**Carrillo (Trujillo), Julián (1875-1865)**

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Julián Carrillo is recognized as one of the first microtonal composers in the Western art music tradition. His experiments with microtones (intervals smaller than the half tone), which he called *Sonido 13* (Thirteenth Sound), were an attempt to expand the melodic possibilities of the Western art music tradition’s language; the first work to crystalize these ideas was *PRELUDIO A COLÓN* (1925). He composed music in quarter-, eighth-, and sixteenth-tones and built special instruments that could play these intervals. He also patented a series of pianos that could play third-, quarter-, fifth-, sixth-, seventh-, eight-, ninth-, tenth- eleventh-, twelfth-, thirteenth-, fourteenth-, fifteenth-, and sixteenth-tones. He developed a numerical system of music notation in order to deal with the increasing number of pitches in the scales generated by these subdivisions of the half tone. He also contemplated the possibilities that the systematic serialization of these new scales may have on theorizing rhythm.

Timeline of Life

1875: Born

1895: Moves to Mexico City to study at the National Conservatory of Music

1899: Attends the Leipzig Royal Conservatory

1905: Returns to Mexico City

1913: Director of the National Conservatory of Music

1914-1918: Exile in New York

1918: Conductor of the National Symphony Orchestra

1919: Director of the National Conservatory of Music for the second time

1925: First public concert of *Sonido 13* music

1926-1927: Concerts in New York and Philadelphia

1940: Copyright of 15 microtonal pianos

1958: Pianos exhibited at the Brussels World Fair

1965: Death

Timeline of Works:

1901: Symphony No. 1

1902: *Ossián* (opera in one act)

1903: String Quartet in E flat major

1910: *Matilde o Mexico in 1810* (opera in four acts)

1921: *Xulitl* (opera in three acts)

1925: *Preludio a Colón*

1926: *Sonata casi fantasia*

1927: Concertino

1927: *Cuarteto atonal “A Debussy”*

1941: Triple concerto for flute, violin, cello and orchestra

1942: Music for the film *La virgen morena*

1945: Symphony No. 3, “Atonal”

1947: *Horizontes*

1949: Concerto for violin in quarter-tones and orchestra

1958: Concertino for piano in third-tones and orchestra

1962: *Misa en cuartos de tono*

1965: *Segunda misa en cuartos de tono*

Julián Carrillo was born into a poor family of indigenous background in the small village of Ahualulco, San Luis Potosí, Mexico. He started musical studies at 10 years of age under a private teacher from whom he received lessons in exchange of labor. At age 20 he continued his studies at Mexico City’s National Conservatory; there he was heard at a student’s concert by President Porfirio Díaz, who granted him a scholarship to study violin and composition in at the Royal Conservatory in Leipzig. Carrillo’s upbringing took place within the strong positivist atmosphere that dominated Mexico’s intellectual life during Porfirio Díaz’s rule (1876-1910); as such, he developed an inquisitive, systematic mind that led him to question conventional musical methodologies and eventually to propose microtonality as the future of Western music. Carrillo’s expressed his frustrations with certain aspects of musical language as early as 1911, when he proposed the reorganization of traditional music forms at the International Rome Music Congress. However, his most radical attempt to expand the expressive vocabulary of music came in 1922, in response to an article in the French music journal *Le Menestrel* that raised pondered the question of microtonality in Western music. Carrillo responded with a microtonal system called *El Sonido 13* (as a metaphor for using sounds beyond the twelve of the chromatic scale used in Western music) that unfolded out of an established belief of the time; that the history of scalar and harmonic practices in Western music reflected and responded to the natural progression of overtones in the overtone series. According to this idea of “musical progress,” once the first twelve different overtones are incorporated as harmonies the next step would be to move into the realm of microtonality. Carrillo’s microtonal system was not based on an acoustic revision of the well-tempered system used in Western art music (as proponents of later microtonal systems like just intonation did); instead, he was interested in multiple equal and symmetrical subdivisions of the whole-tone. This was also the result of Carrillo’s long-standing interest in non-tonal scales, which became the basis of his own concept of “atonality” (one based on rejecting major and minor scales as well as functional harmony while emphasizing the whole-tone as a basic harmonic unit). Such understanding informs most of Carrillo’s music composed after 1925. While many of these works are experimental pieces in which the composer provides “catalogues” of the intervallic and sequential possibilities of these new atonal or microtonal scales, he also managed to compose some extraordinary instrumental and vocal scores that show the expressive possibilities of his new vocabulary. Particularly noteworthy are Carrillo’s thirteen string quartets and his two microtonal vocal masses. In these works, he shows his mastery of traditional compositional techniques like counterpoint, thematic derivation, and formal organization in combination with a novel take on melodic and harmonic exploration of the musical continuum that foreshadows the work of composers like Iannis Xenakis, Gyorgy Ligeti, and Krzysztoff Penderecki. During his lifetime, Carrillo’s ideas gained the favor and support of many world-class musicians; among them, Leopold Stokowski, who commissioned and premiered Concertino (1927), *Horizontes* (1947), and Concertino for piano in third-tones and orchestra (1958). While the originality of Carrillo’s artistic output remains to be fully appreciated in his native country, his heritage is better known in Europe and the U.S., where some consider him a harbinger of the late 1950s and 1960s musical avant-garde.

Selected Bibliography

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