

Madison Symphony Orchestra Program Notes
May 1-2-3, 2024
98th Season / Subscription Program 8
J. Michael Allsen

We close this season with the Madison Symphony Orchestra's first-ever all-Mexican program, beginning with José Pablo Moncayo's *Huapango*, a joyful take on a folk dance from the state of Veracruz. Making his debut with the orchestra, the distinguished Mexican-born pianist Jorge Federico Osorio performs the lush, romantic *Piano Concerto No.1*, an early work by the Mexican master Manuel Ponce. We then perform the colorful—and sometimes savage—*Night of the Mayas* by Silvestre Revueltas. This work will be coordinated with projected images assembled by the MSO's Peter Rodgers. And as the *gran final* of this *fiesta*, we welcome the famed Mariachi de los Camperos for an exuberant set of mariachi music!

This lively work, Moncayo's most popular piece, is based upon the folk music of Veracruz.

José Pablo Moncayo

Born: June 29, 1912, Guadalajara, Mexico.

Died: June 16, 1958, Mexico City, Mexico.

Huapango

- **Composed:** 1941.
- **Premiere:** August 15, 1941 in Mexico City, by the Orquesta Sinfónica de Mexico, under the direction of Carlos Chávez.
- **Previous MSO Performances:** This is our first performance of the work.
- **Duration:** 9:00.

Background

Though he had a lamentably short career, composer José Pablo Moncayo became one of Mexico's leading musical figures.

Moncayo trained in Mexico City, and became a protégé of the great Mexican composer Carlos Chávez, but was closely associated with the more radical Silvestre Revueltas as well. Moncayo also studied briefly with Aaron Copland in the United States. While still a student in Mexico City, he started his career as a

percussionist in Orquesta Sinfónica de Mexico (Symphony Orchestra of Mexico), and he would eventually succeed Chávez as conductor, leading the orchestra from 1949-1954. In the 1930s, Moncayo was part of the “Group of Four”—an influential group of like-minded young nationalist composers who stated aim was to forward the cause of classical works based on Mexican musical material. By far his most popular work is the *Huapango*, composed in 1941 for a commission by Chávez. Moncayo completed the work that summer while attending the Tanglewood Festival near Boston, at the invitation of Copland and conductor Serge Koussevitsky.

What You’ll Hear

The fast-paced opening and closing sections are based upon a pair of songs from Veracruz, and the more relaxed middle section adapts a third.

The title *Huapango* refers to a folk dance associated with the *son huasteca*—the lively folk music of the Mexican coastal state of Veracruz. The *huapango* is traditionally danced on a low wooden platform, so that the dancers’ footwork can provide a percussive counterpoint to the *son*. There is a large repertoire of traditional *sones*, but good singers—*huasteceros*—will seldom sing a *son huasteca* the same way twice: changing melodies at will and inserting topical references and joking asides to their audience. In 1940, Moncayo and his friend Blas Galindo took a folk song collecting trip to the coastal city of Alvarado in Veracruz, and Moncayo transcribed versions of three songs that he later adapted in his *Huapango*. The bold opening section is based on two songs, *El siquisiri* and *El balajú*, with the lively alternation between duple and triple meters that characterizes much of Mexican folk music. A slightly slower, more stately contrasting section adapts *El gavilán*, but the tempo soon ratchets up for a wild reprise of the opening music.

This early work by Mexican composer Manuel Ponce helped to establish him as a leading figure in his homeland.

Manuel Ponce

Born: December 8, 1882, Fresnillo, Mexico.

Died: April 24, 1948, Mexico City, Mexico.

Piano Concerto No. 1 (Romántico)

- **Composed:** Ponce completed the work in September 1910.
- **Premiere:** July 7, 1912 in Mexico City, with Ponce as soloist, conducted by Julián Carillo.
- **Previous MSO Performances:** This is our first performance of the work.
- **Duration:** 23:00.

Background

Written shortly after he returned from studying in Europe no concerto is largely European in style, reflecting in particular the influence of Franz Liszt.

Born in the north central state of Zacatecas, Ponce studied music initially with his sister, before moving to Mexico City as a teenager to enter the National Conservatory. While there, his harmony teacher, Eduardo Gabrielli, strongly encouraged Ponce to continue his studies in Europe. He traveled to Europe in about 1904, studying in Milan and later in Berlin, where one of his primary influences was the pianist Martin Krause (who had been a disciple of Franz Liszt). Out of money, Ponce returned to Mexico in 1907, and immediately threw himself into the musical life of Mexico City, taking a teaching post at the National Conservatory. In the early 20th century, classical composers across Latin America were beginning to look towards their own national styles for inspiration. In Mexico, Ponce was quickly recognized as a leading figure, particularly after a July 1912 concert in Mexico City that featured his *Piano Concerto No. 1*, as well as several smaller pieces that were based upon Mexican folk styles. He followed this up with an influential lecture on Mexican music in 1913. From his post at the National Conservatory (He became its director in 1933.), and his work as a composer, performer, musicologist, and music critic, Ponce exerted a tremendous influence on Mexican music for decades.

Ponce's *Piano Concerto No. 1*, his first large-scale composition and only the third piano concerto written by a Mexican composer, was quickly nicknamed the "Concierto Romántico." In comparison to the more distinctly "Mexicanist" music that dominated his career as a composer, this is largely a romantic, German-style concerto influenced by Franz Liszt (by way of Ponce's teacher Krause), Franck, and Chopin. However, many later Mexican writers have pointed out subtle traces of folk styles from his homeland.

What You'll Hear

In this work, the traditional three movements of a romantic concerto are brought together into a single, unbroken span:

- a stormy opening section in sonata form,
- a lyrical interlude ending with a long cadenza, and
- a lively conclusion

The concerto is laid out in three interconnected movements, beginning with a section marked *Allegro appassionato*. Written in a loosely-constructed sonata form, it begins with a tragic main idea from the orchestra. When the piano enters, it is with a dramatic solo passage and a long trill before it turns to the main theme. Piano and solo woodwinds introduce a lighter second idea before a stormy development that focuses primarily on the main theme. A short recapitulation of this idea ends with a short transition from the woodwinds leading into the second movement (*Andantino amoroso*). This section, the longest of the concerto, begins with a lush introduction, which the piano picks up in a passionate solo. The middle section is a sentimental pair of conversations where the piano is answered first by strings and then by English horn. (This passage is often described as a reference to a Mexican-style love duet.) A long solo cadenza, referring to all of the main ideas heard so far, leads into the final section (*Finale: Allegro*). This serves as an extended coda, ending with a dramatic piano flourish.

This work is an adaptation of a film score by Revueltas, assembled 20 years after his death.

Silvestre Revueltas

Born: December 31, 1899, Santiago Papasquiaro, Mexico.

Died: October 5, 1940, Mexico City, Mexico.

La noche de las Mayas (The Night of the Mayas), arr. José Ives Limantour

- **Composed:** 1939.
- **Premiere:** This music was originally written for a 1939 film. The suite heard here was prepared by José Ives Limantour in 1960. Limantour also directed the first performance on January 30, 1961, by the Orquesta Sinfónica de Guadalajara.
- **Previous MSO Performances:** This is our first performance of the work.
- **Duration:** 26:00.

Background

Revueltas was a radical—musically and politically—and created a style that was influenced by both Mexican music and European modernism. This clearly heard in his score to *La noche de las Mayas*, which was among his final works.

Born into an artistic family in the Mexican state of Durango, Silvestre Revueltas trained as a violinist, composer, and conductor in Mexico and the United States. In the late 1920s he became a protégé of Mexico's leading musical figure, Carlos Chávez. When Revueltas was not yet 30, Chávez invited him to become assistant conductor of Orquesta Sinfónica de México. After a promising start, the end of his career was much darker. He broke with Chavez in 1936, and briefly directed a rival national orchestra. In 1937, Revueltas left for Spain to lend his support to anti-fascist forces in the Spanish Civil War. He eventually fled back to Mexico when Francisco Franco's fascists seized total power in Spain. Though he continued to compose, his last few years were marked by increasing depression, poverty, and alcoholism. He died of pneumonia at age 40. Though relatively little known for many years after his death, Revueltas's unique music has enjoyed a resurgence in the past few decades.

As a composer, Revueltas was much more interested in contemporary European styles than most of his Mexican contemporaries. His orchestral and chamber music was often a blend of modernist techniques with a huge array of Mexican musical influences. He brought this same approach to several film scores written between 1935 and 1939. The last of these was for the 1939 film *La noche de las Mayas*, directed by Chano Uruete. This was a drama centering on an isolated community of Maya Indians in Mexico's Yucatán jungle, and the disastrous result of their encounter with modern culture, in the guise of a white explorer who finds the tribe. Revueltas's score uses a variety of indigenous melodies, and a range of percussion instruments from the region. Revueltas died before he could create a concert version of this music. German composer Paul Hindemith created a concert suite from selections from Revueltas's score in 1946. However, the 1960 version by conductor José Ives Limantour is how the score is usually heard today. Limantour took a very free hand in arranging over 30 of Revueltas's brief musical cues for the film into a large four-movement suite. The suite uses a fairly standard orchestra but an enormous percussion battery in the final movement, requiring twelve players. It calls for several indigenous instruments, including *caracol* (conch shell), *sonajas* (metal rattles), *teponaxtles* (large hollow wooden "slit drums"), and *huehuetl* (a large bass drum).

What You'll Hear

This concert suite, arranged by José Ives Limantour, is in four movements:

- *Noche de los Mayas* begins and ends calmer episode in the middle of the movement.
- *Noche de los Jarana* is more lighthearted, set above a dance rhythm.
- *Noche de Yucatán* is a calm piece of “night music” with hints of darkness.
- *Noche de encantamiento* is where Limantour unleashes the full percussion battery. Most of the movement is a series of variations on a theme heard at the opening.

The opening movement, *Noche de los Mayas*, begins with a threatening fanfare—1930s “movie music” of the most dramatic kind. This is followed by a more relaxed episode and quietly repetitive music from the woodwinds that evokes indigenous melodies. The movement ends with a reprise of the opening music. *Noche de los Jarana* is a much lighter scherzo. (*Jarana* is slang for a drunken party.) The frantic forward motion never stops, as music flits between various meters. The strings act as timekeepers, as brass and woodwinds interject contrasting ideas: a mournful conch-shell call from the tuba, a brief attempt to upset the strings’ rhythm, and a slightly tipsy but quick-footed dance from the brass. *Noche de Yucatán* begins with lyrical and sometimes tense music, evoking the surrounding jungle. This is interrupted briefly by a short interlude for solo flute and drums: an indigenous melody borrowed by Revueltas. The opening mood returns at the bend, but is shattered by a sudden percussive crack that begins the last movement, *Noche de encantamiento* (*Night of enchantment*). The oboe lays out a theme used throughout the movement, followed by an angry response from the strings and brass. The rest of the movement is a set of four increasingly ferocious variations on the opening theme, dominated entirely by the percussion. These percussion parts, meant to sound improvised, were added by Limantour, and are not part of Revueltas’s film score. The movement ends with a savage coda.