

# Introduction

## *History, Ideas, Musical Writing, and the Writing of Music*

For decades, political, social, and lately cultural historians have successfully challenged the orthodox history of the Mexican revolution,<sup>1</sup> which emphasizes a teleology of progress achieved through the beneficence of the post-revolutionary state.<sup>2</sup> The official history of nationalist aesthetics and national identity—with its essentialist claims to *mexicanidad* or *lo mexicano*,<sup>3</sup> its iconization of cultural caudillos, and its close association of cultural nationalism with state sponsorship—has received less attention. In the ongoing critical assessment of aesthetics, focus has been on the plastic arts and *Indigenismo* rather than on music.<sup>4</sup> Yet the orthodox history of music that turns such composers as Manuel M. Ponce (1882–1948) and Carlos Chávez (1899–1978) into icons and links cultural nationalism to government sponsorship is also in need of a re-examination that considers cultural production and consumption as dynamic interplays of power in particular historical contexts. With the critical work of such musicologists as Ricardo Miranda and Leonora Saavedra, as well as my own work elsewhere, such a re-examination has begun.<sup>5</sup> This book contributes to this effort.

Many years ago, a friend and I were walking down Xicoténcatl Street in Coyoacán, Mexico City. We had just attended an extraordinary class on Ponce's *Sonata clásica* (1928) at the Escuela Nacional de Música of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México and were discussing the event. My friend kept saying that he considered Ponce's music to be the best ever written for the guitar and only regretted that "[Ponce] did not compose enough large-scale works in his own voice." According to my friend, it was only in such pieces as *Sonata mexicana* (1923) and *Sonata III* (1927) that we could hear the "true" voice of the Mexican composer, since such works as *Sonata clásica*, *Sonata romántica* (1928), or *Suite in A* (1930–31) were only "imitations of older styles" and therefore not "authentic" reflections of Ponce's individuality. I was bothered by that opinion since I thought that even in those so-called imitations Ponce's individuality was clear and recognizable. I remember hearing the *Suite in A* for the first time without knowing what I was listening to and thinking, "that sounds like Ponce . . . it has to be Ponce," even though later on, an intellectual tradition would force me to listen to the suite as "Ponce in the style of Sylvius Leopold Weiss." Today, more than twenty years after that conversation, I find myself struggling with the same issues: how are notions of tradition and identity discursively created? Which processes inform consumption practices and cultural production in relation to music? How do these processes take place? What is the role of the consumption of foreign ideas in the production of local knowledge? How should we approach the notion of "imitation" in the context of power imbalances that permeate the history of Latin America? What are the implications of talking in terms of imitation and authenticity in relation to the production and consumption of Latin American cultural artifacts? Which power relations are at stake in these discourses? This book is the result of my attempts to answer these questions and explore the notions of imitation and authenticity in relation to the political construction of the discourses that allowed Mexican artists and intellectuals of the 1920s to write their place in Mexican society and history, to negotiate individual and collective desires, and to imagine their futures and that of the nation.

This work is partly a history of the ideas that gave meaning to the diverse musical aesthetics that co-existed in Mexico during the 1920s. In order to tackle the issues that triggered this intellectual quest, I explore the Mexican modernist and avant-gardist traditions developed after the revolution, between 1920 and 1930. However, my object of study is neither music nor musical style per se. I understand music as a process that is shaped by and also shapes its cultural surroundings. Therefore, I use music as a window into the study of Mexican culture in a specific historical period. Since I am interested in musical processes as depositories of the cultural values of the societies in which they are generated, comprehending them is a step toward understanding their cultural surroundings. At the core of this story rests the intellectual elite that played an active role in representing modernity and nationality in Mexico after the 1920s. I focus on the changes, continuities, and ideological struggles within this elite group as exemplified in the musical production of Julián Carrillo (1875–1965), Ponce, and Chávez; the events, debates, encounters, and mis-encounters at the First National Congress of Music (1926); and the changing ideas about indigenous cultures (and their relation to modernity and Cosmopolitanism) reflected in the reception of Ricardo Castro’s (1864–1907) opera *Atzimba* (1900) during the first four decades of the twentieth century. My work does not seek to validate or discredit Carrillo, Ponce, or Chávez as cultural caudillos according to any particular aesthetic criteria. I am not interested in “reinserting” *Atzimba* and Castro’s output to its “rightful” place in the Mexican musical canon either. Rather, I try to show that the development of musical styles, the discussions about music and nationality during the National Congress of Music, and the contradictory reception of *Atzimba* are reflections of the ways in which diverse ideas about modernity, identity, Cosmopolitanism, and ethnicity intertwine as part of complex processes of power negotiation. My case studies show that such notions as “imitation” and “authenticity” acquire meaning in relation to the political and intellectual projects that inform those power relations.

An important concept throughout this book is that of writing. Here, the verb “to write” refers not only to the act of writing or

composing music; it also refers to processes that discursively write music and musical heritage into objects that, as Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett describes, offer a virtuality that “produces something new in the present that has a recourse to the past.”<sup>6</sup> Following this idea, I re-enact a double performative exercise. First, I revise the composers’ self-representations and identifications through musical style, and second, I analyze the composers’ roles in the construction and execution of a hegemonic discourse that re-wrote them a posteriori, according to the nationalist principles of the dominant regime.

This study re-interprets the traditional rhetoric of Mexican cultural history that considers post-revolutionary artistic manifestations as a “natural,” almost teleological outcome of the Mexican revolution. As with every historical narrative, this post-revolutionary discourse in Mexico was developed out of a “myth of origin” that equated the identity of the nation with the ideology of the new state. As part of this process, the modernist and avant-gardist music of Carrillo, Chávez, and Ponce was interpreted and accepted into the “official” discourse of the Mexican revolution only as far as it could be adjusted to its ideological requirements. By exploring the ideas that give cultural meaning to the musical style of these composers and by analyzing the concepts about nationality and modernity discussed during the 1926 National Congress of Music, as well as the notions of “imitation” and “authenticity” that informed the reception of *Atzimba*, this work suggests an alternative reading of 1920s Mexican musical life. This interpretation takes into account the cultural and social complexity that triggered the process of hegemonic negotiation in post-revolutionary Mexico as well as the ambiguities created by and during this process.

On the one hand, I suggest that the modernist and avant-gardist musical languages that Carrillo, Chávez, and Ponce developed in the 1920s show them repositioning themselves within a changing society, a society that contested the pre-revolutionary ideology and social order and produced new institutions of power and codes for social interaction. On the other hand, my study of the ideas that

inform these languages proposes that the notions of “imitation” and “authenticity” acquire meaning when they are used to validate larger political projects, such as nationalism or Modernism.

Forming the axis of my study are five important events that took place in Mexico between 1924 and 1928: the premiere of Carrillo’s first microtonal compositions; the rise to fame of Chávez as an avant-garde artist; Ponce’s move to Paris; the First National Congress of Music in 1926; and the production of one of the musical monuments of the *Porfiriato*, Castro’s Indianist opera *Atzimba* in 1928.<sup>7</sup> Some of these events have been largely misinterpreted by musical historians in order to make them fit the post-revolutionary hegemonic discourse, a discourse that was consciously or unconsciously validated by the historicist writings of these scholars. I interpret these events as evidence of the multi-ideological social context that characterized 1920s Mexico, a plurality born out of the condition of crisis permeating a society whose foundational values were turned upside down by the revolutionary struggle, a condition that was later homogenized by historians who supported the revolutionary program into a thesis that would endorse the state’s dominant discourse on revolution and nationalism. These events also become points of departure for a larger discussion of how musical myths were constructed and of how the aesthetic heritage of some composers was excluded and marginalized in order to support the policies of the Mexican state.

## Modernity, Modernization, Modernism, and Avant-Gardism in the Periphery

The term *modernity* denotes specific modes of social, economic, and political organization that originated in Europe from the seventeenth century onward. Lawrence Cahoon characterizes modernity by such traits as Capitalism, a largely secular culture, liberal democracy, Rationalism, and Humanism, which in this combination are unique to this period in the history of humanity.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, modernity refers to the condition distinguished by these modes of organization. *Modernization* describes processes of development that

strive for the condition of modernity, while *Modernism* refers to an ideological discourse that embraces modernity. Most often, the term Modernism defines artistic aesthetics that reflect on the condition characteristic of late modernity, a highly revolutionized period that, according to Marshall Berman, produces in the modernist artist a desire to change but also a terror of disorientation.<sup>9</sup> Berman considers Modernism an outgrowth of the romantic emphasis on individual expression and originality as well as of the ideas of progress promoted by idealist philosophy and the Industrial Revolution.<sup>10</sup> From his point of view, we may observe two different phases of Modernism. The first has its roots in the nineteenth century and tried to transform the social and cultural order in an attempt to establish new models of aesthetic organization and artistic communication. In art, these ideas spawned movements that intended to liberate the artist from the “prison” of what he or she considered exhausted expressive tools by offering the artist the possibility of new languages; Symbolism, Impressionism, and Expressionism are movements that attempted to establish new artistic paradigms and languages. The second phase of Modernism stemmed from the same desire to change traditional languages that had moved the earlier modernists; however, their efforts did not result in the creation of new languages but rather in a nihilistic radicalization against tradition. This is a tradition of discontinuity, a tradition against tradition that “implies the negation not only of tradition but of discontinuity as well.”<sup>11</sup> This extreme, uncompromising phase of Modernism—represented by such movements as Futurism, Dadaism, or Surrealism—is what Matei Calinescu has defined as the avant-garde. In the words of Calinescu, the avant-garde shares with Modernism a “sharp sense of militancy, praise of non-conformism, courageous precursory exploration, confidence in the final victory of time, and immanence over traditions that try to appear as eternal, immutable, and transcendently determined.”<sup>12</sup> However, the avant-garde implies a future utopia where it will achieve this success over the decadent tradition it tries to overthrow; Calinescu says that this Futurism “is frequently little more than a justification for the most radical varieties of polemicism and for the widespread use

of subversive or openly disruptive artistic techniques.”<sup>13</sup> While Modernism implies the extension of a tradition with the use of “advanced” techniques, the avant-garde entails a counterculture and a rejection of existing institutions; as Richard Taruskin proposes, the avant-garde expresses hostility against tradition.<sup>14</sup>

Peter Bürger considers that the difference between modernist art and the avant-garde is that Modernism could be seen as an expansion of traditional languages that may or may not go beyond the pure aesthetic experience, while the avant-garde has to be understood as an attack meant to alter the institutions that produce and reproduce that art. Thus, the avant-garde is articulated when it understands its own social role; Bürger suggests that shocking and de-familiarizing the public became the most important goal in the avant-garde in order to provide a social critique through the arts.<sup>15</sup>

Modernity and the processes of modernization developed differently in metropolitan and peripheric societies. While Europe and the United States pushed for a colonial expansion of the “civilizing” project of modernity—also referred to as the project of the Enlightenment—and generally profited from its spreading out, the majority of people in peripheric societies seldom shared the benefits of this project and most often were casualties in the expansion of capital. However, achieving modernity became the primary political goal of the elites that dominated peripheric societies, as shown in the variety of policies implemented throughout their histories to stimulate processes of modernization. Nevertheless, the inequalities of these societies—a consequence of their postcolonial condition—prevented a homogeneous and inclusive process of modernization; historically, the characteristics of modernity in the periphery have tended to be heterogeneously localized mostly in the cultural, economic, and social urban centers. This does not mean that the failure to achieve a homogenous, national modern condition prevents the development of valid artistic modernist movements in the periphery. In fact, the presence of these movements is important in that it reveals the implicit contradictions of the supposed universality of the project of modernity. Just as the ideas about modernity acquire a new dimension in the periphery, the notion of the avant-garde is

also re-signified according to the needs of the artists who appropriate it in the Latin American context. Ricardo Roque-Baldovinos points out that one of the main differences between the European and the Latin American avant-garde is that the artists of Latin America actually had the opportunity to actively participate in the social institutions of their countries.<sup>16</sup> Thus, the Latin American avant-garde is different from the European avant-garde not only in terms of style and aesthetics but also in the fact that the Latin American avant-gardists collaborated in the development of cultural policies and the foundation of state-sponsored artistic institutions in their countries. The Latin American avant-garde was not only a movement toward discontinuity; it was also an attempt to propose alternative cultural projects that attempted to resolve the contradictions of modernity embodied in the Latin American reality.

## Mexico, Modern Nation

The cult of modernity in Mexico was not a consequence of the Mexican revolution; it was already the governmental ideal of Porfirio Díaz and could effortlessly be traced back to the liberal policies of President Benito Juárez.<sup>17</sup> Both Juárez's and Díaz's political efforts targeted the development of a national identity in an attempt to create a strong unified nation-state. These efforts were especially necessary after the *Guerras de Reforma*, the civil wars between liberal and conservative political factions that further fragmented an already weak sense of nationality and that facilitated the French occupation of the country between 1861 and 1867. Ideally, a strong nation-state is fundamental in establishing the basis for an efficient industrial and economic network, and such efficiency is necessary for the citizens of that nation to trust the state, to benefit from the system and allow the system's reproduction.

The situation in Mexico after the revolution was similar to that following the French invasion: a generalized economic, social, and cultural crisis fragmented the nation-state and prevented the development of a modern society. In these circumstances, the promotion



of a new sense of national identity—a renewed national identity, one that supported the revolutionary state—as the foundation for modernization could not be postponed. However, and in spite of the distinctly new revolutionary angle, the fundamental ideas of modernization in Mexico can only be fully appreciated as continuations of the project of the Enlightenment initiated with the independence of the country and very clearly articulated in the *Leyes de Reforma*<sup>18</sup> and the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century liberal policies of Juárez and Díaz. This historic and social background, a result of the postcolonial condition of the country, is fundamental in understanding the specificity of artistic Modernism in Mexico, the reasons for Mexican modernists’ “desire to change,” and the sources of their “terror of disorientation.”<sup>19</sup>

As Thomas Benjamin points out, there unfolded over the 1920s a national reconstruction marred by the “fluidity of the power and interests that existed at every political level [making] the reform process uncertain and imperfect, conflicted and often violent, uneven across the country, and subject to slowdowns.”<sup>20</sup> This decade marks the ideological collision of a number of local projects of nation, from the socialist experiments of Adalberto Tejeda and Felipe Carrillo Puerto in the states of Veracruz and Yucatán, respectively, to the fascist radicalism of Tomás Garrido Canabal in the state of Tabasco. Mexico became a site for the encounter, negotiation, and (in the best of cases) reconciliation of a great variety of ideologies, as well as economic, social, and cultural programs.

The musical and cultural events discussed in this book took place between 1924 and 1928, a convulsive period framed by the presidency of Plutarco Elías Calles. A strengthening of the ties between the state and the unions and an expansion of the economic role of the government characterized Calles’s term. Under Calles, the government was in charge of developing a national infrastructure that ranged from irrigation systems and agricultural colleges to highway and railroad systems. However, Calles’s anti-clerical pronouncements also gave birth to the Cristero rebellion, a civil war in west-central Mexico between militant Catholics and the state’s army that outlasted his own government and did not end until 1929.

Calles's presidential succession in 1928 is one of historic importance. Former president Álvaro Obregón ran—and was elected—for a second term in the presidency, stepping over one of the most sacred revolutionary principles: *no reelección* (no re-election). Nevertheless, this venture ended with Obregón's assassination before he could be sworn to office for the second time. This circumstance allowed President Calles to make two very important political moves. The first was the creation of the National Revolutionary Party (the origin of the current PRI) to exercise a tighter political control over the nation's politics. The second was the provisional presidential period of Emilio Portes Gil (1928–1930), which provided the foundation to establish the Maximato, a period from 1928 to 1934 in which Calles was the strong man behind three presidents: Portes Gil, Pascual Ortiz Rubio (1930–32), and Abelardo L. Rodríguez (1932–34).<sup>21</sup> This book seeks to understand the relationship between this ambiguous historical moment (when a series of political alliances and when institutions fundamental for the new regime were created) and the development of music and ideas about music.

This study proposes that the crisis experienced by Mexican composers with the collapse of the economic, social, and cultural stability of the pre-revolutionary regime forced them to re-evaluate their aesthetic ideas and to negotiate new power relations and alliances. I see Modernism and Avant-Gardism in Mexico as cultures or scenes that helped their members reposition themselves and find their own identities in a society in which codes of social interaction were contingent on the clash between pre-revolutionary and revolutionary societies. My intention is to show how the hegemonic, nation-building discourse implemented by the post-revolutionary Mexican government had to exclude, dispossess, and mystify certain aspects of these manifestations in order to validate its own ideological discourse. I establish that the voices that entered this “official” history and canon succeeded in doing so only because they could be retroactively converted into harbingers of that nationalistic discourse or could be modeled to fit its “myth of origin.” My work shows the richness, complexity, plurality, and individuality of cultural manifestations in Mexico during the

1920s in opposition to the rather rigid and teleological “official” version of a culture shaped by the revolution’s ideology developed by the Mexican government.

## Music, Musicians, and Ideas in 1920s Mexico

My approach to the study of music and culture in 1920s Mexico is interdisciplinary; I borrow methods from musicology’s sibling disciplines—ethnomusicology and musical theory—to better apprehend the spirit of the musical processes I have chosen. From ethnomusicology, I take an ethnographic approach to the study of historical documents and data in order to place them within their cultural and social contexts. From musical theory, I use systematic methods of musical analysis—Schenkerian,<sup>22</sup> post-Schenkerian, post-tonal, and set theories—in order to locate the aesthetic resonance of specific musical works with their historical surroundings. In doing this I am interested in doing two things: first, finding the stylistic particularities that make these musical scores into maps of performative composition; and second, taking analytical tools that carry considerable colonialist implications and using them to clarify the ways in which music produced in the peripheries can contest colonialist aesthetic discourses by failing to completely fulfill the expectations inherent in those analytical tools.

The music of Carrillo was systematically excluded from the post-revolutionary canon of Mexican music. Carrillo’s closeness to the pre-revolutionary government of General Díaz, as well as his activities in favor of the short-lived dictatorship of General Victoriano Huerta in the mid-1910s, made him an easy target. His creation of a microtonal system in 1924 only made things more difficult for him, since this new language and his own representation of it as a teleological consequence of the German tradition of absolute, organicist music convinced many that as an artist he was uninterested in the incipient nationalist campaign of the post-revolutionary state.

In Chapter 1, I explore the position of Carrillo’s microtonal system not only within the general crisis of language that characterized

Modernism in the early twentieth century but also within the particular searches for a modern identity in 1920s Mexico. My study of Carrillo's music focuses on three interrelated aspects of my circuit of meaning: production, representation, and appropriation. To understand Carrillo's process of production, I use linguist Émile Benveniste's notion of paradigmatic and syntagmatic axes<sup>23</sup> to analyze the syntactic and grammatical relationships in three compositions by the Mexican composer: *Preludio a Colón* (1924), *En secreto* (1927), and *Cuarteto atonal a Debussy* (1927). By adopting an analytical method founded on post-Schenkerian ideas of dissonant prolongation similar to those expressed by Robert Morgan,<sup>24</sup> I show that stylistic development in Carrillo's microtonal music is a direct consequence of the problems of style and idea that permeated the modernist music of the German tradition in the early twentieth century, a tradition that had nurtured him as a student. My analysis shows that the use of microtones as elements of foreground activity in these works is balanced by a new understanding of background unfolding, one that allows elements other than the tonic triad to serve as fundamental structures for a composition. I propose that Carrillo's position as an outsider to the German tradition allowed him to conceive his microtonal style not only as a continuation of that tradition but also as a reflection of his individuality and his position in a non-European society.

In Carrillo's microtonal system, aspects of production and representation are closely connected. In his writings, Carrillo presented himself as a continuator of the German tradition, but analysis of his works reveals a process more complex than mere imitation. My study shows that appropriation played a determinant role in the development of his microtonal system; therefore, we need to understand his music and his construction of self-identity as results of individual processes of transculturation. In my text, I show that clashing ideologies and discourses of power permeate processes of identity construction and that these processes are themselves the consequence of these particular historical circumstances.

Among Mexican composers, Chávez is one of the better known to American scholars. Nevertheless, most musical history texts label

him a nationalist composer, disregarding his important activities as an avant-garde artist. The reason for this misconception is that Chávez's music was taken as a symbol of the hegemonic identity constructed by the post-revolutionary government in Mexico during the 1930s and 1940s. This construction placed Chávez and his *El fuego nuevo* (1921) at the center of the indigenist movement and traced his nationalist activities to the early years of the revolutionary government installed in 1920, when he was, allegedly, a musical ally of José Vasconcelos.<sup>25</sup> In the post-revolutionary myth of origin, Chávez has been reduced solely to a nationalist composer in order to comply with that revolutionary mythology. Chávez's musical personality was much more complex, synchronically embracing tendencies that would seem contradictory (Indigenism, Neoclassicism, and Avant-Gardism) if they were not understood under the particular political circumstances of 1920s Mexico.

In Chapter 2, I present a quite different picture of Chávez's role during the years of Vasconcelos's cultural crusade. After recognizing the political and historic importance of his multiple identity, I focus on the avant-garde side of Chávez's personality and music and explore his relationship with one of the most radical artistic movements in the history of Mexican arts: *Estridentismo*, a short-lived futurist trend that had a strong influence in Mexico's cultural and political circles between 1921 and 1926. I study ideology and identity in post-revolutionary Mexico as reflected in Chávez's construction of meaning in his output between 1923 and 1927, focusing on a detailed analysis of 36 (1925) from *Siete piezas para piano* (1923–30) and *Energía* (1925).

I analyze the style of Chávez's avant-garde music from the viewpoint of the artist (as encoder) as well the audience and critics (as decoders), understanding the avant-garde as a subculture in the terms proposed by Dick Hebdige. Borrowing ideas from the theories of codes of Umberto Eco and Stuart Hall,<sup>26</sup> I survey Chávez's activities and music as polysemic experiences in which meaning arises not only in the production and representation of specific works of art or styles but also through the processes of de-codification and appropriation during their performances. In

processes of identity formation, the individual and the social experience of the artist and the audience are continuously intertwined, as is their relationships with dominant ideologies. I conclude that in order to understand Chávez's position as a member of a subculture and to understand his construction of identity from this position, it is necessary to understand how the public identified him as part of that subculture and how he managed the ideological implications of this choice in relation to his multiple identity.

Ponce is well known to scholars of Mexican culture and music. He has been considered one of the pre-cursors of musical nationalism in Mexico,<sup>27</sup> and it is under these terms that he found a place within the canon of Mexican art music and the post-revolutionary cultural discourse. As one of the first advocates of musical nationalism—even before the Mexican revolution “officially” legitimized this aesthetic—Ponce found his way into the pantheon of cultural heroes of the post-revolutionary state. Nevertheless, this process carried a high price for Ponce himself and his modernist works. Taruskin has noted that Russian composers were able to enter the canon of Western music only as “exotic” representations of Otherness, which already reserved them a place as “second-class” composers.<sup>28</sup> The paradox is that Russian composers may have a place in the history of Western music as long as they remain the Other. This interpretation brings an incomplete representation of their musical activities: it disregards anything that does not fit the category of nationalist because that is what they “ought” to be in the minds of Western listeners and scholars. This is the same attitude that surrounds Ponce and his music. Ponce was eligible to enter the discourse that places Mexican art's origin with the triumph of the revolution in 1921 only as a nationalist composer and, therefore, as a “precursor” of that revolutionary ideology. The consequences are the same as those exposed by Taruskin: an incomplete account of Ponce's musical activities and his place in the cultural context of the post-revolutionary decade, as well as an aberrant reductionism that oversimplifies an otherwise rich and complex cultural manifestation.

In Chapter 3, I explore how the discursive writing of Ponce's musical activities as those of a nationalist composer overlooks larger cultural and representational issues. I show that these excluded issues are essential in trying to understand not only this composer but also Mexican culture and society as a whole in the 1920s. In this chapter, I study Ponce through a novel explanation of his move to Paris in 1925. The traditional interpretation of this event shows a composer at the height of his compositional powers who suddenly decided to abandon a successful life in his native country in order to pursue his compositional studies.<sup>29</sup> This interpretation results in an artificial categorization of Ponce's compositional output that identifies a nationalist period before 1925 and a modernist period after this year; such an assessment disregards the elements of continuity throughout Ponce's compositional career. I offer a different reading, one that acknowledges the hardships and professional difficulties experienced by Ponce during the early 1920s as the consequence of his alignment with the modernist aesthetic of the group of writers known as *modernistas*. As a modernista artist, Ponce was unable to find a place within the new Mexican society and was forced to re-evaluate his artistic identity. In this cultural framework, Ponce's early nationalistic searches need to be understood as the particular manifestation of a larger desire to renovate the traditional musical languages favored by Mexican composers at the end of the nineteenth and during the first two decades of the twentieth century. Analyzed from this perspective, Ponce's seemingly eclectic compositional career acquires a new coherence; the modernist music he wrote after 1925—for which he was severely criticized, to the point of being called an “insincere composer”<sup>30</sup>—appears to be a consequence of the same modernista drive that had pushed him to explore Mexican folklore more than ten years earlier.

In Chapter 4, I explore the intersection of different discourses on nationalism, Modernism, and modernity as expressed in the call for papers and the actual essays submitted to the First National Congress of Music. Held in Mexico City in September 1926, this congress was one of the earliest attempts to organize the musical scene in Mexico around ideas of folklore and modernity, and, as

such, it reflects the struggle for power that developed between older and younger generations of composers in Mexico by the mid-1920s. The organizers of the congress published a call for papers on musical education, criticism, and aesthetics, as well as composition, pedagogy, and acoustics. Presenters were asked to address the “pitiful state of national music and the lack of a nationalist attitude from creative minds.”<sup>31</sup> In this chapter I present the congress as a forum that facilitated the discussion of Mexican music in relation to ideas of authenticity, identity, modernity, and Modernism; I conclude that the relative plurality of this forum is fundamental to understanding the conciliatory policies that allowed Chávez to attain positions of power in the new regime after the 1930s.

By the early 1930s, a new hegemony was developing, one that took pre-Columbian cultures as the basis of an indigenist, essentialist understanding of Mexican identity. In Chapter 5, I use the 1928 production of Castro’s opera *Atzimba* to explore the changing idea of “the indigenous” in the national imagination. The central point of the chapter is an analysis of the processes of continuity and discontinuity that gave new meaning to the ideas and artistic monuments inherited from the Porfiriato. The discussion that took place in relation to *Atzimba*’s authenticity is fundamental to understanding how discourses about continuity or discontinuity gave meaning to this opera throughout the first three decades of the twentieth century. To illustrate these processes, I compare the reception of *Atzimba* to that of another monument from the Porfiriato, the Palacio de Bellas Artes (Fine Arts Palace) building. This comparative study allows me to suggest that the acceptance of one and the marginalization of the other in post-revolutionary Mexican cultural memory are directly proportional to the possibility of giving new life to older Indianist icons from the Porfiriato under the new indigenist policies of the new regime in the 1930s.

In Chapter 6, I explore the relationship between the individual practices of self-definition of Carrillo, Chávez, and Ponce, as explored in the first three chapters; the process of hegemonic negotiation in the Mexican musical scene that I suggest in Chapter 4; and the re-signification of ideas and monuments inherited from the



Porfiriato that I explore in the reception of *Atzimba* in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 explains that the goal of this book is not to re-evaluate the place of these composers as part of the Mexican musical canon, but rather to show that nationalist meaning is always unstable and contingent. This should be taken into account to deconstruct the very values that validate such nationalist canon. The chapter emphasizes that the study of the cultural, political, and economic forces, as well as the generational power relations I explore throughout the book, is important to understanding Mexican artists and intellectuals as producers of knowledge as opposed to seeing them as mere imitators of European culture.

The questions that influenced this project can only be answered via a multi-disciplinary approach. This study of music takes into account sound structures and the ideas that inspired them, the ideas that formed the frame of reference for their reception, as well as the power struggles that have given them historical symbolic meaning; only such an approach allows us to understand how music articulates and helps reconfigure notions such as tradition and identity. An interdisciplinary study that incorporates an exploration of these signifying practices as well as a critical approach to traditional historical narratives could help us answer the questions that marked the beginning of the intellectual journey that culminated in the writing of this book.