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Mario Lavista and his music with an analysis of “Ficciones”

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Rice University, 1988
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MARIO LAVISTA AND HIS MUSIC
WITH AN ANALYSIS OF FICCIONES

by

BEATRIZ A. BONNET

A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE MASTER OF MUSIC DEGREE

APPROVED, THESIS COMMITTEE

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ABSTRACT

The musical output of Mexican composer Mario Lavista can be roughly organized into three compositional periods corresponding to different techniques and media which he explored in search of his own original voice. These periods are defined in the first chapter, which also delves into Lavista's background and influences, and are represented in an annotated chronological catalogue. Ficciones, an orchestral composition belonging to Lavista's third period, shows an A-B form. Although it is an atonal piece, it has many tonal connotations derived from a germinal cell based on a perfect fifth with an upper and a lower tritone. Throughout the piece the tritone establishes all tonal areas, substituting for the V-I progression of tonal harmony. Lavista is also an influential thinker and teacher, and an interview conducted by the author in Mexico City conveys many of the composer's views on topics such as teaching, literature, analysis and composition.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge those people and institutions without whose help this paper would not have been possible. In Mexico City the researchers at CENIDIM (Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información Musical "Carlos Chávez") helped me find important materials and provided useful suggestions. My special thanks go to Luis Jaime Cortez and to Aurelio Tello, director and subdirector of the Center respectively. I am especially grateful to Mario Lavista who generously took time off from his busy schedule to provide me with the materials and information that I requested and to share his thoughts and some meals with me.

I am also indebted to the Institute of Hispanic Culture of Houston for the scholarship they awarded me in 1987, which made possible my first visit to Mexico City. At that time I had the opportunity to meet Mario Lavista, and I was exposed to some of his music. The research that I carried out during the summer of 1987 also helped immensely in my gaining a good understanding of the current musical scene in Mexico City.

To Dr. Ellsworth Milburn, my deeply felt gratitude for all the years of guidance, patience, and support. His comments and suggestions on this paper were invaluable. I am grateful to Drs. Marcia Citron and Walter Bailey for
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BIBLIOGRAPHY
CHAPTER ONE

BIOGRAPHY OF MARIO LAVISTA AND BACKGROUND

The music of Mario Lavista, an influential Mexican composer born in 1943, and his thoughts on music and other related topics in the form of an interview conducted by the author in August, 1988, are at the core of this thesis. In order to gain a better understanding of any composer's works, however, it is important to learn how events and individuals affected the development of this composer and consequently his output. To this end, this first chapter provides a biography and some background on those elements of the Mexican musical scene that have influenced this particular composer.

When Mario Lavista was born, in 1943, the Mexican musical scene was dominated by nationalism and by the figure of Carlos Chávez (1899-1978). Not only was Chávez a dominant figure as a composer, but his efforts as a theorist, conductor and pedagogue were of paramount importance in nurturing the growth of a healthy musical life in Mexico, especially in the three decades from 1920 to 1950.

But even during the nationalist period, Mexico did not stop looking to Europe, which it had imitated closely until the advent of nationalism, shortly after the turn of the
century. Chávez himself wrote many works during this period that are devoid of any indigenous or popular influences and show that he kept abreast of the current European techniques.

These techniques, which had to a great extent been obscured by the popularity of "Mexican influenced music" during this period, gradually came to the fore as nationalism started to fade in the second half of the 1940's. In the 1950's and early 1960's, when Lavista was acquiring his musical education, there was, then, a diversity of styles reflecting the developments of European music, and now also of American music. Neoclassicism, dodecaphony (which was introduced by Rodolfo Halffter, who was born in Spain, but settled in Mexico in 1939), and polytonality were some of the favorite styles. Both Chávez and Halffter taught Lavista and had great influence on his development as a musician. During these years, a few composers remained loyal to nationalism and kept writing in that style.

While the compositional styles mentioned above continued to have their followers, a new generation of avant-garde composers started to emerge in the 1960's. Aleatoric techniques, graphic scores, multimedia, and electronic music were used by these composers as some of their means of expression. The most important of this generation are Manuel Enriquez, Eduardo Mata, Héctor
Quintanar, Manuel de Elía, and Mario Lavista, the youngest of them.

Mario Lavista was born in Mexico City, on April 3, 1943. He started his musical education at the age of eleven, taking private piano lessons from Adelina Benitez. Since his early years, he was also exposed to many great works of music at the home of his uncle, Raúl Lavista, a very successful composer of film music. At the age of seventeen, he decided to devote himself to music and tried to gain admittance into the National Conservatory of Music. He "was rejected by its director because his hands were too small".²

Soon after this rejection, though, he was introduced to Carlos Chávez, who gave him some piano lessons, as well as some basic lessons in harmony, counterpoint and analysis. In 1963 he was accepted in the composition workshop (Taller de Composición) of Chávez, with whom he studied for four years. While at the composition workshop, which is part of the National Conservatory of Music (Conservatorio Nacional de Música), he also studied with Héctor Quintanar, who was at that time sub-director of the workshop. When Chávez left the Taller de Composición in 1964, Quintanar became its director. At the same time, Lavista studied analysis with

²Interview with Mario Lavista, Mexico City, August 1988.
Rodolfo Halffter, also at the National Conservatory of Music. Lavista's recollections of the teachings of both Chávez and Halffter are included in Chapter IV. However, Lavista never took any other courses at the Conservatory and did not receive a diploma.

Upon completion of his composition studies, in 1967, he received a scholarship from the French government to study in Paris. During his stay there he attended the Twentieth Century Music courses taught by Jean-Etienne Marie at the Schola Cantorum, from which he obtained a Diploma with honors. He also attended a seminar on Schubert taught by Nadia Boulanger. While in Europe, he traveled to Germany, where, in 1968, he attended the courses that Karlheinz Stockhausen and Henri Pousseur taught annually at the Rheinische Musikschule, in Cologne. During the same year, he also took part in the International New Music Courses, in Darmstadt, where he took a course from Ligeti (but not with Xenakis, who was in some sources erroneously cited as a teacher of Lavista). In Darmstadt he also attended some seminars taught by well-known performers dealing with the difficulties of writing for each instrument.

2Most of the sources consulted (Béhague, Wagar, Malmström) list Xenakis as a teacher of Lavista, but the composer has stated that he only attended some lectures that Xenakis gave as a guest lecturer. Interview with Mario Lavista, Mexico City, August 1988.
Upon his return to Mexico, in 1970, he and three other Mexican musicians founded Quanta, an improvisational music group. Other members of Quanta were Nicolás Echevarría (now a film director with whom Lavista has collaborated on three occasions), Fernando Baena (who is now a mime), and Juan Herrejón. This group was interested in simultaneous creation and interpretation of music, as well as in the relationship between live and electro-acoustic music (electro-acoustic music here, as the term is defined by the composer, is the use of traditional instruments modified live, in concert, by amplifiers, filters, etc., so that the audience can simultaneously hear both the natural and the modified sounds of the instrument). Started in early 1970, this group was dissolved at the end of 1971.

In 1971, he started to work in electronic music at the Electronic Music Laboratory of the Conservatorio Nacional de Música, which had just been founded. He continued to work in this field for three years, spending some time at the Electronic Music Studio of the Japanese Radio and Television (late 1971, early 1972), but abandoned this medium because his "interest for this type of music was not based on an expressive need but rather on a purely intellectual curiosity".³

³Interview with Mario Lavista, Mexico City, August 1988.
Beginning in 1979, Mario Lavista started to work in close collaboration with several performers in an exploration and research of the new technical and expressive possibilities of traditional instruments. The result of this new approach are several pieces for solo instruments or small ensembles: *Canto del alba*, *Lamento*, and *Nocturno*, which together form a triptych, all in collaboration with flutist Marielena Arizpe; *Dusk* with double bassist Bertram Turetzky; *Cante* with guitarists Margarita Castañón and Federico Bañuelos; *Marsias* with oboist Leonora Saavedra; *Tres canciones* with mezzo-soprano Adriana Díaz de León; *Madrigal* with clarinetist Luis Humberto Ramos; *Cuicani* with Leonora Saavedra and Luis Humberto Ramos; *Reflejos de la noche* with the Cuarteto de Cuerdas Latinoamericano; *Ofrenda* in collaboration with recorder player Horacio Franco; *Responsorio in memoriam Rodolfo Halffter* with bassoonist Wendy Holdaway.

Although Mario Lavista does not consider himself a "professional film music composer", he has written the soundtrack of three movies, all directed by Nicolás Echevarría: *Judea, Semana Santa entre los coros* (1973), *María Sabina, mujer espiritual* (1979), and *Niño Fidencio* (1982). In 1982, the Association of Film Journalists and Critics awarded Mario Lavista the "Diosa de Plata" (Silver Goddess) for best film music.
Besides being a busy composer, Mario Lavista currently holds posts as a teacher of Composition and Twentieth Century Analysis at the Conservatorio Nacional de Música and at the Escuela de Perfeccionamiento Ollin Yoliztli in Mexico City. He is now on leave from the latter and does not plan to return. He is also the founder and editor of Pauta, a music journal published by CENIDIM (Centro Nacional de Investigación, Documentación e Información Musical Carlos Chávez), a music research center which is part of the National Fine Arts Institute (Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes).

As a composer, as a performer of twentieth century music, as a teacher and as the directing force behind Pauta, Mario Lavista is, undoubtedly, one of the major figures in today's musical scene in Mexico. Luis Jaime Cortez, now director of CENIDIM, declares in the preface to a book of writings on and by Lavista:

As a teacher, suffice it to say that his thoughts have influenced (in a subtle or in a violent way) practically all the Mexican composers younger than he.*

His accomplishments were recognized in 1987 when he was elected to the renowned Academia de Artes (Academy of the Arts).

The compositional output of Mario Lavista can be divided into three periods, reflecting his exploration of different stylistic approaches.

The first period encompasses a few pieces that were written during the time he was studying with Chávez (but obviously not the ones that he considers "exercises"), and all of the works written while living in Europe. The majority of these works are written for traditional instruments, although there are a few pieces for tape and other "instruments" such as alarm clocks and shortwave radios. During this period, Lavista was in many ways part of the avant-garde movement, always searching for new means of expression. Looking back at those early years, he now believes that some of those works are not good, and he does not include them in his formal catalogue. In spite of this, the author feels that those pieces that were written after the composer left Chávez's Taller de Composición should be included, especially since they are mentioned in some of the literature consulted.

With the foundation of Quanta, improvisatory techniques became an important interest of Lavista and were explored both in the recitals given by the group and in some of the pieces that he committed to paper, such as Pieza para un(a) pianista y un piano. When Quanta was dissolved, Lavista returned to the electronic music studio (he had composed a
few pieces for tape earlier while in France). His last piece using this medium dates from 1973.

After he abandoned the electronic music medium, Lavista went through a somewhat transitional period, in which he wrote music with much more precise notation and used intervals with tonal connotations. Many of the pieces from this period also contain musical quotations. Lavista was turning his back on the avant-garde movement and starting to look back to tradition and to the past. His own words about this period are quoted in Wagars:

I started to use intervals I hadn't used before such as perfect fifths, major thirds and others which had tonal connotations, because they were "forbidden" to the avant-garde. I started to believe again in consonance and beauty and that music was inspiration and expression instead of merely an intellectualization of theories. ⁹

This is not to say that the music he has written since then is tonal, or that it imitates the style of any given period, but Lavista is no longer afraid of looking back to the musical legacy of centuries past. In a text he prepared when applying for a Guggenheim fellowship (which he obtained in 1987), Lavista relates:

After some time I realized that what was essential was not to forget, but to remember, to regain my memory. I learned then to look inside myself, knowing that I was indebted to the musicians from

the past and that I was a living part of that inexhaustible flow of music history."

Some representative pieces from the second part of this second period are Quotations, Lhyanh, and Trio.

The pivotal piece that marks the beginning of the third period is Canto del alba, for flute. Since 1979, when this piece was composed, Lavista has written many works that explore the capabilities of the different instruments to the fullest extent. Besides the works for solo instruments and small ensembles mentioned above, the orchestral piece Ficciones, analyzed in chapter III, and his pieces for mezzo-soprano and orchestra are also part of this more mature period of Mario Lavista. In these larger pieces, no special effects were included in the orchestral parts due to both practical reasons and to what the composer termed a "certain timidity about using these resources" on his part.7 The orchestration of the string quartet Reflejos de la noche was the first attempt to write more difficult music for a larger ensemble. In the opera Aura, yet to be premiered, Lavista ventures a little further and includes some very simple multiphonics in the flutes and oboes.

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7Interview with Mario Lavista, Mexico City, August 1988.
The works in the annotated chronological catalogue which follows evidences the array of styles and media which Lavista has explored and can be roughly organized into the three compositional periods mentioned above.
CHAPTER TWO

ANNOTATED CHRONOLOGICAL CATALOGUE OF WORKS

BY MARIO LAVISTA

The structure for the following catalogue is as follows:

Title, translation of title (if applicable), year.
Instrumentation and duration.
Place and date of première, performers.
Publication data.
Recording data.
Annotations.

Throughout this catalogue, unless otherwise indicated, all
the remarks in quotation marks were made by the composer
during the course of a set of interviews conducted by the
author in August, 1988, in Mexico City. Other sources are
acknowledged immediately after the annotation, since the
author believes that footnotes would in this case detract
from the structure of the catalogue.

Cinco piezas (Five Pieces); 1965
String quartet; 8'.
5th New Music Festival, Santos, Brazil; October, 1969.
Cuarteto Haydn.
Unpublished.
No commercial recording available.

Dedicated to Raúl Lavista.

Seis piezas (Six Pieces); 1965
String orchestra; 8'.
No data available.
Unpublished.
No commercial recording available.
Scores and parts may be rented from Ricordi-Ediciones
Mexicanas de Música.
These early pieces show a strong influence of Webern.

**Monólogo (Monologue); 1966**
Baritone, flute, vibraphone, and double bass; 8'.
Sala Manuel M. Ponce, Mexico City; June 27, 1966. Roberto
Bañuelas, baritone; Rubén Islas, flute; Homero Valle,
vibraphone; Daniel Ibarra, double bass.
Unpublished.
No commercial recording available.

Based on Gogol's *Diary of a Madman*. According to the
composer, this is the first work that he wrote not following
the guidelines of Chávez's Taller de Composición. Today the
composer's thoughts on this piece are: "There are some
moments in this piece in which the combination of elements
that I chose works. I think the intervallic construction is
good, and that the piece is coherent in itself."

**Dos canciones (Two Songs); 1966**
Mezzo-soprano and piano; 7'.
Casa del Lago, Mexico City; October 1, 1966. Margarita
González, mezzo-soprano; María Elena Barrientos, piano.
Mexico City, Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, 1968.
No commercial recording available.

Poems ("Palpar" and "Reversible") by Octavio Paz.
Dedicated to Rosa Marta Fernández and Juan Vicente Melo.
Commissioned by Casa del Lago.

**Divertimento; 1968**
Woodwind quintet, 5 woodblocks and 3 shortwave radios; 10'.
Contemporary Music Week, Orléans; February, 1971. Ensemble
de Musique Contemporaine. Konstantin Symonovic, conductor.
Unpublished.
No commercial recording available.

In five sections, with a structure based on aleatoric
principles. Graphic score.

**Homenaje a Beckett (Hommage to Beckett); 1968**
Three a cappella choirs; 8'.
Unperformed.
Unpublished.
Unrecorded.

Based on the work *Comment c'est* (How it is), with texts in
the original French.
**Diacronía (Diachrony); 1968**
String quartet; 12'.
Théatre de la Cité Universitaire, Paris; June 24, 1969. Ives Melon, violin I; Jean-Pierre Maroleau, violin II; Paulette Létazd, viola; Claude Maindive, cello.
Unpublished.

This is the piece in which the composer believes he "found his own voice for the first time". Both precise (pitches, dynamics, articulation) and ambiguous (rhythm, tempo) notation are used.

**Dúo (Duo); 1969**
Tape.
There is no score.
No commercial recording available.

The composer does not include this piece in his catalogue and states that he "does not remember it".

**Bleu (Blue); 1969**
Tape.
There is no score.
No commercial recording available.

As the above piece, the composer does not like to include this piece in his catalogue. Both Dúo and Bleu "had a very short life which they deserved, and I don't even remember them," according to the composer. Cited in Aurelio de la Vega, "La música artística latinoamericana," Boletín Interamericano de Música 82 (November-February 1971-72):17.

**Kronos; 1969**
Minimum of 15 alarm clocks, loudspeakers and tapes; indeterminate chronometric duration of 5 to 1,440 minutes. Conservatorio Nacional de Música, Mexico City; February, 1970. Ensemble under the direction of the composer.
Unpublished.
No commercial recording available.
Espaces trop habités (Spaces too inhabited); 1969
Tape; 6 hours.
Grand Palais, Paris; September 1970.
There is no score.
No commercial recording available.

This piece was done at the Experimental Music Studio of the
Schola Cantorum, in Paris. Other students of Jean-Etienne
Marie also collaborated in creating this piece. It was
written especially for a gallery opening and intended to
serve that purpose only, hence its duration.

Pieza para un(a) pianista y un piano (Piece for one pianist
and one piano); 1970
Conservatorio de Música de Madrid; October 18, 1971. Alicia
Urreeta, piano.
Mexico City, Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, 1972.
In Mario Lavista y Julio Estrada. Mexico City, Voz Viva de
México, Serie Música Nueva, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de

Dedicated to Alicia Urreeta.
Another version is Piece for 2 Pianists and 2 Pianos, in
which a second pianist remains in absolute silence, which
must be "communicated" to the listeners. The piece consists
of seven musical events, which can be played in any given
order. The rhythmic structure is defined by a Fibonacci
series.

Game; 1971
Several flutes; indeterminate duration.
Conservatorio de Música de México, September 18, 1971.
Gildardo Mojica, flute.
Colonia Yunke de Mariposas, Mexico, Ediciones Veracruzanas,
1975.
In Mario Lavista y Julio Estrada, Mexico City, Voz Viva de
México, Serie Música Nueva, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de
México, VVMN-10, 1975; Gildardo Mojica and Rubén Islas,
flutes.

Dedicated to Gildardo Mojica.
Some non-traditional effects are called for in this piece,
which was first written for one flute. A second version,
dating from 1972 adds one to three more players. The piece
consists of 20 small events to be played in any order to be
chosen by the interpreter(s). Rhythm, pitches and dynamics
are precisely notated.
Continuo; 1971
Orchestra; 7'.
Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, December 6, 1971.
Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional. Luis Herrera de la Fuente, conductor.
Unpublished.
No commercial recording available.

Dedicated to Luis Herrera de la Fuente.
Score and parts may be rented from Ricordi-Ediciones Mexicanas de Música.
In this piece Lavista specifies the seating arrangements, dividing the orchestra in two groups, which should be as far apart as possible in order to enhance the stereophonic effect.

Alme; 1971
Electronic music; 7'.
Conservatorio Nacional de Música, Mexico City; October 1971.
Mario Lavista, synthesizer.
There is no score.
No commercial recording available.

Contrapunto (Counterpoint); 1972
Electronic music; 16'.
There is no score.
No commercial recording available.

Based on musical quotations, from Mahler's Ninth Symphony, the Rolling Stones, the national anthem of Mexico, and a variety of other sources.

Trio (Trio); 1972
2 string instruments and ring modulator.

According to the composer "this is a very bad piece, written very hastily, using a graphic score which didn't make sense; it was only a game. Using a graphic score wasn't an expressive need."

Diatónia (Diaphone); 1973
Piano and percussion; 12'.
Poliforum Cultural Siqueiros, Mexico City, March 18, 1974.
Alicia Urreta, piano and percussion.
Unpublished.
No commercial recording available.
Cluster; 1973
Piano; indeterminate duration.
Score is included in the notes accompanying the recording.
In Mario Lavista y Julio Estrada, Mexico City, Voz Viva de México, Serie Música Nueva, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, VVMN-10, 1975; Alicia Urreta, piano.

According to the composer "this is not really a piece, it is an acoustic event. This came about as a result of a conversation with the painter Arnaldo Coen, in which we were discussing the possibilities of creating a piece with a minimum of elements."
It consists of only one cluster, played using pedal. The interpreter is to let it ring for as long as there are any audible sounds. The duration of the piece, therefore, will have a lot to do with the acoustic characteristics of the room and the piano on which it is "performed."

Music for the film "Judea, Semana Santa entre los Coras."
directed by Nicolás Echevarría; 1973
Electronic music; 25'.

Antinomia (Antinomy); 1973
Tape.
There is no score.
No commercial recording available.

The composer does not like to acknowledge this piece, since he does not consider it any good. As far as he is concerned, it "does not exist."

Diálogos (Dialogues); 1974
Violin and piano; 8'.
Mexico City, Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, 1975.
In Música para violín y piano, Mexico City, Voz Viva de México, VVMN-12, 1975; Manuel Enríquez, violin; Jorge Velazco, piano.

Dedicated to Manuel Enríquez and Jorge Velazco.
The piece consists of four sections, each of them precisely notated, which can be played in any given order.
Antifonia (Antiphony); 1974
Flute, 2 bassoons, and 2 groups of percussion; 8'.
Poliforum Cultural Siqueiros, Mexico City, March 24, 1975.
Instrumental Ensemble under the direction of José Serebrier.
Unpublished.
No commercial recording available.

Arrangements for the placement of the musicians are
specified by the composer, so the antiphonal characteristics
of this piece can be heard better.

Cadenzas for the first and third movements of Mozart's E
flat concerto for two pianos and orchestra; 1974
Unperformed.
Unpublished.
Unrecorded.

Pieza para 2 pianistas y un piano (Piece for 2 pianists and
one piano); 1975.
Sala Manuel M. Ponce, Mexico City, April 16, 1975. Carmen
Betancourt and Federico Ibarra, piano.
Guadalajara, Jalisco, Departamento de Bellas Artes, 1976.
Mexico City, INBA-SACM, 1987. Mario Lavista, Federico
Ibarra, piano.

Dedicated to Carmen Betancourt and Federico Ibarra.
This piece was erroneously listed in Baker's Biographical
Dictionary as Espejos (Mirrors), (1975) for piano, 4-hands.
The work contains some "mirrors" as compositional
techniques, but it never had this title.

Quotations; 1976
Cello and piano; 9'.
Teatro del Ballet Folklórico de México, September 11, 1976.
Ignacio Mariscal, cello. Mario Lavista, piano.
Mexico City, Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, 1979.
No commercial recording available (there is one in progress,
with Carlos Prieto and Edison Quintana)

Dedicated to David Tomatz.
Based on brief musical quotations, from Ravel, Debussy,
Crumb, Webern, etc.
Trio; 1976
Violin, cello and piano; 9'.
Teatro del Ballet Folklórico de México, November 17, 1976.
Ramón Romo, violin, Ignacio Mariscal, cello, Mario
Lavista, piano.
Unpublished.
No commercial recording available.

Dedicated to the Western Arts Trio.
Based on musical quotations.

Jaula (Cage); 1976
Several prepared pianos; indeterminate duration.
Sala Manuel M. Ponce, Mexico City, April 3, 1977. Pedro
Ibarra and Mario Lavista, pianos.
Unpublished.
No commercial recording available.

Dedicated to John Cage (hence the title Jaula, which means
cage) on his 64th birthday. Written in collaboration with
the painter Arnaldo Coen. This is the only piece with a
graphic score that Lavista still likes.

Lyannah; 1976
Orchestra; 7'30''.
Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, August 6, 1977.
Orquesta Filarmónica de las Américas. Luis Herrera de la
Fuente, conductor.
Mexico City, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1982.

Dedicated to Luis Herrera de la Fuente.
Score and parts may be rented from Ricordi-Editiones
Mexicanas de Música.
The title of this composition is Swift's word for the
"swallow" in Part 4 of Gulliver's Travels.
Includes some musical quotations.

Talea; 1976
Music box; indeterminate duration.
Unperformed.
Unpublished.
Unrecorded.

Pieza para caja de música (Piece for music box); 1977
Radio Universidad, Mexico City; March 1977.
Unpublished.
No commercial recording available.
Music for the play "Los inocentes" ("The Innocents") by William Archibald; 1977
Piano, string quartet, percussion and music box.
Teatro de la Universidad, Mexico City; November, 1977.
Cuarteto Mozart; Mario Lavista, piano; Homero Valle, percussion.
Unpublished.
No commercial recording available.

Music for the film "María Sabina, mujer espiritú" by Nicolás Echevarría; 1978
Flute, cello, trombone, and piano.

Canto del alba (Dawn Song); 1979
Flute in C, amplified; 11'.
Primer Foro Internacional de Música Nueva, Mexico City, April 28, 1979. Marielena Arizpe, flute.
Mexico City, Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, 1980.

Dedicated to Marielena Arizpe.
Part of the Triptico (Triptych) for flutes. In these pieces Lavista explores new technical possibilities, such as multiphonics, microtones, etc. This piece needs to be performed on an open-hole flute with a low B footjoint.

Tango del adulterio (Adultery Tango); 1979
Piano; 3'.
Teatro Milán, Mexico City; October 11, 1979. Recorded by the composer.
Unpublished.
No commercial recording available.

Written for the play Fue una historia de amor (It was a love story) by Gilbert Léautier. Dedicated to Mabel Martin.

Dusk; 1980
Double bass; 9'.
Teatro de la Danza, Mexico City, April 16, 1980. Bertram Turetzky, double bass.
Mexico City, Instituto Nacional de Bellas Artes-CENIDIM, 1982.
No commercial recording available.

Dedicated to Bertram Turetzky.
Simurg; 1980
Piano; 10'.
Teatro Ocampo, Morelia, Michoacán, Mexico; July 5, 1980.
Gerhart Muench, piano.
Mexico City, Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, 1982.
In Compositores latinoamericanos; Sao Paulo, Universidad de Sao Paulo, 1986; Beatriz Balzi, piano.

Dedicated to Gerhart Muench.
Simurg, the king of birds, is the subject of a Sufi poem quoted by Borges in one of his short stories. In the program notes Lavista wrote: "I like to think that Muench is a bird who, a long time ago, started a long trip in search of knowledge."

Cante; 1980
Two guitars, amplified; 12'.
VII Festival Hispanoamericano de Música Contemporánea, Madrid; October 27, 1980. Margarita Castañón and Federico Bañuelos, guitars.
Mexico City, Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, 1986.
No commercial recording available.

Dedicated to Margarita Castañón and Federico Bañuelos.

Ficciones (Fictions); 1980
Orchestra; 13'.
Sala Nezahualcóyotl, Ciudad Universitaria, Mexico City, August 1, 1980. Orquesta Sinfónica de Minería. Luis Herrera de la Fuente, conductor.
Mexico City, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1987.
In Compositores mexicanos de hoy, Paris, Forlane UM 3568, 1982; Orquesta Filarmónica de la Ciudad de México; Fernando Lozano, conductor. Reedited in Mexico by Peerless.

Dedicated to Juan Vicente Melo.
Score and parts may be rented from Ricordi-Ediciones Mexicanas de Música.
This piece is analyzed in depth in the third chapter of this thesis.

Dedicated to Gerhart Muench.
This piece was written as a present to Gerhart Muench, a German composer living in Mexico. It is written in the style of Chopin and given the next number (after Chopin's Nocturn Op. 55, No. 2), because of Muench's love for Chopin's music. It was not intended to be performed in front of an audience.

Lamento a la muerte de Raúl Lavista (Lament to the Death of Raúl Lavista); 1981 Bass flute, amplified; 7'30".

Part of the Triptico for flutes. See notes for Canto del alba.


Danza bucólica (Bucolic dance); 1981 Music box; indeterminate duration.

Dedicated to Dionisia Urtubées.
Nocturno (Nocturne); 1981
Flute in G; 7'30''.
Cuarto Foro Internacional de Música Nueva, Mexico City; March 14, 1982. Maríelena Arizpe, flute.
Mexico City, Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, 1984.
1) In Música Mexicana de Hoy, Mexico City, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, , 1984; Maríelena Arizpe, flute. 2) In Voces de la flauta, Mexico City, Consejo Nacional de la Juventud, 1984; Maríelena Arizpe, flute.

Part of the Triptico for flutes. See notes for Canto del alba.

Music for the film "Niño Eldencio" by Nicolás Echevarría; 1982.

Marsias; 1982
Oboe and crystal cups; 9'.
Museo Nacional de Arte, Mexico City; October 24, 1982.
Leonora Saavedra, oboe.
Mexico City, Ediciones Mexicanas de Música, 1985.
In Música Mexicana de Hoy, Mexico City, Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, 1982; Leonora Saavedra, oboe.

Dedicated to Leonora Saavedra.
New technical possibilities, such as multiphonics, are explored in this piece. The crystal cups create harmonic fields over which the oboe line is juxtaposed.

Correspondencias (Correspondences); 1983
Piano, 10'.
Unperformed.
Unpublished.
Unrecorded.

Written in collaboration with Gerhart Muench.

Tres canciones (Three Songs); 1983
Mezzo-soprano and piano; 8'.
Sexto Foro Internacional de Música Nueva, Mexico City, May 12, 1984. Adriana Díaz de León, mezzo-soprano; Mario Lavista, piano.
Unpublished.
No commercial recording available (there is one in progress with Adriana Díaz de León and Edison Quintana).

Dedicated to Adriana Díaz de León.
Chinese poetry of the Tang Dynasty. Poems by Po Chu Yi and Li Chang Yin.
Reflejos de la noche (Reflections of the Night); 1984
String quartet; 12'.
Unpublished.
No commercial recording available (there is one in progress with the Cuarteto Latinoamericano).
Entire piece written using only harmonics.

Mía el comienzo (3 canciones) (Towards the Beginning (three songs); 1984
Mezzo-soprano and orchestra; 9'.
XII Festival Internacional Cervantino, Guanajuato, Mexico; October 24, 1984. Orquesta Sinfónica Nacional. Adriana Díaz de León, mezzo-soprano; Francisco Savin, conductor.
Mexico City, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México, 1988. No commercial recording available.
Poems by Octavio Paz.
Dedicated to Octavio Paz.
Score and parts may be rented from Ricordi-Ediciones Mexicanas de Música.

Cuicani; 1985
Flute and Bb clarinet; 10'.
Galería Universitaria, Mexico City, November 21, 1985.
Marielena Arizpe, flute; Luis Humberto Ramos, clarinet.
Unpublished.
No commercial recording available (one in progress with Marielena Arizpe and Luis Humberto Ramos).
Dedicated to Salvador Flores.

Madrigal; 1985
Clarinet in Bb; 10'.
Galería Universitaria, Mexico City; November 21, 1985. Luis Humberto Ramos, clarinet.
Unpublished.
No commercial recording available (one in progress with Luis Humberto Ramos).
Dedicated to Luis Humberto Ramos.
Uses multiphonics and other special techniques.
**Tres noches (Three Nocturnes); 1985-86**
Mezzo-soprano and orchestra; 20'.
Première of the first two songs: Sala de Conciertos Nezahualcóyotl, Ciudad Universitaria, Mexico City; June 27, 1986. Orquesta Filarmónica de la Universidad Autónoma de México (OFUNAM), Adriana Díaz de León, mezzo-soprano; Luis Herrera de la Fuente, conductor.
Unpublished.
No commercial recording available.

Poems by Rubén Bonifaz Nuño and Alverro Mutis.
Dedicated to Consuelo Carredano.
Score and parts may be rented from Ricordi-Ediciones Mexicanas de Música.

**Reflejos de la noche (Reflections of the Night); 1986**
String orchestra; 12'.

Score and parts may be rented from Ricordi-Ediciones Mexicanas de Música.
Transcription of *Reflejos de la noche* for string quartet.

**Ofrenda (Offering); 1986**
Tenor recorder; 10'.
Unpublished.
No commercial recording available.

With multiphonics, non-traditional fingerings, simultaneous playing and singing by the performer, etc.

**Vals (Waltz); 1986**
Flute, clarinet, string quartet; 3'.
Unpublished.
Unrecorded.

Theme of the short film "El mundo de la talavera" by Julián Pablo.
Aura; 1987-88
Opera in one act; 1 hour 10'.
Unperformed (The première is tentatively set for April 1989).
Unpublished.
Unrecorded.

Based on the short story by the same name by the Mexican writer Carlos Fuentes. The libreto is by the Mexican playwright Juan Tovar. The opera is in one act and has eleven scenes. There is only one scenography.
The première will tentatively take place at the Festival del Centro Histórico de la Ciudad de México (Mexico City Historic Center Festival) and will be directed by Luis Berber.

Lavista uses multiphonics in the orchestra for the first time.

Responsorio in memoriam Rodolfo Halffter (Responsory in memoriam Rodolfo Halffter); 1988
Bassoon, 2 bass drums and 4 tubular bells(2 percussionists); 12'.
Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City; April 23, 1988. Wendy Holdaway, bassoon; Homero Valle and Jesús Guadarrama, percussion.
Unpublished.
No commercial recording available.

Dedicated to Wendy Holdaway.

Cuaderno de viaje (Travel Log); 1988
Viola; 9'.
Unperformed.
Unpublished.
Unrecorded.

Written for the Italian violist Maurizio Barbetti, who will premier it in Amsterdam at the Gaudeamus Competition, in November, 1988. The entire piece is written using only harmonics. The title of this piece is still tentative, although the composer is "ninety percent sure that this will be the final title."
CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSIS OF FICCIONES

This chapter consists of an analysis of Ficciones, one of Lavista's major orchestral works. Written in 1980, this piece belongs to his third stylistic period. Literature has always been an important interest of Mario Lavista, and most of the pieces from this period demonstrate this interest to a greater or a lesser degree. In the case of Ficciones, the literary source for his inspiration is the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges. Not only is the title taken from one of his books, but the composer learned about Simurg, the immortal king of birds, in one of Borges's short stories, entitled "El acercamiento a Almostasín." The legend of Simurg, which is at the heart of Ficciones, is mentioned in this short story. Prompted by Borges's reference to Simurg, Lavista decided to look for the actual source and found it in a thirteenth century poem by the Sufi mystic Farid ad-Din Attar entitled "The Conference of the Birds."

As the story goes, Simurg dropped a splendid feather in the middle of China, and the birds decided to find him. In their search for Simurg (which means thirty birds), they cross seven valleys. Many of them succumb. Only thirty reach Kaf, the mountain that circles the Earth, where Simurg lives. They realize that Simurg is each and all of them.
This principle of identity metaphorically described in the poem is the aspect of the legend which most interests the composer. He relates:

My piece does not pretend to describe the story of Simurg in the manner of a symphonic poem, in which form depends on a story or a program which serves as a guideline for the composer; I am interested that the principle of identity that this poem states appears in a musical form or language devoid of anecdotal references.

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. The germinal cell is formed by four notes: Eb, A, Bb and E, which form two tritones related by a perfect fifth. The piece starts with the strings playing tremolo Eb’s spanning two octaves, while double basses punctuate this Eb every two measures providing rhythmic interest. In the fifth measure, the other members of the germinal cell appear in layered entrances, each coming an eighth note later than the previous one. In measure 6 the original cell is sounded simultaneously (Ex. 1).

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m.6 (all sounding pitches)  

Example 1

The bottom tritone, which is emphasized by the bassoons and contrabassoon (A) and by the timpani (Eb), defines the pitch centers of the piece, and the two notes are related in such a way that the tonal connotations are obvious. One could almost say that the whole piece is one big movement from a tonic (Eb) to a dominant (A), with a tritone defining the V to I progression. This tritone, with its implications of a V-I progression, is used to establish all new tonal areas. Most of the "functional" harmonies are shown by the activity of the double bass part, which is always separated from the role of the upper strings.

*For instance, the C harmonic area which begins the second section is defined by the tritone Gb-C, first established in measures 100-101 in the double-basses, bass clarinet and first bassoon, and emphasized again in measure 104, before the long C unison which closes section I.
In much the same way as one can go around the circle of fifths, this first cell can generate others by moving in perfect fifths from the upper note of the initial fifth. Instead of having twelve keys, as in the circle of fifths of traditional harmony, twelve cells, each formed by a perfect fifth and its two corresponding tritones (above and below), can be found by this method. Example 2 shows how each new cell can be generated.
Example 2\textsuperscript{10}

Because of the tritones found above and below each perfect fifth, cells 7 to 12 are mirror images of cells 1 to 6 respectively, just as any two keys on exactly opposite sides of a circle of fifths are a tritone apart. The arrows between the cells illustrate this correspondence.

\textsuperscript{10}A similar analysis can be found in Jeannine Wagar, "Stylistic Tendencies in Three Contemporary Mexican Composers: Manuel Enríquez, Mario Lavista and Alicia Urreta" (D.M.A. dissertation, Stanford University, 1985), p. 50.
Of these cells, only 1, 2 and 4 with their mirrors 7, 8 and 10 are used in *Ficciones*. Cell 4 was chosen to once again show symmetry, and therefore mirror images, since it is built on the note C, which is exactly half way in the tritone Eb–A which forms the tonal fabric of the piece. The importance of this symmetry around the note C is further evidenced by the fact that the second section of the work begins after the new tonal center, which is based on cell 4, is established by repeating the note C in an orchestral unison (as Eb had been established at the beginning of the piece).

The two sections that form *Ficciones* are of approximately equal length, measured in real time. The first section, which encompasses measures 1 through 114, is in turn divided into five clearly marked subsections. There are several different ways in which Lavista separates the different sections and subsections. Throughout the piece, and particularly in this first section, one of the most noticeable ways through which he achieves this separation is with the introduction of textural changes.\(^\text{21}\)

Measures 1 through 17 are based exclusively on the first cell, except for occasional ornamental figures used to mark entrances of the cell notes. The note Eb is

\(^{21}\text{A structural analysis of *Ficciones* emphasizing textural and pitch considerations appears in Appendix 1.}\)
prominent. The basic texture consists of tremolos in the strings, with winds and percussion punctuating entrances and providing rhythmic interest. In measure 18, the second cell appears over a pedal Eb. This entrance is emphasized by using almost the whole orchestra, thickening the texture considerably, and by indicating a fortissimo. The first cell is sounded in measure 19, with each note member of the cell introduced by an ornamental sextuplet. A repeat of measure 18, with the addition of one extra beat forms measure 20. From then on until measure 33, where section B starts, only cell 1 is used, maintaining the texture used before. The whole section A can then be described as being a long prolongation of the note Eb, with occasional appearances of the rest of the members of cell 1 and two interruptions in which cell 2 is briefly introduced.

A chorale-like melody in the tuba and contrabassoon, and its corresponding countermelodies in the upper woodwinds start in measure 33 (Example 3).
→ Indicates countermelody with triadic implications.
* Indicates countermelody based on seconds.

Example 3

Several aspects of this melody (and of its countermelodies) should be discussed at this point, as they are vital to the understanding of some of the features that unify the entire piece. The beginning of this chorale melody is based on the first cell and, with the introduction of the note C, gives, in three measures, a good synopsis of the "tonal" structure of the piece. The third and fourth
measures introduce modal ambiguity for the first time in the piece and form a melodic cell that returns several times during the course of *Ficciones*. Beginning in the fourth measure, a modulation begins and the melody ends on G, which is part of cell 4, presented here for the first time (m. 38). This modulation takes place by following the upper tritones of the three cells used in *Ficciones* (Example 4).

![Example 4](image)

There are two types of countermelodies in counterpoint with the main melody. One is based on minor seconds (flutes, clarinet I) and is written in part in inversion with itself. Both the stepwise movement and the use of inversions are present in other parts of the piece.

The other type of countermelody appears in the piccolo (which is doubled by the cellos playing harmonics) and the second clarinet. The most important aspect of this melody is that it outlines a major and a minor triad, or arguably, a minor seventh chord. Whatever the label, the tonal implications are obvious. The use of chord outlines superimposed over a harmonic fabric based on fifths and
tritones recurs time and again during *Ficciones*. Both types of countermelodies described here have the same carefully planned rhythm: the moving notes in the counterpoint do not coincide with the moving notes in the melody, so as not to interfere with the melodic understanding of the listener. This kind of attention to detail permeates the entire work.

Besides the first appearance of melodic material, subsection B (measure 33) is set apart by a complete change of texture. The strings drop out, except for the violas, which continue to play a tremolo Eb, the only unifying textural element between sections A and B, and the winds take center stage. In measure 38, when cell 4 is sounded for the first time, all the strings return. A new melodic line based on the "thirds motive" from the chorale melody, starts in measure 39 and is preceded by a three note anacrusis, which begins an eighth note after the previous melody ended. Once more it is evident that Lavista is a very skillful craftsman.

Beginning in measure 41 there is a repeat of the chorale melody and countermelodies that started section B, followed by the melody based on thirds. There are differences between these two halves of section B, but they remain in the realm of orchestral textures. The double basses, when they are active in this subsection, emphasize the notes G and Db, in a tritone relationship (V-I) defining
the new tonal center. This tonal center is kept throughout section C, which starts in measure 49.

In this third subsection, the texture changes quite dramatically. Measure 49 marks the beginning of the section and at the same time carries over the final notes of the previous melodies. In measure 50, while there are still remnants of the previous melodic material, the new texture is presented, again in a layered form. As was the case in section A, texture, rather than melody, is the prevalent interest in the first part of section C. The double basses sound a Db (part of cell 4), while the rest of the string section plays natural harmonics. The strings are coupled in pairs, as they were paired in the ornamental figures at the beginning of the piece. While the strings are playing harmonics, both G and Db are occasionally sounded in the winds, so as to help the basses in maintaining a feeling of a tonal center. In the second half of section C, starting on measure 56 (with an anacrusis beginning in the previous measure), melodies appear again. In this respect, the second part of section C can be related to section B. The melodic material is also derived from the first melodies and countermelodies. For instance, the melody in the double basses and contrabassoons can be easily traced to the original melody in the tuba and contrabassoon. The modal ambiguity already mentioned above when discussing the first
melodies of the piece is used to a greater extent in this part, both as it had been presented before and in mirrors.

The upper strings stop playing harmonics and start playing tremolo Eb's in measure 67, as they did in the beginning. After three measures that can be considered transitional, where the first cell is again established, there is a complete return to the A section by measure 70. This section is labeled A', as there are a few permutations of measures, changes in meter (in relation to A), and other minor changes. Section A' closes with strings alone playing the first cell in tremolo.

The section between measures 91 and 114 serves as a transition to the second major section of Ficciones. As the string section (minus double basses) keeps playing cell 1 in tremolo, a series of melodies are played in the winds beginning in measure 91. In measure 104, while the upper strings keep playing the same cell, the double basses, doubled by the bass clarinet and the first bassoon modulate to cell 4, and by use of a tritone (V-I) the new tonal center, C, is established. Cell 1 is still sounded over a pedal C, but soon the note C overtakes and is played in an orchestral unison with carefully layered entrances in each of the string sections. This leads to a fermata on C which conclusively ends the first major section of Ficciones.
The second major section consists of what is basically an orchestration of an earlier piece by Lavista: Simurg, for piano. This piano piece was written for the German composer and pianist Gerhart Muench, who has lived in Mexico for over 30 years. Lavista relates in program notes for the première of this work:

For him (Muench), music is, more than any other art, knowledge of being. I like to think that Muench is a bird that started, some time ago, a long trip in search of knowledge. I have wanted to "translate" in my work certain traits of this remarkable composer's personality...¹²

Activity in all parameters increases at the beginning of section two. Harmonically, the section starts with a presentation of cell 4, but already in the third measure (m. 117) cell 2 is added. From then on to measure 126 the double basses play the notes C, G, Db and Gb, which are the members of cell 4. Over this harmonic background a series of short melodies (almost motives), containing pitches from all three cells, is played. In terms of dynamics, the introduction of the first "motive" is emphasized by a marking of fortissimo. The dynamic level stays basically at at least a forte level, while the first section is mostly piano, although crescendos and decrescendos abound.

Rhythmically, the first section is quite static. Not only are the general pace and the harmonic rhythm slow, but apart from the entrances of cell 2 in parts A and A', there are no rhythmic motives. In the beginning of this second section, the melodies juxtaposed over the harmonic cell have definite rhythmic identities. Duple meters were the norm for the first half of Ficciones. There is greater rhythmic complexity in the second half where changes of meter are frequent. 7/8 and a combination of 3/4 and 4/4 are the predominant meters, representing the seven valleys that have to be crossed to arrive to Kaf. Texturally the writing here becomes a little thicker, although it is never muddy.

In measure 128 a new subsection begins with melodies in conjunct motion. The dynamic level is dropped significantly and the orchestral texture becomes thinner. The rhythmic activity also decreases. After two measures of rests, the double basses start emphasizing the note G. The same note G continues to be present in the violas, horns and clarinets when the double basses stop in measure 133. Measures 136 and 137 contain melodies based on seconds and thirds. Once more the "thirds motive" from measures 39 and 40 appears, providing modal ambiguity.

The next section, starting in measure 138, is unified by the repetition of the motive in the horns (Example 5).
Example 5

While the note G is emphasized in the horns, the woodwinds have melodic lines. Stimmtausche technique is also present here, usually in sets of two measures (Example 6).

Example 6

The repetitive horn parts change slightly in measure 144 as the first horn part alternates between a minor third and a major second. This motive is taken up by the first clarinet and the first violins in measure 149.

Measures 153 and 154 see the strong presence of the Eb come back in the trumpet. Elements of cells 2 and 4 are played in the bassoons, while both cell 1 and cell 4 are used in the second oboe and English horn. Besides being
rich harmonically, these two measures contain (oboe II) a quotation from a piece by Gerhart Muench entitled *Presencias*.13

The rhythmic activity increases once again in measures 155 to 157 to arrive to the *forte* climax in measure 158. In this measure, the texture thickens and the G and the Eb again carry similar weight. The anacrusis leading to the downbeat of measure 158, serves to further mark the climax.

In this measure, the "thirds motive," which had first appeared in measure 38 (complete with anacrusis), returns in the horns, violas and first oboe. The repetitive motive originally given to the horns is given to the violas and first oboe in measure 161, and to other instruments in subsequent measures. As a last reminder, the harp, first trombone, tuba and double basses play cell 2 in measures 165 and 166.

The last three measures of the piece provide a summary of the harmonic activity of the entire work. Cell 4 appears in the double basses, bassoon II, and harp, in measure 167 and first beat of 168. Cell 2 is sounded and sustained as a chord throughout the three measures in the violas. Cell 1

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ends the piece, just as it started it, in the double basses, bassoon II, harp, and violas.
CHAPTER FOUR

AN INTERVIEW WITH MARIO LAVISTA

On literature and music

Bonnet: In studying your music and in reading Pauta, which you direct, I became aware of your great interest in literature. Can you explain how literature has affected you as a composer?

Lavista: I believe that the selection of one author over another when reading, depends on a certain type of secret affinity - a mysterious affinity. Obviously, one can talk about certain literary sources of inspiration, but even though my music is influenced by certain literary ideas, I have never felt impelled to say what I needed or wanted to say through any medium other than music. I am aware that all the things one reads throughout life have an influence on all the actions of one's life, not only on music-making. Reading in a certain sense molds us, directs us, and I am positive that this is reflected in a quite mysterious way, in a language as different as is the language of sound. I read for pleasure. My only closeness to literature is through aesthetic pleasure. When I first start to read, if I don't feel that I am being transformed, that it does not transform me, then I believe that reading is useless. One should read, look at a picture, or listen to music according
to the degree in which one feels transformed. A sound should transform, if not the work is useless.

On analysis and composition

Bonnet: When we met, in July 1987, you had just won a Guggenheim fellowship, which enabled you to take a leave of absence from teaching and compose your opera Aura. Is the work complete?

Lavista: It's basically complete. I've already composed the vocal score; this allows the work to be rehearsed with the singers, and then I immediately started on the orchestration. I have orchestrated about two thirds of it. I don't usually compose directly on to the orchestra page. I prefer to do an outline, a sketch, and then as a second process to composing, I orchestrate it, and direct my attention only to the process of orchestration, knowing that I already have various other things solved, because if I face the orchestra score directly, without having had an outline, I believe there are too many problems to be solved. I have to decide on which notes, what rhythm they have, which instruments will play them ...

Bonnet: How do you start then, with the piano?

Lavista: I usually make an outline, and in that outline I write down certain orchestral ideas, but I continue working, knowing that when I finish, I have to orchestrate it.
Bonnet: Then, for instance, if you write a piece that you know will be for orchestra, how do you write? On four staffs?

Lavista: That depends, it could be two, three ...

Bonnet: So you write the correct octaves, the correct registers and so on.

Lavista: I try to write them, yes.

Bonnet: And the doublings and the colors, you do those when orchestrating?

Lavista: I do that when orchestrating, and frequently it seems certain ideas emerge more complete than others, so I use four staffs, and then it's not just an outline, that passage is already orchestrated. But the next one could be only one chord. Other things interest me, the harmony, other things, and I move on. I don't worry about thinking of what would be the counterpoint to this, what else could be added to it. That will come because it is a work for orchestra, not a work for piano. Only once have I written an orchestra piece directly, that was Lyhannh. I did that directly; afterwards, I preferred to go back to my previous process.

Bonnet: Do you think there are formulas for making music?

Lavista: I believe that there is no one formula for making good music. That is, a person can have the knowledge, the
craft, and nevertheless still make bad music. That means that there is something very deep down in the human being that needs to be said. The act of composing is basically an act of doing, but of doing something, of saying through sound - since a musician's thinking comes through sound - much more than through concepts. That is, it's clear that one can formulate a certain work in words, but actually, what one has wanted to say, has already been said, has already been said in its own terms ... only in those terms.

Bonnet: There are many people who cannot understand this unless one points it out to them.

Lavista: Or verbally ... my intentions were such and such... Now, in principle, this type of explanation seems to me rather useless because of the following: because, I believe, that every one hears his own music. I believe that listening to music is to complete a cycle in the formation of a piece of work that began with composition, continued with performance and then found the listener. Until a listener is found, the music is somehow unfinished. Now, when I listen to music, the music that I like, that I frequent, it is that music in which I hear myself. The same happens with certain poems, in which one finds a phrase that one has already thought of, that one already knew. That is, I am reading myself in that poem, and it is that poem which is actually revealing certain things in myself. I believe that the problem of music is the same, only that it is in
terms of sound. I listen to one of Mozart's string quintets, and if I do so often, it is because I hear myself in it. Therefore, it seems to me that from that point of view, it is rather useless to know what Mozart thought of that quintet, because I am hearing a work that goes much beyond the intention of the composer. The composer may have certain intentions, but once the work acquires a certain degree of autonomy, when it goes out into the world, when it reaches a listener, then it acquires a life of its own.

Bonnet: Part of the common heritage.

Lavista: Yes. Yes, of course. It is already part of us. The intentions of a composer may be quite respectable, but they have been formulated with words, while his deeper intention, what he wanted to say on a deeper level, was molded through sound.

Bonnet: So then when I analyze Ficciones or when I listen to Ficciones and I come to certain conclusions, I could very well be in disagreement with what you would, perhaps, say in words.

Lavista: Probably. I believe that an analysis is always desireable, because it allows me to ... for instance, if I decide to analyze a Debussy prelude, I shall do so because I want to know what the rational thinking of that musician was. That is, what did he have to invent to say what he needed to say. He had to invent this whole system, this
whole way of building, which is so personal, but precisely to say something that is a part of this same texture, right? It is evident that the form, that the content is exactly the same. Of course, analysis brings you closer to an author, brings you closer to the work. In any case, if it is a truly great piece of music, it is new every time you hear it. Now then, the analysis allows you to hear it better. There is a level of hearing which is elementary, and which I believe is very valid, and that is hearing melodies. But if you go even deeper into listening, you begin to hear things which enrich this relationship with the work even more. I am not suggesting that analysis is useless. For instance, I get enormous pleasure out of analyzing. I do this quite frequently, because I teach composition and twentieth century analysis, so I analyze those works. What I wish to point out, and I insist on this with my students, is that in analyzing, for instance, *The Firebird*, and in trying to discover the mechanism that surrounds or that manipulates this very coherent machinery, we want to discover this mechanism, because this mechanism served that composer in saying what he had to say. But having knowledge of this mechanism in no way guarantees, it does not tell us, how to write a work of art. One cannot know that, because sometimes it does not depend on the composer any more, it depends on the history of that work, it depends on whether those who come afterward decide that that work has to be heard. For instance, it may be that the next generation
decides not to listen to today's music, then the life span of that piece of music would be very short. So analysis, of course, is useful, but it does not give us the key to music.

**On teaching composition**

Bonnet: How does one teach composition then?

Lavista: What does one teach, when teaching composition? What are we trying to teach? We are trying to teach a craft, a knowledge of a tradition, a very deep knowledge of music, of works of music. By deep, I mean to say really get into each piece and try to see that universe, and try to inhabit it, and see its relationships and see how it is built. Besides, we attempt to provide the student with a craft, a profession; that is, just as there is an interpreting profession, there is a composing profession. It is necessary to have a first-class profession, because that is the only way in which we can say things clearly. And it is the only way in which we can avoid much of it staying in the inkwell, and to avoid a divorce between the idea and that which is written down. What one tries to do is that there be practically no distance between what one hears internally and what one writes on the paper to be heard externally, and that it coincide with what was previously heard. Nevertheless, I believe that something always remains in the inkwell, as writers say. But the battle with writing is to try to get these two distances to
come together, and that sometimes they coincide. I often think, with respect to teaching composition, that the student should not spend too much time in contact with the teacher. A student of composition should be around some three years, and then one must let him go to find his own voice, because if the time lapse is too long, I believe that creation then becomes something very academic. Perhaps a student begins to think that this is truth. That this daily labor, this analysis, of his profession, is the truth.

On his teachers

Bonnet: So then Chávez' teaching style was actually to imbue yourself in that composer?

Lavista: Yes, the style of Chávez' Taller de Composición was based on tradition. The composers that were analyzed were Bach, Mozart, Schubert, Brahms, Chopin, Wagner and Debussy. That is, those that were looked at in depth, let's say, more than the ones on the periphery, within this teaching. For instance, if you were studying Chopin, you practically had to know his entire production. Every day, for an hour and a half, you had to listen, only listen. Another hour and a half you analyzed one or another piece; and then you started putting together an étude, a prelude, I wouldn't say imitating, actually, but trying to use the stylistic elements of Chopin. I liked this, because it gave us two things. On the one hand, you got to know the composer
and his works well, and on the other, at the time you were writing, you were acquiring a craft, you were really writing a lot of music. I believed that it worked. Chávez was criticized in the sense that he didn't concern himself with the student's personal language, that he didn't give him freedom. But I never felt that he took away any freedom, I felt that I was learning.

Bonnet: You also studied analysis with Halffter. What did you learn from Halffter?

Lavista: I always had and still have great admiration for Halffter, as a teacher and as a composer. When I was at the Taller de Composición, Halffter gave classes at the Conservatorio, and his classes at that time, during the two or three years that I spent with him, were basically focused on twentieth century music, which was something that was not played at the Taller de Composición. So I thought it would be an ideal complement to take Halffter's analysis class. It's thanks to him that I first learned about the Vienna school, among other things. He opened the door for me to learn the serial system, basically, analyze some Schoenberg pieces. Much less Berg and Webern. I also remember seeing the first act of La Bohème with him, so it's thanks to him that I am a Puccini fan to this day. It's thanks to him that I learned about that music which apparently comes in only through your skin; having learned
the actual construction of a composer which in the Conservatorio was not a part of any analysis class.

On his own music

Bonnet: At some point you had given me a catalogue of your works. Later, you told me that the best and most complete catalogue was the one done by Luis Jaime Cortez and published in the book Mario Lavista, textos en torno a la música, which has just been published. However, I have come across some pieces that are not in either one. Why?

Lavista: Those works don’t exist any more. That is, when I withdraw them from a catalog, it’s because they don’t exist. There is no score for them. There are a number of works that, when seeing them later with better eyes, one realizes that they are very badly done, done at a bad time, in a great hurry, and I don’t think it ethical, to oneself, to try to include all that one has done in a lifetime, rather than to include only what one believes to be well done. That is why I have allowed myself to remove various works that do not have any interest for me, perhaps not for others but for me.

Bonnet: Of the works that are in some catalogue somewhere, are many of them graphic?
Lavista: No, actually, graphism never interested me much. The only graphic score I like, is one that I wrote together with a painter friend of mine, it's called Jaula.

Bonnet: What can you tell me about Cluster?

Lavista: I included it, well, because I had a very avant-garde period. With that I mean to say a period in which I believed that a type of avant-gardism was to give much more importance to the idea than to its realization. That in reality, the concept itself of a work was more important than its realization. So, the idea of Cluster came from a chat with Arnaldo Coen, to compose something with the least number of elements, with only one element. Kronos, for instance, which is for alarm clocks, is also a composition which at that time, I naively classified as avant-garde, that is, modern. I heard Ligeti's piece for metronomes; and also a very likeable piece written by a Spaniard, Carlos Luis de Castro, for kitchen utensils. So at the time, I thought I could write something for alarm clocks, that is, for non-musical instruments. But I still insist that that work is much more within the concept of the composer than the craft of the composer, because neither in Cluster nor in this work, was it necessary to have a craft to do it.
CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS

The author chose *Pucciones* as a subject for analysis because it is a work representative of the current production of Mario Lavista. In it, the composer displays great skill in handling his instrument of choice (the orchestra) and in producing a work that, because of its harmonic and melodic treatment, is balanced and coherent. Lavista's output and philosophy make him a good representative of a generation of Latin American composers who no longer lag behind their American and European counterparts in terms of technical knowledge and skills. And as it is the case with contemporary Latin American writers, many of these composers, Lavista included, have strong and original voices, which deserve to be heard outside the boundaries of their native countries.

Lavista's contribution to the music of Mexico and of Latin America, not only as a composer, but also as a thinker and as a teacher are already, at the age of 45, quite significant. The author hopes that the contents of this thesis may contribute, in some small way, to sparking a greater degree of interest in the United States for the music of Mario Lavista and other talented Latin American composers.
## APPENDIX 1: STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS OF PICCIONES

### SECTION I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBSECTION:</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>A</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEASURES:</td>
<td>1-17</td>
<td>18-20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PITCH MATERIAL:</td>
<td>Cell 1</td>
<td>Cell 2 over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eb prominent.</td>
<td>Eb pedal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEXTURE:</td>
<td>Tremolos in strings, except double-basses. Winds and percussion punctuate entrances and provide rhythmic interest.</td>
<td>Almost full orchestra. Thick texture.</td>
</tr>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBSECTION:</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEASURES:</td>
<td>20-32</td>
<td>33-48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eb prominent.</td>
<td></td>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBSECTION:</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEASURES:</td>
<td>49-55</td>
<td>56-66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEXTURE:</td>
<td>String glissandi in contrary motion. Very thin texture with a few winds doubling the double-basses.</td>
<td>Glissandi in strings continues. Melodies in tuba, contra-bassoon and double-basses; then in other winds.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### SUBSECTION: C

**MEASURES:** 67-69  
**PITCH MATERIALS:** Transitional.  
**TEXTURE:** Tremolos in strings. Winds and timpani emphasize the tritone A-Eb.

**MEASURES:** 70-90  
**PITCH MATERIALS:** Cell 1, plus short appearances of cell 2, as in A.  
**TEXTURE:** Tremolos in strings with short entrances of winds and percussion. This texture interrupted by near tutti entrances of cell 2 material.

### SUBSECTION: Transition

**MEASURES:** 91-114  
**PITCH MATERIALS:** Cell 1 and cell 4. Melodic material with elements of B. Tonal center moves to C.  
**TEXTURE:** Tremolos in strings and melodies in woodwinds and later in double-basses. Then unison C in strings.

### SECTION II

### SUBSECTION: D

**MEASURES:** 115-127  
**PITCH MATERIALS:** Cell 4 is harmonic background. Short melodies containing pitches from all cells are superimposed over this background.  
**TEXTURE:** Thicker texture. Many rhythmic motives mostly in winds and percussion over a strings background. *Forte.*

**MEASURES:** 128-137  
**PITCH MATERIALS:** Melodies in conjunct motion. G is emphasized. "Thirds motive" from measures 39-40 reappears.  
**TEXTURE:** Dynamic level dropped. Thinner texture. Rhythmic activity decreased.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBSECTION:</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEASURES:</td>
<td>138-152</td>
<td>153-154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PITCH MATERIAL:</td>
<td>Section unified by motive in French horns. G continues to be emphasized. Permutation of parts between instruments in sets of two measures.</td>
<td>Eb reappears. All cells are sounded. Quotation from G. Muench's piece Presencias in oboe II.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEXTURE:</td>
<td>No strings. Winds, then piano and harp, and finally strings. Gradual thickening of texture.</td>
<td>Thin texture. Some winds only.</td>
</tr>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SUBSECTION:</th>
<th>G (Coda)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MEASURES:</td>
<td>155-169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PITCH MATERIAL:</td>
<td>Several elements from previous sections reappear. Pitch centers G and Eb carry similar weight. Last three measures summarize harmonic activity of entire piece.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEXTURE:</td>
<td>Rhythmic activity increases and texture thickens until climax in measure 158. Then texture gets gradually thinner and dynamic level decreases to pianissimo.</td>
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BIBLIOGRAPHY


