making history: that evening in March 2012 marked the first and only time throughout El Colegio's existence that an entire music event was devoted to the work of female composers. Appropriately, the cohort of invited performers was also all women: cellists Iracema de Andrade and Natalia Pérez Turner, and flutist Mary Elizabeth Thomas. Even on such a promising occasion, the outcome of the event continued to obscure the gender disparity that is at the core of the many institutionalized artistic policies in Mexico. The patriarchal, sexist, and classist ideology under which El Colegio was founded and continues to operate has yet to be fully challenged.⁶⁷

Gabriela Ortiz's recent enrollement as a member of El Colegio opens up possibilities for change. Lavista initiated the letter in support of Ortiz's candidacy in 2020, and when his health began to deteriorate, Juan Villoro undertook the charge. That Ortiz's nomination was fully supported by El Colegio's Council reflects, on one hand, the institution's intention to address its gender imbalance. On the other hand, and most importantly, her nomination exemplifies the significant role that the *composer-intellectual* has gained in the institution. Like Chávez, Mata, and Lavista before her, Ortiz is mainly a composer. Her career, though multifaceted, has always focused on the production of music, and her remarkable national and international reputation is based on her creative work.

A close look into the repertoire Lavista programmed demonstrates a clear emphasis on new music (i.e., music from the twentieth and twenty-first centuries), particularly from Mexico. As Chávez did before him, Lavista helped secure a predominant place for contemporary compositional activity within El Colegio. In contrast to his predecessor, however, Lavista included a greater number of works written by composers younger than himself in the events he programmed. Among these composers are Federico Ibarra, Marcela Rodríguez, Javier Álvarez, Hilda Paredes, Gonzalo Macías, Ana Lara, María Granillo, Hébert Vázquez, Carlos Sánchez Gutiérrez, Gabriela Ortiz, Armando Luna, Juan Trigos, Georgina Derbez, Jorge Torres Sáenz,

⁶⁷ Although Lavista did not program the music of women composers often, he hosted a significant number of female performers, including María Teresa Rodríguez, Lourdes Ambriz, Wendy Holdaway, Asako Arai, Eva Zöllner, Mercedes Gómez, Janet Paulus, Lidia Tamayo, Cristina Valdés, Verónica Murúa, Haydée Schvartz, and Carmen-Helena Téllez.

Eugenio Toussaint, and Rodrigo Sigal. In addition to domestic music activity, El Colegio has been a major site for world premieres of work by Mexican and international authors. Among the foreign composers who premiered pieces in Lavista's events are Roberto Sierra, Michael Matthews, Alessandro Solbiati, Mark Applebaum, Brian Ferneyhough, Alberto Posadas, and Karin Rehnqvist. Lavista's commitment to promoting contemporary music in general and new music from Mexico in particular was a constant throughout his tenure as a member of El Colegio Nacional—a commitment both of his predecessors, Chávez and Mata, also shared.

According to physician Ruy Pérez Tamayo, who was a member of El Colegio Nacional for over three decades (1980–2022), El Colegio's Council never addresses political ideologies during their monthly meetings.⁶⁸ He also affirmed that when the Council discusses nominations of potential new members, the candidates' political ideologies or partisan affiliations are not considered. In Pérez Tamayo's view, El Colegio's membership represented a wide range of political inclinations, ranging from left-wing liberals to right-wing conservatives. The founding decree of El Colegio specifies that the institution cannot actively participate as such in political matters. But how realistic is it to expect political views to remain on the margins of this institution? Political protests have permeated the walls of El Colegio, and musical events have opened spaces for protest to arise.⁶⁹

Putting Things in Writing: El Colegio's *Memorias*

The primary channel for communicating the activities of El Colegio's members is the institution's annual *Memorias*. Apart from containing a detailed report of all activities throughout the calendar year, each of these yearbooks includes a number of texts written by the members, ranging from full-fledged specialized research articles to short opinion pieces on diverse matters. There is no restriction on the length, scope, and nature of the texts, and all members are invited to submit as many articles as they wish.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Ruy Pérez Tamayo, email message to author, October 7, 2012. At the time, Pérez Tamayo was Chair of the Department of Experimental Medicine at the National University (UNAM) School of Medicine of the General Hospital of Mexico.

⁶⁹ A concert in honor of John Cage performed on September 5, 2012, is an example. A kind of riot took place in the middle of the musical performance. Members of the audience loudly protested against the then newly elected president Enrique Peña Nieto. For more about this occasion, see Alonso-Minutti, *La música en El Colegio Nacional*, 30.

⁷⁰ Members of El Colegio's Council rotate the coordination and editorial tasks of the *Memorias*. However, this information has not always been included in the publication. I would like to thank Fernando Álvarez del Castillo, current Director of El Colegio's Centro de Documentación, for facilitating pertinent bibliographic information. The *Memorias* are available in some bookstores in Mexico City and are currently sold inexpensively at El Colegio's bookstore; however, their distribution is quite limited. Seen in this light, the intended audience for the *Memorias* is first and foremost the members of El Colegio themselves. Plans to make the *Memorias* available online have been in place for quite some time. Currently, there is no digital access to these publications.

Chávez, Mata, and Lavista contributed to the *Memorias* by including essays centered on various musical topics. Throughout his long tenure at El Colegio, Chávez published only a handful of essays.⁷¹ These texts allowed him to reinforce the establishment of music as an intellectual discipline and to initiate the formulation of the role of the composer as intellectual. As previously discussed, Chávez viewed the composer as an individual with extraordinary abilities; an intellectual whose creations should be regarded as “masterworks.” He begins his 1952 essay “Vivaldi-Bach” with a categorical definition of Vivaldi as “a star; a great inventor; a great enlightened man.”⁷² He describes Vivaldi’s compositional process as formalist—one focused primarily on a balance of form—and asserts that Vivaldi’s individuality is the result of his genius, which in turn makes him not a craftsman but an artist. This focus on form is also present in his essay “Arte americano,” in which Chávez affirms that individuals on the American continent should be regarded as heirs of Western culture as much as Europeans are. Hence, the search for originality in American art should not be sought in a “nationalism inspired by localism and limitation,” but in the universal search for the equilibrium of form.⁷³

Chávez’s modernist belief in musical progress was the foundation of his commitment to promoting certain kinds of new music. To that end, he quoted what Stravinsky had said to the Argentinean press while he lived in Buenos Aires: “We cannot speak a lyrical language or a pathetic language anymore. We must use a scientific language, a language of precision.”⁷⁴ Chávez, speaking to the implications of this quotation, stated that whether the listener liked this music was of no importance, for ultimately the historical value of this new scientific musical language could not be denied. The modernist flair of this statement is reminiscent of Milton Babbitt’s comments in his famous essay “Who Cares if You Listen?,” published just two years prior to Chávez’s essay. However, Chávez’s attitude toward his audience was much more inclusive than Babbitt’s, at least in principle. Finally, Chávez concluded that music has no intrinsic value. By closing his essay with this statement, the composer was conforming to El Colegio’s main ideological standard: *Libertad por el saber*, or freedom through knowledge, a goal that, at least in theory, is not meant just for the educated but makes knowledge accessible to *all*. Chávez believed the composer should never compromise his artistic integrity even when audiences disapproved, although he was in turn committed to educating the public in what he deemed great music.⁷⁵

⁷¹ The essays Chávez published in the *Memorias* are: “Vivaldi-Bach” (1952), “Arte americano” (1952), “Canto y melodía” (1954), “Dodecafonismo en México” (1954), “Pierre Boulez” (1960), and “Mis amigos poetas: Ramón López Velarde” (1973).

⁷² Carlos Chávez, “Vivaldi-Bach,” in *Memoria de El Colegio Nacional 1952*, ed. Andrés Cisneros Chávez (Mexico City: El Colegio Nacional, 1952), 183.

⁷³ Carlos Chávez, “Arte americano,” in Cisneros Chávez, *Memoria 1952*, 187–90. Chávez’s views on this topic resemble Lavista’s notion of “Mexican essence” (see Chapter 2).

⁷⁴ Carlos Chávez, “Pierre Boulez,” in *Memoria de El Colegio Nacional 1960*, ed. Andrés Cisneros Chávez (Mexico City: El Colegio Nacional, 1960), 66. [Ya no podemos hablar un lenguaje lírico ni un lenguaje patético. Debemos emplear un lenguaje científico, un lenguaje de precisión.]

⁷⁵ An example of Chávez’s belief is explored by David Brodbeck in his essay, “Music and the Marketplace: On the Backstory of Carlos Chávez’s Violin Concerto,” in Saavedra, *Carlos Chávez and His World*, 178–202.

The inaugural speeches of new members—included in later volumes of the *Memorias*—are statements in which members assert their place among the intellectual elite and give the other members (and the audience attending the ceremony) an overview of the state of affairs of the discipline they represent. As a founding member, Chávez did not have to make such a speech, but his successors did.

Mata began his inaugural speech by outlining what he understood to be his purpose as a member of El Colegio: “By definition, my work here will be outreach, both informative and inevitably critical.”⁷⁶ In his view, given the “lack of a musicological school in the country,” the composers were left with the task of engaging in critical debates about musical topics.⁷⁷ Gladly accepting this challenge, Mata announced that he would offer an analysis of the state of contemporary musical composition. He continued by providing a brief—and quite denigrating—historical overview of Mexican music. While exalting Western European traditions (German, in particular), Mata derided Mexican music as devoid of “originality.” Adamantly, he stated that Mexico lacked a cultivated musical tradition.⁷⁸ In his pessimistic account, he regarded the emergence of Chávez and Revueltas as a miracle, as they interrupted history with their originality. It was through Chávez and Revueltas that Mexican music finally could be granted a “naturalization certificate” to enter the world of contemporary Western culture.⁷⁹

Confirming Chávez’s relevance in this historical account of Mexican music is somewhat expected given Mata’s audience. But the pairing of Chávez with Revueltas was a bold move, as Revueltas’s music had a limited presence in El Colegio. (During his tenure at the institution, Chávez only programmed Revueltas’s music once—*Ocho por radio*, in 1958.) In his narrative, therefore, Mata emphasized the need to devote scholarly attention to the works of “our two great musicians.” This attention would only be possible through educational reform that could place classical music at the center and not merely as a subculture for the initiated. Classical music, according to Mata, should be upheld as a common heritage and as one of the glories of human civilization. He believed that it was only through achieving massive dissemination of the music of the “great masters” that people could assume them as their own.⁸⁰ As a

⁷⁶ Mata, “Discurso de ingreso,” 133. [... por definición, mi labor aquí tendrá que ser de divulgación, informativa e inevitablemente crítica.]

⁷⁷ Mata blatantly denies the existence of Mexican music scholars and therefore, asserts that it is the duty of composers to fill the void. Mata, “Discurso de ingreso,” 133. This disdain for musicologists (or music scholars in general) is subsequently reproduced by poet Jaime García Terrés in his response to Mata’s speech: “[E]l sitio que Eduardo Mata, con toda dignidad y pascaliano espíritu de finura, llega a ocupar aquí no habría sido cubierto por un escueto musicólogo.” García Terres, “Respuesta al discurso de Eduardo Mata,” in Cisneros Chávez, *Memoria 1984*, 148.

⁷⁸ Mata, “Discurso de ingreso,” 137.

⁷⁹ Mata, “Discurso de ingreso,” 139. [Con su existencia adquiere nuestra música seria, carta de naturalización en el concierto de la cultura occidental contemporánea.]

⁸⁰ Mata, “Discurso de ingreso,” 141. In his own words: “La noción de que la gran música es un patrimonio común de la humanidad y una de las glorias de nuestra civilización, solo puede fijarse mediante la difusión masiva de los grandes maestros, para que el pueblo los asuma como propios.”

member of El Colegio, Mata considered his main role to be exposing “the people” to the music of the great masters (a selected group of male composers).

In spite of the self-imposed challenge Mata set for himself as promoter of the “great masters” of Mexican music (Chávez and Revueltas) to the general public, his conducting career abroad prevented him from fulfilling his goals. As previously discussed, during his decade-long tenure at El Colegio, Mata coordinated only ten *conferencias-conciertos* at the institution, and a close look at his programming shows that he probably intended for his events to follow a historical progression. Apart from his inaugural speech, Mata only published one text in the *Memorias*: an essay he read at an event celebrating El Colegio Nacional’s fiftieth anniversary in October 1994.⁸¹ Written as an homage to Carlos Chávez, this is another laudatory text. Mata recounted Chávez’s compositional trajectory and offered contextual and descriptive information for the pieces later performed in the program: *Energía* (1925), *Suite para cuarteto doble* (1947), and *Xochipilli* (1940).

In contrast with the small number of essays both Chávez and Mata published in the *Memorias*, Lavista’s large contribution of texts is noteworthy.⁸² His essays can be grouped in three different categories: the first and largest group consists of the texts Lavista read during his *conferencias-conciertos*. These essays have a didactic tone and highlight musical observations, analytic considerations, or the historical context of the repertoire about to be performed. The second group includes texts that Lavista wrote for special occasions, such as album launch events (not necessarily of his music) or liner notes he was invited to write. The last group is made up of short program notes for a handful of scores Lavista published in the *Memorias*. These include *Cuaderno de viaje*, for violoncello (*Memoria* 1998), *Natarayah*, for guitar (*Memoria* 1999), *Suite en cinco partes*, for string quartet (*Memoria* 2000), *Mater dolorosa*, for organ (*Memoria* 2001), and *Tres miniaturas*, for guitar (*Memoria* 2002).

Lavista’s essays are brief and are meant for a general audience, especially music lovers (*melómanos*). His texts could be compared to Chávez’s insofar as they share a common goal: the outreach and promotion of concert music. Lavista compiled several of these essays in an edited volume titled *Cuaderno de música 1*, published by El Colegio in 2013.⁸³ This collection of seventeen short texts gives the reader a glimpse into some of Lavista’s passions, and in his own words, it reflects his “phobias and musical tastes.”⁸⁴ Right before his passing, Lavista was preparing a second volume, *Cuaderno de música 2*. It was published posthumously in 2022.

In some of the texts compiled in *Cuaderno de música 1*, Lavista pays homage to composers he admires—Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, John Cage, and Conlon

⁸¹ This event also served as a pre-inaugural ceremony for El Colegio’s main hall, the Aula Magna.

⁸² A chronological list of texts written by Lavista included in the annual *Memorias* (1999–2015) can be found in the companion website for this book.

⁸³ The volume *Cuaderno de música 1* was reissued in 2016.

⁸⁴ Mario Lavista, in “Mario Lavista busca su propio lenguaje con *Cuaderno de música 1*,” interview by Huemanzin Rodríguez, *Noticias de El Colegio Nacional*, September 12, 2016, <http://colnal.mx/news/mario-lavista-busca-su-propio-lenguaje-con-cuaderno-de-musica-1>, accessed June 24, 2023.

Nancarrow, or to individual pieces such as Claude Debussy's *La Mer* and Arnold Schoenberg's *Pierrot lunaire*. In one text he offers a brief historical overview of the *Stabat Mater* as a musical genre. As discussed in Chapter 6, the exploration of religious subjects was a constant in Lavista's compositional career. This collection also includes texts that Lavista wrote for memorable occasions, such as his inaugural speech as a new member of El Colegio Nacional, titled "El lenguaje del músico," and his response to his friend, visual artist Arnaldo Coen's 2010 inaugural speech as a new member of the Academia de las Artes, titled "El sonido y lo visible."⁸⁵

The counterpart to Lavista's celebratory essays was a series of texts in which he adopted a critical and sarcastic tone. For example, in his essay "La cueva de Alí Babá" Lavista critiqued the Sociedad de Autores y Compositores de México (SACM), a non-profit organization that protects authors' rights by collecting royalties on behalf of its members.⁸⁶ Lavista described the society as one of the greatest disgraces of the nation and critically challenged the presumed democracy of its organizational apparatus. He also denounced the corruption, inefficiency, and impunity of Roberto Cantoral García (1935–2010), former chair of SACM's Board of Directors.

Lavista again adopts a judgmental tone in his essay "Los tres tenores y medio, rebajados a dos y medio." There he harshly critiques a 2005 concert by the Tres Tenores (minus Pavarotti) and Alejandro Fernández at the Parque Fundidora in the city of Monterrey. "We are witnessing not a musical event," writes Lavista, "but a market phenomenon common to our contemporary society which privileges certain values and behaviors driven by power and money."⁸⁷ For Lavista, the attendance of the president of Mexico at the time, Vicente Fox, at this concert was a concerning situation. Here, as in a few of his other essays, Lavista addressed the government's decreasing support of the "high arts," particularly since 2000, when Fox's term as president began. "In this world of business and transactions," Lavista wrote, "art music of our time is becoming more and more marginalized and forgotten, isolated by a market whose products are governed by the law of supply and demand."⁸⁸ This essay reflected his concern for the future of concert music, which in his view, was in danger of being erased by the market. His critique of performers who crossed over genres—from "classical" to "popular" and vice versa—was also unwavering. To him, those lines should never be crossed.⁸⁹

⁸⁵ Given their close friendship, Coen's entrance to the Academia de las Artes was, to Lavista, a truly celebratory occasion. For more on their early collaboration, see Chapter 3.

⁸⁶ The organization was directed by singer-songwriter Armando Manzanero from 2011 and until his death in 2022.

⁸⁷ Mario Lavista, "Los tres tenores y medio, rebajados a dos y medio," in *Cuaderno de música 1* (Mexico City: El Colegio Nacional, 2013), 123. [En el caso de los Tres Tenores, no estamos ante un hecho musical, sino ante un fenómeno de mercado típico de la sociedad contemporánea en la que privan ciertos comportamientos y valores referidos casi exclusivamente al poder y al dinero.]

⁸⁸ Lavista, "Los tres tenores," 123. [En este mundo de la transacción y los negocios el arte musical de nuestro tiempo se encuentra cada vez más arrinconado y olvidado, aislado por un mercado cuyos productos se rigen por la ley de la oferta y la demanda.]

⁸⁹ Lavista, "Los tres tenores," 123. [En el campo de la interpretación ... las fronteras entre la música clásica y la popular, entre la clásica y la comercial, ya no existen, han sido borradas.]

In his essay “¿De qué vive un compositor?” (How Does a Composer Make a Living?), included in *Memoria* 2003, Lavista offered his views on the state of current cultural policy and provided a pragmatic overview of the economic situation of Mexican composers living in Mexico. According to Lavista, composers could not make a living from composition because their product was not subject to market laws. The activity of music composition, he wrote, had nothing to do with the market and everything to do with intrinsic aspects: musical language, musical form, and the like.⁹⁰ In his view, it should be the government’s responsibility to provide funding to sustain artistic activities.⁹¹ Bemoaning the Fox administration’s decreased support for the arts, Lavista stated: “It seems to me that there is an overall disdain for intelligence and spirit, for the world of art and culture by the ‘government of change.’ It would seem that ignorance has arrived and is here to stay. We are witnessing the disappearance of the cultural policies that have always distinguished the Mexican state.”⁹² Lavista lamented that, while the country was entering into a new phase, that of “el gobierno del cambio,” this change was accompanied by reduced economic support for artistic endeavors. In Lavista’s words: “One has the impression that the government of change does not know what to do with cultural affairs, as it believes that culture should have an economic function. The fact that cultural affairs function to give men and the world meaning is of little importance to this government.”⁹³

Lavista continued to voice complaints about *el gobierno del cambio* during the twelve years of rule by the Partido de Acción Nacional (PAN). These critiques appeared in press interviews but not in published essays. This was also true when the Partido Revolucionario Institucional (PRI) returned to power in 2012 with Peña Nieto. Although Lavista complained about Peña Nieto’s poor cultural politics, he did not publish any text about it. It should be noted that the presidents from both parties—PRI and PAN—visited El Colegio Nacional and maintained, to a certain degree, amicable relationships with its members. During the first seventy-five years of its existence, El Colegio enjoyed uninterrupted support by each president in turn. This would drastically change in 2018, when Andrés Manuel López Obrador (AMLO),

⁹⁰ Mario Lavista, “¿De qué vive un compositor?,” in *Memoria de El Colegio Nacional 2003*, ed. Ramón Xirau (Mexico City: El Colegio Nacional, 2003), 155–56.

⁹¹ Governmental funding of the arts in Mexico has caused a wide centralization and control of resources for cultural and artistic production, which in turn has also had negative effects. Ignacio Sánchez Prado notes that “[p]roponents consider that only through public financing can culture thrive in a country where audiences do not always have the economic capacity or educational levels to sustain cultural activity. In turn, detractors contend that this subsidy masks the underlying problems: the lack of substantial audiences due to the ruinous state of public education in Mexico and the use of resources to subsidize a cultural bourgeoisie at the expense of sectors with greater economic need.” See Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado, “Mexican Literature in the Neoliberal Era,” in *A History of Mexican Literature*, ed. Ignacio M. Sánchez Prado, Anna M. Nogar, and José Ramón Ruisánchez Serra (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 366.

⁹² Lavista, “¿De qué vive un compositor?,” 154. [Me parece que hay en todo esto un desprecio de parte del gobierno del cambio por la inteligencia y el espíritu, por el mundo del arte y de la cultura. Tal parece que la ignorancia llegó para quedarse. Estamos asistiendo a la desaparición de la política cultural que distinguió siempre al Estado mexicano.]

⁹³ Lavista, “¿De qué vive un compositor?,” 154. [Se tiene la impresión de que el gobierno del cambio no sabe qué hacer con la cultura, cree que debe servir para algo en términos económicos, le parece poca cosa que solo sirva para darle sentido al hombre y al mundo.]

founder of the political party Movimiento de Regeneración Nacional (MORENA), came to power.

The decrease in financial support and the multiple cuts to the budget allocated to the arts had already characterized previous PRIAN (the unified PRI and PAN parties) administrations—from Ernesto Zedillo (1994–2000) to Peña Nieto. López Obrador’s austerity measures, however, were unprecedented and have had drastic repercussions for El Colegio’s operations. There were multiple staff layoffs in 2019, and, at the end of 2019, stipends for members were significantly reduced.⁹⁴ Although there was great anticipation for the first left-wing president in over three decades, López Obrador’s administration has been particularly hostile toward the arts. According to Rafael Lemus, López Obrador regards artists as “one of the most harmful elites that the government should fight.”⁹⁵ He has jeopardized the continuation of state-funded art scholarships, such as those given by the Fondo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes (National Fund for Culture and Arts, FONCA) and the Sistema Nacional de Creadores de Arte (National System of Art Creators, SNCA). López Obrador’s austerity plan has affected not only the arts but also the sciences.⁹⁶ As historian Enrique Krauze remarks, “[López Obrador] doesn’t believe in institutions. . . . He believes in himself.”⁹⁷ His threat to eliminate FONCA has provoked artists from various disciplines to react. In April 2020—shortly before the COVID-19 pandemic dominated all news outlets—artists had begun to come together to publicly demand that AMLO revise his austerity plan.⁹⁸

After eighty years of uninterrupted activity, the future of El Colegio is as uncertain as ever, and the institution is working with an almost nonexistent budget. This is due in part to the current administration’s austerity politics and disdain for cultural and artistic institutions, but also to the historic economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Even before the advent of COVID-19, which caused El Colegio to suspend all in-person activities, López Obrador’s budgetary cuts had already significantly limited the institution’s operations. Since the beginning of his presidency, López Obrador has been loudly criticized by some members of El Colegio and other intellectuals.

⁹⁴ In a conversation with Lavista at the beginning of 2020, he reported that in December 2019, El Colegio’s members received only 25% of their regular stipend. Mario Lavista, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, January 14, 2020.

⁹⁵ Rafael Lemus, “AMLO contra la cultura,” *Opinión, The New York Times*, September 16, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/es/2019/09/16/espanol/opinion/cultura-lopez-obrador.html>, accessed July 15, 2022. Lemus reports: “En más de una ocasión él y algunos de sus allegados se han empeñado en representar a los creadores como una más de las dañosas élites que el gobierno debe combatir: consentida y privilegiada, dependiente de las becas y del subsidio público, apenas productiva.”

⁹⁶ Lizzie Wade, “Mexico’s New President Shocks Scientists with Budget Cuts and Disparaging Remarks,” *Science*, July 23, 2019, <https://www.sciencemag.org/news/2019/07/mexico-s-new-president-shocks-scientists-budget-cuts-and-disparaging-remarks>, accessed June 24, 2023.

⁹⁷ Jude Webber, “López Obrador Takes on Mexico’s Institutions,” *Financial Times*, July 29, 2019, <https://www.ft.com/content/69bf2628-b1e1-11e9-bec9-fdcab53d6959>, accessed June 24, 2023.

⁹⁸ In April 18, 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic was on the rise, *Letras Libres* published a lengthy opinion piece that included concerns by individual members of the literary community. César Arístides, Rafael Aviña, María Baranda, et al., “Adiós al Fonca tal y como lo conocemos,” *Letras Libres*, April 18, 2020, <https://www.letraslibres.com/mexico/cultura/adios-al-fonca-tal-y-como-lo-conocemos>, accessed June 24, 2023.

Up to our last conversations, Lavista expressed serious consternation about the anti-intellectual culture promoted by López Obrador's administration and about the future of El Colegio Nacional. He felt very disillusioned with the president's lack of financial support for the arts and culture. López Obrador's austerity plans had widespread repercussions, even affecting Lavista's own financial stability. To make up for this financial constraint, he took a teaching position at the Universidad Panamericana, a private Catholic university.⁹⁹

Educational Value, Educational Reach

During El Colegio's history, the role of the composer as intellectual has remained largely unchanged. The concerts, public talks, and published texts by Chávez, Mata, and Lavista promoted a modernist ideology that still operates as a curatorial parameter of national and foreign contemporary music. Lavista argued that music—as both a performance art and an intellectual activity—should be supported by national programs and should not be subject to the whims of individual politicians. Hence, he regarded El Colegio as *the* place that possessed both the platform and the finances to fulfill that duty. He lamented the lack of representation of dance, theater, and cinema in El Colegio's membership and criticized the institution's gender imbalance.¹⁰⁰

The trajectory of musical activities at El Colegio Nacional, though limited to the Western art tradition, has been noteworthy in the exposure it has provided for contemporary repertoires. Thanks to Chávez, Mata, and Lavista, concerts of unknown or little performed repertoires of contemporary art music have been offered free of charge. In their role as members of El Colegio's Council, the three of them helped place the stature of music at the level of other intellectual disciplines represented at this institution. For eighty years, the figure of the composer as an intellectual committed to the promotion and performance of new music has remained almost completely intact.

As the epigraph to this chapter indicates, Lavista believed music was a source of knowledge that gave meaning to the world, for music holds the memory of humankind.¹⁰¹ Driven by this premise, Lavista utilized the *conferencias-conciertos* as a didactic platform to explore music as an epistemology. What becomes clear after closely examining Lavista's activities is that, in his view, the Western European art tradition—and more specifically modernist contemporary music—was the repertoire that best

⁹⁹ Having to seek out work opportunities to supplement his income at the end of his life was, understandably, very difficult for Lavista. In the last in-person conversation I had with him, at the beginning of 2020, he expressed: "En este punto en mi vida, yo ya no quiero dar más clases. Llevo 50 años dando clases. Pero lo voy a tener que hacer, no hay de otra." Lavista, discussion, January 14, 2020.

¹⁰⁰ Yet, the first musician Lavista nominated for membership to El Colegio Nacional was Javier Álvarez (1956–2023)—one of his former students and another male composer. He promoted Álvarez's nomination for three years, but the Council did not support it. If the Council had approved the nomination, Álvarez would not have filled the gender vacuum Lavista criticized.

¹⁰¹ Lavista, "La música da sentido."

conveyed this epistemic potential. While elitist, his commitment is based on an urgent need to support the activity of concert music composition, a field with a precarious financial status and an uncertain future.

Throughout his career, Lavista was an educator. He began teaching in the National Conservatory of Music in 1969, when he was twenty-six years old and he did not stop until his death. His main subjects were music analysis (which mostly focused on twentieth-century music) and music composition. Teaching gave him much pleasure, and he looked forward to his classes every week. I had an opportunity to sit in on one of his classes at the Conservatory in the spring of 2012. The subject of discussion that day was Alban Berg's *Lyric Suite*. With his relaxed demeanor, his teaching style was most appealing. At the same time, he was very thorough and allowed his students plenty of time for discussion. In contrast to his relaxed approach at the Conservatory, Lavista's lectures at El Colegio were much more formal inasmuch as the rigidity of the Aula Magna's layout and the overall solemnity of each *conferencia-concierto* made audience participation difficult.

Despite this limitation, from my experience attending Lavista's events at El Colegio, the audience seemed to be quite satisfied with the setting. At times, audience members raised questions or comments immediately after lectures (and before concerts). In an enthusiastic note about Lavista, journalist Eduardo Mejía wrote: "It is not necessary to attend his classes to be his student: his essays . . . his keynotes, the lectures that precede the concerts he regularly offers at El Colegio Nacional, make the audience think that listening to music is something necessary and joyful because Lavista transmits his passion, his love for good music."¹⁰²

The primary purpose of El Colegio's existence as specified in its constitution is to educate the Mexican people—as per its slogan, *Libertad por el saber*. To what extent has this central mission been accomplished? Most of the institution's activities take place in the capital, Mexico City. Could we therefore conclude that the intended audiences for El Colegio's offerings are the inhabitants of the capital, the so-called *chilangos*? During the multiple times I conducted archival research or visited El Colegio's library from 2012 to 2018, I noticed that the institution receives few visitors and even fewer researchers. Most days, I was the only external visitor. Furthermore, in casual conversations I had with people (taxi drivers and vendors) I encountered en route to El Colegio, I noticed that few of them knew about El Colegio's activities. In fact, some of them confused El Colegio Nacional with El Colegio de México (a prestigious higher-education institution located in Tlalpan) or with El Colegio de San Ildefonso (now a cultural center/museum located half a block away from El Colegio Nacional).

¹⁰² Eduardo Mejía, "Semblanza. Mario Lavista," *La Jornada Semanal*, December 4, 2005, 16. [No es necesario asistir a sus cátedras para ser su alumno: sus escritos (aunque piense como músico, sus ensayos y artículos son excelentes, divertidos, amenos, pero muy serios), sus conferencias, las charlas que anteceden los conciertos que ofrece con regularidad en El Colegio Nacional, hacen que el auditorio piense que escuchar música es algo necesario y gozoso, porque Lavista contagia su pasión, su amor por la buena música.]

Although El Colegio became significantly more visible when it developed an online and social media presence, the extent of its impact is still somewhat limited.

In the case of Lavista's events, we know that his *conferencias–conciertos* attracted a significant number of attendees. However, this estimation, based on information I gathered from conversations with the staff, Lavista, and other members, as well as information from press reports, has yet to be verified. It is currently impossible to determine the number of attendees or their demographic makeup, as I was not allowed access to the registration books. However, from my occasional visits to the building, through watching online streaming events, and after querying El Colegio's staff, it seems that the audience for Lavista's *conferencias–conciertos* was composed of college-age individuals, young professionals, and a good number of middle-aged people whose background is hard to ascertain.

In spite of El Colegio's seemingly reduced visibility, all of the concerts I have attended in person or have watched live online attracted hundreds of people. In mid-March 2020, El Colegio closed its doors to the public due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the members continued to host live events on several online platforms. While Lavista was not one of the first to join this new virtual reality, he hosted his first Facebook live streaming event on May 27, 2020. For the occasion, he invited his daughter, choreographer Claudia Lavista, to co-present fragments from *Cuaderno de viaje*, a video recording of a dance program featuring music by her father.¹⁰³ Both father and daughter gave introductory notes and offered brief commentaries before each of the sets.¹⁰⁴ Based on the comments posted below the Facebook video, this event drew the attention of viewers from a variety of locations, including Puerto Rico, the United States, Venezuela, and China. Without a doubt, the pandemic and subsequent move to online media have allowed a wider audience to partake in El Colegio's events, and it encourages even more dialogue between attendees. The informality of Facebook might even incentivize online viewers to provide written comments on the events.

Coincidentally, El Colegio Nacional was founded the same year Lavista was born, 1943. Even though by decree members over 70 are exempted from their educational responsibilities, Lavista did not interrupt his duties, and, right before his passing, he entered the realm of live streaming and social media. During his long tenure at El Colegio, Lavista was very prolific. He offered a large number of musical events and music-centered publications for and through El Colegio. Until 2019, the institution granted Lavista uninterrupted financial means to coordinate a total of 140 events in the span of two decades (1999–2019). He was able to introduce audiences to the musical repertoires that reflected his aesthetic preferences performed by musicians whom he admired, some of whom he collaborated with. Therefore, with few exceptions,

¹⁰³ For more detail on this program, see Chapter 5.

¹⁰⁴ El Colegio Nacional (Mexico), "Cuaderno de viaje. Coordina: Mario Lavista," streamed live on May 27, 2020, Facebook Watch video, 1:52:42, <https://www.facebook.com/ColegioNacional.mx/videos/3691197990895820>, accessed June 24, 2023.



Figure 7.6 Mario Lavista in his home studio, Colonia Condesa. Photo by Gerardo Márquez Lemus. D.R. © El Colegio Nacional, Luis González Obregón 23, Mexico City, 2010. From El Colegio Nacional’s Collection. Used by permission.

Lavista’s events introduced audiences to lesser known repertoires. In this regard, and as previously discussed, Lavista’s role at El Colegio was shaped by his commitment (inherited by Chávez and followed by Mata) to modernist repertoires of new music. Although many continued to criticize Lavista for the gender imbalance of his programs and his limited selection of traditions outside of Western European art music, his activities at El Colegio followed his aesthetics and reflected his understanding of what his role as composer and intellectual was and should be (see Figure 7.6).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Some of the recent events that Lavista organized featured traditions outside Western art music: “Nuestro son jarocho” featured a selection of *sones regionales* performed by Grupo Tembembe Ensemble Continuo (October 13, 2019), and “Cantos del desierto” featured a selection of *cantos cardenches* performed by the Coro Acardenchado Los Cardencheros de Sapioriz (October 19, 2019). Both of these events were well attended and received significant media attention.

8

Epilogue

Nihil novum sub sole: Perpetual Mirrors

*Bien sé que no hay
nada nuevo bajo este cielo,
que antes otros pensaron
las cosas que ahora yo pienso.
Y bien, ¿para qué escribo?
Bueno, porque así somos,
reloj que repetimos
eternamente lo mismo.*

—Rosalía de Castro¹

For the first time in twenty years, in 2020, I could not travel to Puebla, Mexico, to spend Christmas with my family because of the COVID-19 pandemic. On Saturday, December 19, 2020, while drafting this epilogue, my iPhone prompted an automatically generated memory of a photo taken exactly eight years before, on December 19, 2012, during a Christmas party at Lavista's house in Colonia Condesa, Mexico City (see Figure 8.1). From 2004 and until 2020, traveling home had also meant reconnecting with Lavista. And, during that period, an integral part of my end-of-the-year traditions was attending these Christmas gatherings where I would also have the opportunity to greet Lavista's family, close friends, and collaborators.

At a given point during these cheerful events, guests would join around a beautifully decorated tree to sing a chorus from Handel's *Messiah* or a Christmas carol. My visits to Lavista's house in the winter season would often coincide with one of his weekly *comidas de los miércoles* (Wednesday lunches)—gatherings at lunch time when he would host a few friends—musicians, poets, writers, visual artists, art curators—and/or members of his family, including his mother.² Whether attending a Christmas party or one of the *comidas*, visiting Lavista's house was always a memorable experience.

Centered on music, literature, the visual arts, cultural events, or world events, the conversations at Lavista's house were usually full of vitality and laughter. And it seems to me that the people who partook in those gatherings also enjoyed the back and

¹ Rosalía de Castro, quoted in Mario Lavista, *Trece comentarios en torno a la música* (Mexico City: El Colegio Nacional, 2016), n.p. [I know well that there is / nothing new under the sky, / that others thought before / the things that now I think. / And so, why do I write? / Well, because we are like this, / a clock that repeats / eternally the same.]

² The main meal in Mexico (*la comida*) is held between 2:30 and 4:00 p.m.



Figure 8.1 Christmas party at Mario Lavista’s house in Colonia Condesa, December 19, 2012. From left to right: Lourdes Sosa, Arnaldo Coen, Mario Lavista, Ana R. Alonso-Minutti, and Nicolás Echevarría. Photographer unknown. From the author’s personal archive.

forth, the bouncing of ideas, thoughts and laughter. The casual exchange Lavista fostered when he invited people into his home is a window into his compositional process. As someone who closely followed Lavista’s trajectory for the last two decades of his life, I encountered a strong parallel between his creative process with that atmosphere of generous exchange. When composing, he fostered a creative intimacy in which musical thoughts bounced back and forth between composer and performer and reflected upon each other, as in a mirror.

Lavista’s students particularly admired his ability to promote creative intimacy with others. Hebert Vázquez, for example, notes that Lavista’s capacity to build close relationships with both the performers he worked with and the students he mentored set him apart from other more detached composers. Both Ana Lara and Gabriela Ortiz considered Lavista to be their most influential teacher.³ They appreciated his approach to teaching composition: he allowed his students to discover their own “creative worlds” without imposing a particular path on them.⁴ Vázquez notes that

³ Alida Piñón, “Divertimentos del hombre y el artista,” *El Universal*, Confabulario, October 5, 2013, <https://confabulario.eluniversal.com.mx/estampas-del-hombre-y-el-artista/>, accessed June 24, 2023.

⁴ Gabriela Ortiz, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, July 7, 2012.

Lavista's generosity and his broad, rich outlook toward art, life, society, and humanity constituted his greatest contribution to younger generations.⁵

Lavista's classes were never limited to musical matters. His conversational approach to teaching was also singled out by Luis Jaime Cortez, who remembers that Lavista would treat his students as peers. "In the classroom"—Cortez said, "he would guide us in a very generous fashion. More than classes, those were conversations."⁶ Cortez and his peers—Lara, Vázquez, Ortiz, Armando Luna, Georgina Derbez, and Mariana Villanueva—were all profoundly impacted by Lavista (see Figure 8.2).

As homage to their mentor, in 2013 a group of Lavista's students—coordinated by Lara—composed nine pieces to be premiered in a concert to celebrate Lavista's seventieth birthday.⁷ The program included works by Javier Álvarez (1956–2023), Hilda Paredes (b. 1957), Jorge Ritter (b. 1957), Ana Lara (b. 1959), Ricardo Risco (b. 1960), Hebert Vázquez (b. 1963), Luis Jaime Cortez (b. 1963), Gabriela Ortiz (b. 1964), and Armando Luna (1964–2015). In promotional notes and interviews published previous to this concert, several of Lavista's students expressed their gratitude for their mentor and their appreciation of his ability to "open his students' minds, spirits, and ears."⁸ To Lara, Lavista's liberating way of mentoring his students was best reflected in the diversity of styles represented in the works performed at the concert; this was testimony to how Lavista, while encouraging compositional rigor, did not impose a particular style.⁹

Also as part of the celebration of Lavista's seventieth birthday, photographer and documentary filmmaker Paulina Lavista (b. 1945)—Lavista's first cousin—produced the hour-long documentary *La escritura musical: 70 años de Mario Lavista*. The documentary incorporated interviews with a few of his students (including Lara and Ortiz), performers with whom Lavista worked closely (including Horacio Franco and Arón Bitrán), and other close collaborators such as Nicolás Echevarría. As expected, these commemorative endeavors emphasized Lavista's centrality in Mexico's concert music scene. Moreover, they offered a preliminary view into the composer's legacy. Any discussion of Lavista's legacy must consider not only his compositions, but also his activities as promoter, editor, and mentor which he engaged in until his death.

Commemorative events and concerts in Lavista's honor have proliferated since his passing. As an example, the Centro de Experimentación y Producción de Música

⁵ Hebert Vázquez, in discussion with the author, Albuquerque NM, April 7, 2014.

⁶ Luis Jaime Cortez, in discussion with the author, Mexico City, July 18, 2012. [En las clases él lo que hacía era guiarnos de un modo, digamos, muy generoso. Más que una clase era una conversación en realidad. . . . Yo creo que en mi obra y en la de mis compañeros de generación, todos tenemos esa influencia de Lavista, pero muy profunda.]

⁷ This event was made possible through the sponsorship of the Dirección de Música de la Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and Radio UNAM. It took place at the Sala Carlos Chávez of the Centro Cultural Universitario on September 28, 2013.

⁸ Ana Lara, interview by Adrián Figueroa, "Rinden alumnos homenaje a Mario Lavista por sus 70 años de vida," *La Crónica*, September 27, 2013, <http://www.cronica.com.mx/notas/2013/785590.html>, accessed May 21, 2021. [. . . el hombre generoso, culto y el "padre" que abrió la mente, el espíritu y oído a sus alumnos.]

⁹ Ana Lara, interview by Ángel Vargas, "Discípulos de Mario Lavista rinden homenaje al compositor," *La Jornada*, September 26, 2013, <https://www.jornada.com.mx/2013/09/26/cultura/a03n1cul>, accessed July 11, 2023.



Figure 8.2 Mario Lavista and his students outside the National Music Conservatory, ca. 1988. Top row (left to right): Juan Fernando Durán, Ramón Montes de Oca, Ana Lara, Mario Lavista, Gabriela Ortiz. Bottom row (left to right): Armando Luna Ponce and Ricardo Risco. From Ana Lara's personal archive. Courtesy of Ana Lara.

Contemporánea (Cepromusic) of the Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes, with a program titled *Solo Lavista*, organized three concerts during the spring and summer of 2022. These commemorative events have allowed Mexican audiences to hear some rarely performed pieces from Lavista's catalogue, such as *Divertimento* (1968) and *Mutaciones* (1974), the graphic score that accompanies Arnaldo Coen's art exhibition. To celebrate what would have been Lavista's seventy-ninth birthday, in April 2022 the Fonoteca Nacional also organized an event that included a digitalized version of *Alme*, a piece for tape that Lavista composed at the Conservatory's Electronic Music Laboratory in 1971. In a hybrid mode, both online and directly at the Fonoteca, Hebert Vázquez, Juan Arturo Brennan, Theo Hernández, and I offered our remarks on Lavista's

career as a composer, writer, and educator. In addition, through the efforts of Cuarteto Latinoamericano and Cuarteto José White, the entire cycle of Lavista's string quartets premiered in three consecutive concerts at the Palacio de Bellas Artes in June 2022.¹⁰

More than ever before, Lavista's solo, chamber, and orchestral music is being performed in concerts in Mexico and abroad, a trend that is most likely to continue into the future. The creation of the Mediateca Lavista at the end of 2022 has also granted an unprecedented exposure of Lavista's work. Envisioned by Claudia Lavista, and coordinated by *Sonus Litterarum* (directed by Luis Jaime Cortez and Ana Lara), this platform is intended as a centralized place for everything connected to Lavista, from scores and manuscripts, to recorded interviews, photographs, and essays by Lavista and about him. A project of this magnitude requires the support of multiple institutions which the Mediateca Lavista has obtained through the indefatigable work of Claudia Lavista.¹¹ While Mediateca Lavista's ambitious goals will be fulfilled only gradually, the platform has already published invaluable material that had remained unaccessible until now. The creation of the Mediateca Lavista, and the digitization of Lavista's scores and audios, currently taking place by staff at Cenidim and Fonoteca Nacional, respectively, are facilitating unprecedented access to Lavista's work. On par with these initiatives, my hope is that the present study will instigate further research on Lavista's multifaceted creative trajectory.

Lavista's students have already started writing memorial pieces in his honor. Cuarteto Latinoamericano premiered Ana Lara's *Memorial* in March 2022, and the Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional, directed by Carlos Miguel Prieto, performed Gabriela Ortiz's *Tzam* in June of the same year. Beyond his native Mexico, composers and musicians abroad often mention the vital role Lavista has had in contemporary music circles of the Americas at large. His fervent support of performers devoted to contemporary music was key to the trajectories of a growing number of chamber music ensembles. The music Lavista wrote with and for them has contributed to a rich production of solo and chamber pieces that are now at the core of the Latin American music repertoire. During the last two decades of the twentieth century—before the global reach of social media—Lavista's journal *Pauta* provided an important platform for the emergence of a continental dialogue among contemporary music circles.

Lavista's compositional trajectory and his approach to teaching composition were rooted in the belief that there is nothing new under the sun, or *nihil novum sub sole*. I use this verse from the Vulgate Bible (Ecclesiastes 1:9) as a token of Lavista's predilection for biblical Latin. Emulating the sentiment behind the poem by Galician poet Rosalía de Castro (1837–1885) that opens this epilogue, Lavista wrote: “The great

¹⁰ In 2020, violinists Edgardo Carone and Héctor Robles, violist Omar Pérez, and cellist Jorge Ortiz—all members of the Orquesta Filarmónica de la UNAM—formed a string quartet named Cuarteto Lavista. Part of this ensemble's mission is to promote the music Lavista wrote for string quartet.

¹¹ Alongside *Sonus Litterarum*, there are nine institutions that currently participate in the Mediateca Lavista: Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes y Literatura, Centro Nacional de las Artes, Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información Musical Carlos Chávez, Coordinación Nacional de Música y Ópera, Fonoteca Nacional, Radio Universidad Autónoma de México, Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, Arte y Cultura Grupo Salinas, and URTEXT.

renovations in music and art in general are always in relation to form, not content. Humanity has not invented new sentiments: we keep talking about the same things.”¹² Although Lavista was at the forefront of the avant-garde during the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, he always maintained a profound connection with music traditions. At a time when experimentalists across Europe and the United States were breaking with the past and promoting the idea of the *tabula rasa*, Lavista decidedly was not. Vázquez contends that, in contrast to other composers who rejected musical pasts, Lavista emphasized that what stands behind artistic creations are the same principles, only presented in different ways.¹³ “Tradition, through Lavista’s teachings”—says Vázquez—“had to do with seeing ourselves reflected in music from the past in order to compose something that didn’t pretend to come out of nowhere.”¹⁴ In his opinion, Lavista’s music could be understood as an intersection between tradition and creation.

At the beginning of this study, I presented the metaphor of *mirrors of sounds* as a way to address the relational affective powers at play in Lavista’s music. Since he was a relational composer, his compositions can be understood as social spaces where he fostered a creative intimacy with the performers he worked with and where he built bridges of communion with his mentors and his chosen ancestors. These bridges invalidate the temporal and spatial gaps that divide the living and the dead. Insofar as Lavista’s music continues to be performed, studied, and talked about, we will be able to partake of the communion. Inside the social space that constitutes his music, human and nonhuman bodies commune by bouncing reflections off each other. They see themselves in each other and they extend an invitation for us to see ourselves in one another, as in perpetual mirrors.

¹² Lavista, *Trece comentarios en torno a la música*, n/p. [Las grandes renovaciones que ha tenido la música, y el arte en general, siempre se refieren a cuestiones de índole formal, no de contenido. El hombre no ha inventado nuevos sentimientos: seguimos hablando de lo mismo.]

¹³ Vázquez, discussion.

¹⁴ Vázquez, discussion. [La tradición a través de Lavista tenía que ver con ese reflejarnos en esta música que analizábamos, la gran música del pasado, y entonces proceder a componer algo que no tuviera la pretensión de surgir de la nada.]

APPENDIX

Chronological List of Works by Mario Lavista

I began compiling a list of Mario Lavista's works in 2006. My point of departure was Lavista's profile on El Colegio Nacional's website, which contained an abbreviated catalogue of works grouped by genre. However, newer versions of the site omitted this information.¹ At the end of each year, from 2006 to 2020, I directly consulted with Lavista about which new works to add. The last time he saw the list was spring 2021, before I submitted this manuscript to the press. I am aware that the list does not include every single piece of music he ever wrote; he willfully omitted some from his own catalogue.

After Lavista's passing and with Claudia Lavista's support, composer Ana Lara compiled a list of all items found in Lavista's personal archive, including pieces he had not previously incorporated to any list. There are several discrepancies between Lara's list and the one I include in this appendix that I was unable to reconcile. At the time of this writing, Lavista's personal archive (which is temporarily hosted at Cenidim) has restricted access. For the purposes of this publication, I decided to keep the list of Lavista's works that I had compiled with his help.

The future (and permanent) location of Lavista's personal archive is uncertain. Currently, his daughter and trustee, Claudia Lavista, is in conversation with U.S. libraries and centers interested in the archive's acquisition. Working in conjunction with several national institutions including INBA, El Colegio Nacional, Cenidim, Fonoteca Nacional, and Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, she is overseeing the digitization of her father's work. The online platform Mediateca Lavista, created in 2022 and operated by *Sonus Litterarum*, is intended to function as a digital archive of all kinds of materials by or about Lavista.²

In what follows I offer basic information about each work: title, subtitle (if applicable), date of composition, and instrumentation, according to information I found in scores and manuscripts I received directly from Lavista. Whenever applicable, I also add information about coauthorships and transcriptions. Although Lavista made me aware about music he composed for theater, television, and film, he never shared any manuscript pertaining to those projects with me. In those cases, I only provide the names of writers and directors.

Passion, Poison and Petrification (1961), music for theater; written by George Bernard Shaw

Seis piezas para orquesta de cuerdas (1965), string orchestra

Sinfonía modal (1965), symphony orchestra

¹ See "Mario Lavista," El Colegio Nacional, <https://colnal.mx/integrantes/mario-lavista/>, accessed June 29, 2023. The encyclopedia entries on Lavista written by Consuelo Carredano and Gabriel Pareyón offer a list of works up to their time of publication. See Consuelo Carredano, "Lavista Camacho, Mario," in *Diccionario de la música española e hispanoamericana*, dir. Emilio Casares Rodicio, vol. 6 (Madrid: Sociedad General de Autores y Editores, 2000), 803–12; and Gabriel Pareyón, "Lavista (Camacho), Mario," in *Diccionario enciclopédico de música en México*, vol. 2 (Mexico City: Universidad Panamericana, 2007), 579–81. The online site for the Institut de Recherche et Coordination Acoustique/Music (Institute for Research and Coordination in Acoustics/Music, IRCAM), contains a list of Lavista's works and a partial discography up to 2010. See "Mario Lavista," Ressources.IRCAM, https://brahms.ircam.fr/en/mario-lavista#works_by_date, accessed June 29, 2023.

² See Sonus Litterarum, "¿Qué es la Mediateca Lavista?" *Sonus Litterarum*, November 28, 2022, <https://sonuslitterarum.mx/que-es-la-mediateca-lavista/>, accessed June 29, 2023.

- Monólogo* (1966), baritone, flute, vibraphone, contrabass; text by Nikolai Gogol
- Dos canciones* (1966), mezzosoprano, harpsichord or piano; text by Octavio Paz
- Seis piezas para cuarteto de cuerdas* (1967), string quartet
- Homenaje a Samuel Beckett* (1968), 3 SATB choruses; text by Samuel Beckett; translation by José Emilio Pacheco
- Divertimento* (1968), wind quintet, 5 wood blocks, 3 short wave radios
- Diacronía* (1969), string quartet
- Kronos / Cronos* (1969), at least 15 alarm clocks
- Espaces trop habités* (1969), tape
- Poesía en movimiento* (1969), music for theater; written by Salvador Flores
- Pieza para un(a) pianista y un piano* (1970), piano
- Game* (1970), 1, 2, 3, or 4 flutes
- Continuo* (1971), string orchestra, brass, 4 percussion, 2 prepared pianos
- Alme* (1971), tape
- Contrapunto* (1972), tape
- Trío* (para dos instrumentos de cuerda y modulador de anillos) (1971), 2 string instruments, ring modulator
- Diafonía* (1973), piano, prepared piano, percussion
- Cluster* (1973), any number of pianos and pianists; in collaboration with Arnaldo Coen
- Judea: Semana Santa entre los coras* (1973), music for film; directed by Nicolás Echevarría
- Diálogos* (1974), violin, piano
- Antifonía* (1974), flute, 2 bassoons, 2 percussion
- Cadencias para el primer y tercer movimientos del concierto en Mi bemol para dos pianos y orquesta de Mozart* (1974), piano
- Pieza para dos pianistas y un piano* (1975), piano
- Miss Julia / La señorita Julia* (1975), music for theater; written by August Strindberg
- Quotations* (1976), violoncello, piano
- Trío 1* (1976), violin, violoncello, piano
- Jaula* (1976), prepared piano (any number); in collaboration with Arnaldo Coen
- Talea* (1976), music box
- Lyhannh* (1976), orchestra
- Pieza para caja de música* (1977), music box
- The Fall of the House of Usher / La caída de la Casa Usher* (1977), music for theater; written by Edgar Allan Poe
- The Innocents* (1977), music for theater; written by William Archibald
- Flores de papel* (1977), in collaboration with Raúl Lavista; music for film; directed by Gabriel Retes
- María Sabina, mujer espíritu* (1978), music for film; directed by Nicolás Echevarría
- Tango del adulterio* (1979), piano
- Canto del alba* (1979), amplified flute
- Fue una historia de amor* (1979), music for theater; written by Gilbert Léautier
- Ficciones* (1980), orchestra
- Cante* (1980), 2 amplified guitars; transcription for 2 harps by Mercedes Gómez and Janet Paulus, 2007
- Dusk* (1980), contrabass
- Simurg* (1980), piano
- Nocturno en Mi bemol, op. 55 no. 3 (posth) [sic]* (1980), piano
- Historias como cuerpos* (1980), tape
- Lamento* (a la muerte de Raúl Lavista) (1981), amplified bass flute
- Motete a dos voces* (1981), music box
- Danza bucólica* (1981), music box

- Canción de cuna* (1981), music box
Ana (canción de cuna) (1981), music box
Rondo (1981), music box
Nocturno (1982), alto flute
Marsias (1982), oboe, 8 crystal wine glasses
Hécuba, la perra (1982), music for theater; written by Hugo Hiriart
Niño Fidencio (1982), music for film; directed by Nicolás Echevarría
Tres canciones (1983), mezzosoprano, piano
Correspondencias (1983), piano; in collaboration with Gerhart Muench
Tres acrósticos nocturnos (1983), piano
Hacia el comienzo (1984), mezzosoprano, orchestra; transcription for piano and voice, 1998
Reflejos de la noche (1984), string quartet; transcription for string orchestra, 1986
Cuicani (1985), flute, clarinet
Madrigal (1985), clarinet
Tres nocturnos (1985–1986), mezzosoprano, orchestra
Vals (1986), flute, clarinet, string quartet
Ofrenda (1986), tenor recorder
Aura (1987–1988), opera in one act, soprano, mezzosoprano, tenor, bass, orchestra; libretto by Juan Tovar, based on the novel by Carlos Fuentes; transcription for orchestra, 1989
Responsorio (in memoriam Rodolfo Halffter) (1988), bassoon, 2 percussion
Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1988), music for television; directed by Nicolás Echevarría
México en la obra de Octavio Paz (1988), music for television; directed by Héctor Tajonar
El pífano (retrato de Manet) (1989), piccolo
Cuaderno de viaje (1989), viola; transcription for violoncello by Bozena Slawinska, 2002
Cadencias para el Concierto en Si bemol mayor para fagot de Mozart K191 (1990), bassoon
Arte contemporáneo (1989), music for television; directed by Héctor Tajonar; written in collaboration with Octavio Paz
Arte precolombino (1989), music for television; directed by Héctor Tajonar
Re / visiones. La pintura mural (1989, 1996), music for television; directed by Carlos Fuentes
Clepsidra (1990), orchestra
Las músicas dormidas (cuadro de Tamayo) (1990), clarinet, bassoon, piano
Cabeza de Vaca (1990), music for film; directed by Nicolás Echevarría
El sol azteca (1990), music for television; directed by Héctor Tajonar
El enigma de los mayas (1990), music for television; directed by Héctor Tajonar
México a través de su arte (1990), music for television; directed by Héctor Tajonar
Danza de las bailarinas de Dégas (1991), flute, piano
Eclipse (1991), music for television; directed by Nicolás Echevarría
Lacrymosa (a la memoria de Gerhart Muench) (1992), orchestra
Diálogos en el espacio (1992), music for television; directed by Héctor Tajonar
Las puertas del tiempo (1992), music for television; directed by Nicolás Echevarría
Cinco danzas breves (1994), flute, oboe, clarinet, French horn, bassoon
Tres danzas seculares (1994), violoncello, piano; transcription for viola by Omar Hernández Hidalgo, 2003
Expedición a la violencia (1994), music for television; directed by Héctor Tajonar
Missa Brevis ad Consolationis Dominam Nostram (1994–1995), mixed chorus a cappella; transcription for chamber ensemble by Carmen-Helena Téllez, 1998
Tropo para Sor Juana (sobre el *Sanctus de la Missa ad Consolationis Dominam Nostram*) (1995), orchestra
Música para mi vecino (cinco breves estudios para las cuerdas al aire) / *Music for My Neighbor* (five short studies on open strings) (1995), string quartet
Sinfonías (cuarteto de cuerdas no. 4) (1996), string quartet

- Danza isorrítmica* (1996), 4 percussion
- Octeto* (1997), 2 oboe, 2 clarinet, 2 bassoon, 2 French horn
- Natarayah* (1997), guitar
- Siete invenciones* (cuarteto de cuerdas no. 5) (1998), string quartet
- Formas en el tiempo* (1998), music for television; directed by Julián Pablo
- Pañales y sonajas* (canción de cuna para Elisa) (1999), mezzosoprano, prepared piano
- Suite en cinco partes* (cuarteto de cuerdas no. 6) (1999), string quartet
- Fanfarría para un concurso* (1999), 4 French horn, 4 trumpet, 3 trombone, tuba, timpani, tubular bells, bass drum
- Estudio* (2000), 4 marimba
- Canon for Jo* (2000), piano
- Mater dolorosa* (2000), organ
- El alma de México 1. Intro. El alma de México* (2000), music for television; directed by Héctor Tajonar
- El alma de México, 2. Amanecer en Mesoamérica* (2000), music for television; directed by Héctor Tajonar
- El alma de México, 3. Paisaje de pirámides* (2000), music for television; directed by Héctor Tajonar
- El alma de México, 4. Los hijos del sol* (2000), music for television; directed by Julián Pablo
- Tres bagatelas* (2001), violin, viola, violoncello
- Tres miniaturas* (2001), guitar
- Gargantúa* (2002), narrator, children's chorus, orchestra; text by François Rabelais; adapted by Michèle and Jean Villatte
- A Cage for Sirius / Una jaula para Sirius* (2002), prepared piano, percussion
- Vivir mata* (2002), music for film; directed by Nicolás Echevarría
- Elegía* (a la memoria de Nacho) (2003), flute, piano
- Pieza para piano* (sobre un modo balinés) (2003), piano
- Cristo de San Juan de la Cruz* (tropo para Salvador Dalí) (2004), instrumental ensemble
- Dúo* (2004), viola, violoncello
- Stabat Mater* (2004–2005), chamber choir, cello octet
- Cinco preludios enlazados* (en recuerdo de Eduardo Mata) (2005), piano
- Divertimento para una coreografía imaginaria* (2006), 2 violoncello, prepared piano
- Trío no. 2* (2006), violin, violoncello, piano
- Tango rag* (2006), piano
- Páramos de Rulfo* (2006), piano
- Salmo* (2006–2007), soprano, 4 crotales, contrabass; text from Latin Vulgate Bible
- Llamada para un concierto* (2008), 2 French horn
- Suite de Gargantúa* (2009), wind quintet, string quartet
- Divertimento para una bruja* (2009), clarinet, viola, cello, contrabass, prepared piano
- Plegarias* (2009), bassoon, electronics
- Calixto* (homenaje a Galileo) (2009), violin
- Concierto para cello y orquesta* (2009–2010), cello, orchestra
- Tres cantos a Edurne* (2010), orchestra
- Adagio religioso* (a la memoria de Eugenio) (2011), orchestra
- Cánticos a Eugenio* (2011), flute, alto flute, bass flute
- Música para un árbol* (2011), soprano, recorder, violoncello, crystal wine glasses
- La conquista* (2011), music for television; directed by Nicolás Echevarría
- Kailash* (2012), oboe, prepared piano, 4 percussion, crystal wine glasses
- Mujer pintando en cuarto azul* (para Joy Laville) (2012–2013), piano
- Canto fúnebre* (a la memoria de Joaquín) (2013), orchestra
- Músicas de cristal* (2013), glass harmonica, 3 percussion

- Fanfarria “En estilo antiguo”* (2013), 2 trumpet, 2 French horn, percussion
Eco de la montaña (2014), music for film; directed by Nicolás Echevarría
El penacho de Moctezuma. Plumaria del México antiguo (2014), music for television; directed by Jaime Kuri
Adagio para cuarteto de cuerdas (2015), string quartet
Bocetos para una rama (2015), flute, clarinet, violin, violoncello, piano
Grandes figuras del arte mexicano: Manuel Álvarez Bravo. Poeta de la imagen (2015), music for television; directed by Nicolás Echevarría
Maithuna (2016), 2 soprano, 2 mezzosoprano, percussion
Duelo (en recuerdo de Armando Luna) (2016), trumpet
Toque de silencio (cuarteto de cuerdas no. 8) (2017), string quartet
Aire sonoro (2017), accordion
Requiem de Tlatelolco (2018), children’s chorus, orchestra, narrator
Boîte à musique (2019), 3 alto flutes
Preludio (2019), violoncello
Cinco piezas breves para piano, unfinished (2020), piano

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