About 'La Música de México'

The Mexican Cultural Institute is excited to host its 2018 Music Series, 'La Música de México'. The 2018 Music Series is a connected and comprehensive program of concerts, conferences, and recitals with some of Mexico and the US's most renowned composers, musicians, and academics. The participants in this series are among the best in their respective fields, and most are affiliated with some of this country's most distinguished academic institutions. They are musicians of Mexican descent, or US-natives who, like so many more in this country, recognize the unique contribution made by Mexicans to the cultural richness of the United States.

Curated by Mexican musician and composer Carlos Sánchez-Gutiérrez, the series will present a kaleidoscope of composers and performers of electroacoustic and mixed-media, chamber music, urban song, mariachi, sones, and more. The events will take place on the first Thursday of every month from February to December 2018. We welcome you to join every month!

Carlos Sánchez-Gutiérrez

Carlos Sánchez-Gutiérrez was born in Mexico City in 1964 and now lives in the New York tundra, where he is a Professor of Composition at the Eastman School of Music. He studies with Jacob Druckman, Martin Bresnick, Steven Mackey and Henri Dutilleux at Yale, Princeton and Tanglewood, respectively. He has received many of the standard awards in the field (e.g. Barlow Prize, Guggenheim, Fulbright, Koussevitzky, Fromm, American Academy of Arts and Letters). He likes machines with hiccups and spiders with missing legs, looks at Paul Klee's Notebooks everyday, and tries to use the same set of ears to listen to Bach, Radiohead, or Ligeti.

UPCOMING

October 4, 2018 | Recital of chamber music by Alla Balena Ensemble
November 1, 2018 | Recital of chamber music with violinist, Saul Bitran and pianist, Sally Pinkas
December 6, 2018 | Recital of Julián Carrillo’s String Quartets with musicologist, Dr. Alejandro Madrid and Momenta String Quartet

by

Dr. Ana Alonso-Minutti

as part of the 2018 Music Program

LA MÚSICA DE MÉXICO

Thursday September 6, 2018
at the Mexican Cultural Institute
Washington, D.C.
Chavela’s Frida: Singing Pain, Performing Desire

Mexican singer Chavela Vargas (1919–2012) is regarded as an international icon, especially for her performances of rancheras. While the canción ranchera is rooted in a patriarchal heteronormative context, Chavela queered conventions with her raspy voice, her use of unchanged gender pronouns, and her rural campesino image. Given her uncompromising vocal performances, and her open queerness, Chavela challenged the socially-constructed gender binaries of conservative mid-century Mexico.

When Chavela met Frida Kahlo at a party at the latter’s Casa Azul, she felt an instant, intense connection with her. While their romance has been a matter of much speculation, Chavela referred to Frida as, “my greatest love.” Chavela recounted singing endless songs for Frida, and one of Frida’s favorites, “La Llorona,” later became forever linked to the painter’s mass media image through Julie Taymor’s film, Frida (2002). The cinematic rendition of the song, according to Sofía Ruiz-Alfaro, unveils a female homoeroticism within the normative heterosexuality of the film’s plot.

Taking Ruiz-Alfaro’s claim a step further, I argue that Chavela’s recurrent performances of “La Llorona” throughout her career were not only a public testimony to her adoration of the Mexican painter, but performative utterances in which she asserted Frida’s own homoeroticism. Through an intertextual lens and music analysis, I explore the performative construction of Frida as, “La Llorona.” A vocal analysis of several renditions of the song renders visible the parallels Chavela insists in redrawing between herself and her lover. Defiance, suffering, spirituality, and homoerotic desire inhabit the mythology of Chavela’s Frida.

Ana Alonso-Minutti is associate professor of music and faculty affiliate of the Latin American and Iberian Institute at the University of New Mexico.

Her research interests include experimental and avant-garde expressions, music traditions from Mexico and the US-Mexico border, music history pedagogy, intersectionality, feminism, religion, and decolonial methodologies.

She is coeditor (with Herrera and Madrid) of Experimentalisms in Practice: Music Perspectives from Latin America (Oxford UP, 2018), and her book Mario Lavista and Musical Cosmopolitanism in Late Twentieth-Century Mexico is under contract by Oxford UP. Her work has been published in Mexico, Argentina, and the U.S., and she has presented her research throughout the Americas and Europe.

As an extension of her written scholarship, she directed and produced the video documentary, Cubos y permutaciones: plástica, música y poesía de vanguardia en México, which was exhibited at the Museo Universitario de Arte Contemporáneo (MUAC) in Mexico City in 2017.

She holds a B.A. in music from the Universidad de las Américas, Puebla, and M.A. and Ph.D. degrees in musicology from the University of California, Davis. Prior to joining the faculty at the University of New Mexico, where she currently directs the graduate program in musicology, Alonso-Minutti was assistant professor of music at the University of North Texas.