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“Los vivos eran oídos a lo lejos entre el estruendo de las bandas militares”: The Promotion of Music during the Second Mexican Empire*

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Abstract

This article aims to analyze the cultural “structures and practices” that Mexico inherited from the Second Mexican Empire, particularly in the field of arts and music, trying to be a counterbalance to the black legend that weighs on this stage of our history. My proposal is that many of the ideas brought to the country by the emperor —the Habsburg-Lorena Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian— are still in use today.

Keywords: mexico, second mexican empire, nineteenth century, maximilian I, war of reform

Resumen

Este artículo pretende aproximarse a las “estructuras y prácticas” culturales heredadas por el segundo imperio mexicano, particularmente en el ámbito de las artes y la música, tratando de hacer un contrapeso a la leyenda negra que pesa sobre esta etapa de nuestra historia. Mi propuesta es que muchas de las ideas culturales y artísticas que el emperador Maximiliano aportó a México sigan vigentes en el siglo XXI.

Palabras clave: mexico, segundo imperio mexicano, siglo XIX, maximiliano I, guerra de reforma

La idealización del pasado ocupa el lugar de la memoria
José Emilio Pacheco

¿Y el ultimo Imperio? ¿Pues se quiere además de las guerras de nuestra independencia un asunto mejor para la epopeya?... Y luego aquel sitio de Querétaro tan grandioso y tan sangriento, aquellos sitiados tan valientes, aquellos sitiadores tan esforzados, aquel monarca tan bravo y tan digno como guerrero... todo eso que irá tomando a nuestra vista formas colosales a medida que se aleje.
Ignacio Manuel Altamirano

In early 1865, the consulate of the Mexican empire in Le Havre, Normandy, provided a list of ships that had been sent the previous year to the ports of Veracruz, Tampico, and El Carmen. In total, twenty-seven boats —including the French frigates *Mazatlan* and *Maximilian I*— crossed the

* Dedicated to Will Fowler.

Atlantic to Mexico with more than nine thousand tons of cargo, and it is notable that at least a dozen of them carried “music” or “musical instruments.” The French frigate *Talisman* alone, for example, carried twenty-five pianos to Mexico.¹ Musical instruments and scores, music education, and public and private concerts, all confirms that music played a fundamental role in the formation of the collective imagination, social action, and the legitimation of power during the Second Mexican Empire, and my objective is to account for this importance, providing a counterweight to the black legend that is associated to this period of history.

Background

Mexico was in bankrupt after the brutal War of Reform² —also known as the Three-Years War— and thus on June 17, 1861, the Mexican Congress decided to suspend all foreign loan payments. As a result, agents of France and Spain recommended immediate armed intervention in Mexico. The United Kingdom joined the call, and in October an agreement was signed in London for the three European naval powers to send troops to Veracruz. At the beginning of the following year, the French emperor, Napoleon III, dispatched to Miramar Castle a letter addressed to the Habsburg-Lorena Archduke Ferdinand Maximilian, proposing to occupy the throne of Mexico, in order to “drag a continent out of anarchy and misery [...] to raise [...] the flag of monarchy, supported by a freedom administered with prudence and in the sincere love of progress.”³ It has been said that Maximilian had a weak character, and was a puppet of the French Emperor. But the truth is that he did not accept the throne immediately: before leaving Austria, “the archduke waits the return of the commission to Miramar with the confirmation of the vote of the notables of the majority of the country”;⁴ while in the correspondence with Napoleon III the Archduke was never intimidated, and frequently expressed his indignation, disagreement and exasperation, as well as his dynamism, initiative and leadership.⁵

The plan to establish a monarchy in Mexico was not new: on February 24, 1821, General Agustín de Iturbide, President of the Regency, declared independence from Spain, and the following year the Congress proclaimed him constitutional emperor. But the First Mexican Empire was short-lived, as the then-governor of Veracruz, Antonio López de Santa Anna, financed an uprising that forced Iturbide to flee to Europe. On his return, he was apprehended and shot in Tamaulipas.⁶ If in our time there is a perception of monarchy as an aging museum piece and, simultaneously, as a result of the corruption of left- and right-wing regimes, there is also

¹ Hemeroteca Nacional de México (HNM), *El diario del imperio*, January 31, 1865, 101.

² See Will Fowler, *La guerra de tres años, 1857–1861, El conflicto del que nació el Estado laico mexicano* (México: Crítica, 2020).

³ Egon Caesar Conte Corti, *Maximiliano y Carlota* (México: FCE, 2014), 75–108.

⁴ HNM, *El pájaro verde*, March 3, 1864, 3.

⁵ See Conte Corti, *Maximiliano y Carlota*.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 15–16.

disenchantment with the representative system of government, in nineteenth-century Mexico there was no such quandary. The country was born into independence with dual ideas of forms of government, the republican and the monarchical, each with passionate defenders. After the triumph of republicanism, the idea of monarchy lay latent for decades, due to the fact that during the last colonial century the New Spain experienced a sustained economic growth.⁷

In 1840, José María Gutiérrez de Estrada, a prominent Mexican diplomat based in Europe, published a letter to the president in which he traced “the grim outline of the desperate situation of our country.” He criticized the republican system, incapable of pulling us out of “our smallness and misery,” and proposed monarchy as the solution that would allow Mexicans to enjoy the “true freedom” and “brilliant prosperity” enjoyed by “the happy inhabitants of Great Britain, France, Holland and Tuscany.”⁸ Gutiérrez de Estrada himself led the commission that offered the crown of Mexico to Maximilian at Miramar Castle on April 10, 1864, which was accepted by the archduke with a touching speech delivered in Spanish.⁹

Another important promoter of the monarchy was the historian and politician Lucas Alamán, one of the most prominent Mexican intellectuals of the nineteenth century. In the introduction to his *History of Mexico*—a work vigorously criticized by an anonymous editorial in the liberal newspaper *El siglo diez y nueve*—Alamán expounded upon the “form of government that this country had since the conquest, and the state of prosperity it attained, so that with the presence [...] of the happy results it produced, it can try to [...] obtain the same advantages, using means already known and proven by experience.”¹⁰ Because these ideas were still in use in the 1860s, it was possible to establish a new monarchical project.

Very few episodes of Mexican public life have led to so vast a number of publications as those provoked by the French intervention in Mexico, particularly publications related to the restored republic. Analyzing a large number of books and pamphlets of the time, I managed to trace the imprint of the black legend that has been woven around the Second Empire. While it is true that the emperor recognized the power of proselytism—leading him to circulate writings highlighting his accomplishments, decrees, and award posts and decorations—it is also true that, after the shooting of Maximilian and his Mexican generals in Querétaro, the restored republic produced a huge amount of published material aimed at justifying many of the actions carried out during the itinerant presidency of Benito Juárez and after the fall of the empire. In particular, there

⁷ See Carlos Alejandro Ponzio, “Globalisation and Economic Growth in the Third World: Some Evidence from Eighteenth-Century Mexico,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37 (2005): 437–467.

⁸ José María Gutiérrez de Estrada, *Carta dirigida al Escmo. Sr. presidente de la república, sobre la necesidad de buscar en una convención el posible remedio de los males que aquejan a la república; y opiniones del autor acerca del mismo asunto* (México: Impreso por Ignacio Cumplido, 1840), 54–75.

⁹ Conte Corti, *Maximiliano y Carlota*, 260–261.

¹⁰ Mentioned in HNM, *El siglo diez y nueve*, December 8, 1849, 3.

was a real obsession with humiliating traitors¹¹ and justifying the emperor's assassination.¹² In relation to this, psychoanalyst Otto Rank illustrated the "similarity between the career of certain anarchist criminals and the hero's family fable," and that "the morbid trait [...] is the pathological transfer of hatred from the father to hatred of the king [...] [but] the anarchist will beg to be spared the gravest punishments, on the grounds that he killed a totally different person from the one he had actually tried to destroy, despite a seemingly excellent political motivation."¹³

After the triumph of the republic, the printing press played a decisive role in spreading the official truth, which laid the foundations of the black legend, as historian Leonor Ludlow notes: "The historiography of the period of the Second Mexican Empire (1863–1867) preserves many of the accounts and arguments that laid the groundwork for the breakup of nineteenth-century liberalism, placing enormous emphasis on international ambitions in combination with the betrayals of the 'Mexican reaction,' which was occupied with the preservation of the old order."

Later, Ludlow issues a call to "leave aside sectarian visions in order to achieve a more balanced analysis of the empire's *raison d'être* and its impact on the subsequent process that inherited imperial economic structures and practices."¹⁴ Although thousands of citizens sympathized with the monarchical system, no one can deny that Maximilian's presence in Mexico was imposed primarily by force of arms and the French empire's money. But the black legend, which relied on a chauvinistic nationalism, has prevented us from recognizing the progress made during this brief historical period. For this reason, I want to approach the cultural "structures and practices" that the Second Empire bequeathed to Mexico, particularly in the sphere of arts and music.

Music and Everyday Life

The Habsburg archduke administered a territory whose citizens could not dissociate music from their daily lives and celebrations. For example, Maximilian's travel diary mentions that, on April 18, 1865, he left the palace of Chapultepec accompanied by various officers, stopping in the village of San Cristobal to see the monument erected in memory of the priest José María Morelos at the place

¹¹ See, for example: Anónimo, *Los traidores pintados por sí mismos. Libro secreto de Maximiliano, en que aparece la idea que tenía de sus servidores* (México: Imprenta del gobierno, en palacio, a cargo de José María Sandoval, 1867). Also: Anónimo, *Lista en que constan los nombres de los mexicanos que en el estado de Guanajuato traicionaron a su patria sirviendo a la invasión extranjera, y secundando sus inicuas miras al pretender dar prestigio y estabilidad al maniquí de Napoleón III Maximiliano de Austria* (Guanajuato: Impreso por Hernandes Hermanos, 1867).

¹² See Benito Juárez, *Manifiesto justificativo de los castigos nacionales en Querétaro* (Guadalajara: Tip. De S. Banda, Exconvento de Sta. María de Gracia, 1879). And also: Anónimo, *Causa de Fernando Maximiliano de Hamburgo: que se ha titulado emperador de México y sus llamados generales Miguel Miramón y Tomás Mejía sus cómplices por delitos contra la independencia y la seguridad de la nación, el orden y la paz pública* (México: A. Pola, 1907).

¹³ Otto Rank, *El mito del nacimiento del héroe* (Barcelona: Ediciones Paidós, 1981), 113–114.

¹⁴ Leonor Ludlow, "La disputa financiera por el imperio de Maximiliano y los proyectos de fundación de instituciones de crédito (1863–1867)," *Historia mexicana* 47, no. 4 (1998): 765–805.

where he had been shot. There, they were greeted by a band, and a crowd awaited his arrival.¹⁵ Similarly, many towns and cities received the emperor, or the committees he sent, with music and other “demonstrations of rejoicing,” as occurred at the dedication of the hospice for poor children of Guanajuato,¹⁶ at the opening of the Tequisquiac tunnel,¹⁷ or during the celebration of the Empress’s birthday,¹⁸ in the summer of 1866. But harmonic sounds had accompanied Mexicans long before the arrival of the Spanish and, thanks to the gatherings, the halls, the cafes, the concerts and the city and small-town bands, the dissemination of those sounds was encouraged across all classes throughout the century of independence. From birth to death, nineteenth-century Mexicans favored music in their daily lives, as evidenced by an anonymous article from 1838. The reporter visited the home of his seamstress, whom he discovered at a soirée, “demonstrating the skill of her legs, dancing a *jarabe* with the barber.” They were handing out glasses of liqueur among the spectators, and the reporter was surprised when he saw a small table on which was the corpse of a child of about two years of age. Music was a fundamental component even of wakes among the poor: enlivening the ceremonies of the “unhappy class of our society,” one would find in a corner “three players of the *vihuela* and one of harp,” in addition to several *jaranitas*.¹⁹ And we could evoke many similar stories from the viceregal period.²⁰

If music was already integrated into the daily lives of the Mexicans, there is no doubt that the Second Empire strengthened its presence: a few weeks after his arrival, Maximilian welcomed Mexican musicians, and frequently inviting them to offer recitals, as mentioned in a newspaper: “the best philharmonic artists of this capital have been called to give concerts in the palace.”²¹ Later, we will see Maximilian’s promotion of opera and of bands, but right now it is worth recalling the decree that was intended to “set definitively the administration of the Mexican army corps.” Title IV of this order affirms that uniforms, weapons, and musical instruments belong to the State, and it was the obligation of the dress captain to keep general records of the latter two.²² With this, we verify the importance of musical instruments in the militia sphere: were they as important as weapons to achieve the conquest of a nation?

¹⁵ HNM, *El diario del imperio*, April 24, 1865, 387.

¹⁶ HNM, *El diario del imperio*, July 13, 1866, 51.

¹⁷ HNM, *El diario del imperio*, July 19, 1866, 67.

¹⁸ HNM, *El diario del imperio*, July 13, 1866, 52.

¹⁹ HNM, *Semanario de las señoritas mexicanas*, Tomo 2, 1841, 402–408.

²⁰ See Antonio García de León, *El mar de los deseos. El Caribe afroandaluz, historia y contrapunto* (México: FCE, 2016).

²¹ HNM, *El pájaro verde*, July 14, 1864, 3.

²² HNM, *El diario del imperio*, October 27, 1866, 361.

Theater, Opera and European Music

From the time interventionist troops began to occupy the capital of the republic, in early June 1863, the regency sought to pacify and unite the population through music, theater, and other public amusements. Examples include the Iturbide Theater, which French soldiers called in their language Theater of the Army, where concerts with Mexican and French dances were presented daily, performed by an orchestra directed by maestro Chávez: “[People] danced cheerfully and drank wine and spirits [...] and consumed ice cream and refreshments.” *Le Trait d’Union*, as well as other newspapers published in Mexico City, promoted in French the theater and music programming that would be presented at the theater.²³ Later, people were invited to gatherings at the palace, where there was music and dancing, and ice cream, punch, biscuits, and cupcakes were served.²⁴ In November 1864, the Grand National Theater changed its name to the Grand Imperial Theater,²⁵ and it was frequently attended by Maximilian and his wife, Empress Charlotte.²⁶ In the same vein, at the end of 1865 the empire decided to create a national theater, “where dramatic works will be performed under the direction of the famous poet Don José Zorrilla,” in addition to establishing a contest with two prizes of a thousand pesos each for the best comedy and best tragedy presented there.²⁷

It was to the performing arts, in particular theater and music, that the sovereigns granted their greatest patronage. One need simply refer to the appointment of the eminent Mexican singer and composer Angela Peralta as “chamber singer of the empire.” In a note that the first secretary of ceremonies sent to the famous *cantatriz* (female singer), he expresses their majesties’ regret at not being able to attend her benefit performance because they were in mourning, especially because “they have had occasion to appreciate your privileged talent.”²⁸ Other musicians were favored with similar distinctions, such as Francesco Mazzoleni, named “chamber tenor” in 1864, with a grant of four thousand pesos a month to form his own artistic company,²⁹ as well as Tito Rocco, “harpist of Their Majesties’ chamber.”³⁰ A month before the Peralta benefit, the emperor offered to provide “whatever was lacking in entry fees to cover the expenses” for the premiere of the opera *Ildegonda*, by Mexican composer Melesio Morales. In this area, as on many other occasions, Maximilian and his wife demonstrated their great admiration for the talents of

²³ See, for example: HNM, *La Sombra*, June 6, 1865, 4. Even after Maximilian’s death, the Theatre Iturbide continued to present dramas and comedies, music and dances.

²⁴ Enrique de Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña histórica del teatro en México* Vol. I. (México: Porrúa, 1961), 672–673.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 680.

²⁶ See Luis Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante el segundo imperio (1862–1867)* (México: Imprenta universitaria, 1959).

²⁷ HNM, *El diario del imperio*, December 28, 1865, 727.

²⁸ HNM, *El diario del imperio*, January 30, 1866, 135.

²⁹ Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante el segundo imperio*, 20.

³⁰ HNM, *El diario del imperio*, July 17, 1865, 56.

artists, as reviewer Enrique de Olavarría y Ferrari attested: “The administration of the hapless Austrian prince patronized public performances to the fullest extent possible, and opened its doors to all artists of merit [...] so many artists turned to Maximilian, so many others he protected and rewarded splendidly.”³¹

In fact, from the beginning of imperial rule in 1863 there was a rise in the performing arts. In that year, three Mexican operas were premiered: *Clotilde de Cosenza*, by Octaviano Valle; *Romeo*, by Melesio Morales; and *Pietro D’Abano*, by Cenobio Paniagua.³² But the new imperial theater did more than stage performances for the elite; there were often functions for various charities, such as that held for the free school for deaf-mutes, which included the use of a traditional Mexican instrument: the *bandolón*.³³ In addition, at special festivities, such as the one that took place on September 16, 1864, to celebrate the independence, the emperor authorized that all functions at various theaters in Mexico City would be free.³⁴ I must emphasize that Maximilian hated the “ceremonial festivals” and, by opening the doors of the theaters to traditional music and the general public, the Second Empire transgressed the social uses of the stage, normally used by the elites as spaces of sociability, distinction and instruction.

On the other hand, the presence of the sovereigns inspired musical creation: The day the *Novara* left Trieste for Mexico, the musicians of the regiments garrisoned in the city performed the “Accession Hymn,” which the Mexican delegation “had asked to be composed in Paris,” to be played “at all places the sovereign passes.” A witness to the send-off stated that “Los vivas eran oídos a lo lejos entre el estruendo de las bandas militares” (“Cheers were heard in the distance amid the noise of the military bands”).³⁵ Just a few weeks after their arrival in Mexico City, composer Eusebio Delgado announced the publication of two *danzas habaneras* entitled *Fernando and Carlota*, clarifying that proceeds from sales would be donated to the *Tecpan de Santiago*, as what motivated him was “not the petty matter of profit, but to interpret musically the names of Their Majesties in the festive and popular melody of dance.”³⁶ If Delgado was not a composer of great fame, the celebrated creator of Italian operas and “famous maestro [Gioachino] Rossini,” certainly was: in 1865 he dedicated to Maximilian a “Fanfare,” first performed on the night of November 4 by the “chamber music” in the court theater.³⁷ Although he had gone many years

³¹ Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña histórica del teatro en México*, 698–699.

³² Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante el segundo imperio*, 16–17.

³³ HNM, *El diario del imperio*, March 30, 1867, 262.

³⁴ Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante el segundo imperio*, 110.

³⁵ Anonymous, *Advenimiento de SS. MM. II. Maximiliano y Carlota al trono de México. Documentos relativos y narración del viaje de nuestros soberanos de Miramar a Veracruz y el recibimiento que se les hizo en este último puerto y en las ciudades de Córdoba, Orizaba, Puebla y México* (México: Imprenta de J. M. Andrade y F. Escalante, 1864), 134.

³⁶ HNM, *La sociedad*, July 13, 1864, 3.

³⁷ HNM, *El diario del imperio*, November 6, 1865, 455.

without composing new works, the elderly musician presented this “Fanfare” to the Mexican emperor as thanks for Rossini having received the *Great Cross of Guadalupe*.³⁸

Military Bands and Popular Songs

In May 1865, a fire in a dwelling in the nation’s capital resulted in the deaths of Colonel Tourre and three other French soldiers. After the funeral, “the mortal remains of the victims were accompanied to their final resting place by the melancholy sounds of three musical bands.”³⁹ One of the results of the French intervention in Mexico was the dissemination of music performed by military bands, which introduced Adolphe Saxe’s new instruments to Mexico, along with musical forms then in vogue, such as waltzes and polkas. These bands not only introduced new instruments and dance music to Mexico, but also concert pieces by little-known composers, such as the case of the Austrian Band, which frequently performed overtures by Beethoven and Wagner.⁴⁰ In addition, some military musicians passed down to Mexicans an iron discipline of study and commitment to the art of sound, having been teachers of a generation of Mexican instrumentalists.⁴¹

I noted earlier that the Second Empire directed substantial resources toward the performing arts, mentioning patronage of theater, opera and chamber music. But I must underline that this support did not favor only the upper class, whose members enjoyed the gala functions; it also addressed a concern about bringing cultural activities to squares and streets throughout the country, where citizens from various socioeconomic backgrounds could hear and assimilate quality music. Maximilian and Charlotte were accompanied by highly accomplished musical groups that not only performed in the empire’s capital, but also offered concerts in the cities occupied by the Franco-Mexican army. By way of example, I quote again Olavarría y Ferrari, who witnessed the serenades offered by the Austrian Legion in the main square and other public places, stating that “a group as superior as that military band will rarely have been heard in Mexico.”⁴² Similarly, and to celebrate the emperor’s birthday, the “French music of ‘95” was presented in the capital of Zacatecas, and the state’s official newspaper, “interpreting the general feeling,” wished the king long life.⁴³ Further north, in Saltillo and Monterrey, at least three military bands offered performances whenever a break in hostilities permitted: those of the Regiment of Hunters, the Foreign Legion, and the Belgian Regiment.⁴⁴ Even at the end of the nineteenth century, the visits

³⁸ HNM, *El diario del imperio*, October 16, 1865, 377.

³⁹ HNM, *El diario del imperio*, May 6, 1865, 431.

⁴⁰ HNM, *La sociedad*, July 2, 1865, 2.

⁴¹ Rubén M. Campos, *El folklore y la música mexicana. Investigación acerca de la cultura musical en México (1525–1925)* (México: SEP, 1928), 198–200.

⁴² Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña histórica del teatro en México*, 700.

⁴³ Mentioned in HNM, *El diario del imperio*, July 20, 1866, 71.

⁴⁴ Luis Martín Garza Gutiérrez, *Raíces de la música regional de Nuevo León* (México: CONARTE/CONACULTA, 2006), 87.

of these musical ensembles were remembered as extraordinary events that transmitted technical and interpretive knowledge to local ensembles, as the Mexican diplomat Pedro de Alba wrote, evoking his childhood in San Juan de los Lagos, Jalisco: “A battalion or regiment passing through used to be among the most talked-about events in my hometown [...] and if they brought their band, they offered a serenade [...] then the musicians [of the town’s band] became an audience [...] not only did they write down the names of the unknown pieces, but they received lessons in hearing the passing band play.”⁴⁵

Indeed, Mexican musicians learned from foreigners, who privileged trendy European music in their concerts, but also included pieces by Mexican composers. This can be seen in a program of “music of the municipal guard,” which included the overture from *Le pompé de Nuremberg* and quadrilles from the opera *Le part de diable*, as well as a dance by Tomás León.⁴⁶ I indicated before that various “high culture” composers created musical works dedicated to the imperial couple; but popular composers also sang to the emperors, which confirms that the Second Empire was not only accepted by the elites, but also had adherents from all social strata. An example is the *Corrido de Maximiliano* (Ballad of Maximilian), who mourned the death of the sovereign with these verses:

Rest in peace Emperor Maximilian
An archduke very worthy of lamentation,
Prince of Austria, you were tricked into coming
And you left Miramar Castle...
That ancient continent shuddered,
The Austrian House recoiled,
Sad and mournful to know the unfortunate fate
Of a descendant of the famous Charles the Fifth.⁴⁷

But melodies with ambiguous stanzas or fondly reminiscent of the Second Empire were excluded from official history and, instead, writers of the liberal elite imposed their mockery on the monarchs and the thousands of Mexicans who supported them. As an example, Guillermo Prieto—who was part of the Juárez cabinet—conceived the lyrics of *Los cangrejos*,⁴⁸ and General Vicente Riva Palacio the well-known *Adiós mamá Carlota* (Goodbye Mother Charlotte), rhymes that he improvised upon learning of the Empress’s trip to Europe.⁴⁹ People set these couplets to music with tunes borrowed from other popular songs, and there was no party of Republicans who did not sing them, although even some liberals condemned that “cruel satire against the unfortunate empress.”⁵⁰ This was the origin of the black legend: impostor antics, that simulated to emanate

⁴⁵ Pedro de Alba, *Niñez y juventud provincianas* (Aguascalientes: ICA, 1996), 77.

⁴⁶ HNM, *La sociedad*, November 16, 1866, 3.

⁴⁷ Antonio Avitia Hernández, *Corrido histórico mexicano, voy a cantarles la historia (1810–1910)* (México: Editorial Porrúa, 1997), 141–142.

⁴⁸ These verses were written around 1855, but they remained in use during the French intervention. Vicente T. Mendoza, *La canción mexicana. Ensayo de clasificación y antología* (México: FCE, 1998), 289–291.

⁴⁹ HNM, *El siglo diez y nueve*, April 13, 1894, 2.

⁵⁰ Reyes de la Maza, *El teatro en México durante el segundo imperio*, 28.

from the people, and which were embodied as genuinely popular in the *Songbook of the Intervention*.

Music Education

In Mexico City's 1865 municipal budget, approved by the city's council, the amount of 1,836 pesos, allocated to the Academy of Music and Drawing, stands out.⁵¹ Such news were very common during Maximilian's administration, indicating a liberal government that was very clear about the importance of arts and accountability to the public. In addition to regularly printing decrees in the *Diario del Imperio*, the imperial press also published books that included the emperor's letters or speeches. Indeed, in the volume entitled *Alocuciones, cartas oficiales e instrucciones del emperador Maximiliano* (Speeches, Official Letters and Instructions of the Emperor Maximilian), missives sent to ministers and generals are made public, but there are also significant speeches offered by the emperor, stating that "protecting the sciences and the arts is one of the sacred duties of the head of the nation."⁵² In this context, the Mexican Academy of Sciences and Literature was founded in July 1865, since "intelligence, and through [it] the sciences, unite all the riches of creation [...] to serve the development and happiness of man: he who works for science works, then, for the public good."⁵³ Maximilian promised to give his full support behind the "development of the national sciences," and through his communications we can confirm the passion with which he assumes his Mexicanness, and his affection and admiration for his adopted nation: "Our dear homeland has entrusted me with a noble task, that of being able to work for it; and I do it with all my heart, with all my soul. Among the most interesting duties of this task is to seek, develop and use the innumerable riches with which Providence has endowed this beautiful country."⁵⁴

The promotion of science and the arts was only part of Maximilian's interests; he was also passionate about the history of Mexico, as we see in the decree in which he ordered the *Diario del Imperio* to print twice a week "some unpublished works from the National Archives concerning national history."⁵⁵ But here our theme is music education, and it was in that field that one of the most prominent national events of the Second Empire took place: the creation of the Mexican Philharmonic Society. This organization was established by civil society on January 14, 1866, and had as one of its main objectives the creation of a free music conservatory.⁵⁶ To this end, various charity performances were organized, including the first "great vocal and instrumental concert,"

⁵¹ HNM, *El diario del imperio*, February 11, 1865, 142.

⁵² Maximiliano de Habsburgo, *Alocuciones, cartas oficiales é instrucciones del Emperador Maximiliano, durante los años 1864, 1865, y 1866* (México: Imprenta imperial, 1867), 195.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 120–122.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 119.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁵⁶ Antonio García Cubas, *El libro de mis recuerdos: Narraciones históricas, anécdotas y de costumbres mexicanas anteriores al actual orden social* (México: Imprenta de Arturo García Cubas sucesores hermanos, 1905), 522–524.

held at the Imperial Theater on September seventh of that year. By then, the conservatory already had about three hundred students of both sexes, and to conclude the first part of the recital they presented “the end of the first act of the opera *La Vestale*, performed by 345 gentlemen and young ladies, members of society, with the accompaniment of orchestra, military band and twelve pianos played in four hands.”⁵⁷ In fact, not an easy opera to perform. In early 1867, the imperial administration donated the proceeds from the lottery to the conservatory.⁵⁸

The institution conducted a large number of cultural activities, and with the restored republic, in January 1868, its program was adjusted to reflect the recently promulgated Law of Public Instruction.⁵⁹ The conservatory received some help from Juárez, but, in early 1877, during the brief presidency of Juan N. Méndez —between two administrations led by General Porfirio Díaz— the federal government agreed that “the conservatory of music that was in charge of the Mexican Philharmonic Society is to be regarded from now on as a national establishment.”⁶⁰ This was a political strategy, but there is no doubt that the influence of the Second Empire is fundamental to understand the State’s continued subsidization of the arts and the advancement of European music in Mexico, as by the 1870s music education echoed in various places throughout the country: as well as the new national conservatory, the Philharmonic Society of Jalisco announced in 1873 that they would reopen music classes for men and girls;⁶¹ another conservatory was inaugurated in Cuernavaca, state of Morelos, in May 1877,⁶² while in 1879, the Melesio Morales Music Conservatory opened its doors in San Luis Potosí.⁶³

“Equity in Justice”: Maximilian Versus the Mexican Liberals

As I specified earlier, the restored republic used music and the printing press to generate a black legend around the Second Empire, as well as to repudiate the thousands of Mexicans throughout the territory who adopted the monarchy. But Maximilian had a privileged education, he accepted the throne of Mexico with the ideal of modernizing the country, transferring and applying European avant-garde science, such as the political philosophy of Lorenz von Stein, for whom “the improvement of the State would only be possible through the improvement of the individual.”⁶⁴

⁵⁷ HNM, *El diario del imperio*, September 6, 1866, 216.

⁵⁸ Gloria Carmona, *La Música De México. Período De La Independencia a La Revolución (1810 a 1910)* (México: UNAM, 1984), 99.

⁵⁹ García Cubas, *El libro de mis recuerdos*, 524.

⁶⁰ HNM, *El foro*, February 20, 1877, 1.

⁶¹ Biblioteca Pública del Estado de Jalisco, *Juan panadero*, September 21, 1873.

⁶² HNM, *El órgano de los estados*, July 20, 1877, 3.

⁶³ HNM, *La voz de México*, December 3, 1879, 3.

⁶⁴ Konrad Ratz, *Tras las huellas de un desconocido: Nuevos datos y aspectos de Maximiliano de Habsburgo* (México: Siglo XXI Editores, 2008), 8.

The motto of Maximilian’s liberal empire—which even appears on the coat of arms in the coins he minted— was “Equity in Justice,” nearly a century before the idea appeared in John Rawls’s seminal essay “Justice as Fairness,” the result of a 1957 conference at which the author called for a rejection of utilitarianism.⁶⁵ With that same progressive idea, the Second Mexican Empire established a policy that supported education, science, and the arts, seeking the development of the country and national unity. In particular, and anticipating its social function and importance in the collective imagination, music was promoted as a strategy of citizen participation and social action in collective life, intended to reconcile and unite a society divided by hatred that had been generated by political parties for over half a century.

In contrast, I might cite the book *Observaciones sobre varios puntos concernientes a la administración pública del estado de Zacatecas* (Remarks on Various Points Concerning the Public Administration of the State of Zacatecas), published in Baltimore, Maryland, by “one of the eminent personalities of whose deeds the homeland can and should be proud,” Luis de la Rosa Oteiza, who died a few years before the establishment of the Second Empire, when he was minister to President Ignacio Comonfort.⁶⁶ In this volume, the liberal writer made various petitions regarding the administration of his home state, with “education, teaching and public instruction” prominent. One of his recommendations was the establishment of an “Academy of Fine Arts [for] painting, sculpture and architecture.” However, and with no explanation, de la Rosa noted that “no outlay would be made on behalf of the State for the teaching of music, singing, dancing, drama, or other arts of pleasure and delight.”⁶⁷ We see that even the most brilliant Mexican liberals did not discern the significance of subsidizing music and the performing arts. For them, these arts were no more than fun and amusing, matters of “pleasure and delight,” or were manipulated to promote hatred and division—as in the aforementioned case of *Los cangrejos* and *Adiós mama Carlota*—; while the archduke turned them into a symbol of identity, element of peace and unification, close to the people, and recognized by all social classes.

Within the same order of ideas, the crown of Mexico was offered to Maximilian by a group of conservatives who hoped that the new monarch would abolish the Laws of Reform. But he did not, and on the religious issue he was decidedly forceful, decreeing that he confirmed the nationalization of ecclesiastical assets and authorized freedom of worship.⁶⁸ While this was happening, the empire fought in different parts of the country against Juárez’s troops, one of the most bellicose of whom was the battalion of General Porfirio Díaz, who had settled in Oaxaca. The terms of its surrender demanded that the imperial army expend a great deal of human and material resources, which became a “new and sensitive blow to the economy.”⁶⁹ But in the end, Díaz—the great defender of the Laws of Reform and the constitution of 1857— would become a dictator,

⁶⁵ John Rawls, “Justicia como equidad,” *Revista española de control externo* 5, 13 (2003): 129–158.

⁶⁶ Francisco Sosa, *Biografías de mexicanos distinguidos* (México: Porrúa, 1998), 551.

⁶⁷ Italics are mine. Luis de la Rosa, *Observaciones sobre varios puntos concernientes a la administración pública del estado de Zacatecas* (Baltimore: Juan Murphy y cia., 1851), 41–43.

⁶⁸ Conte Corti, *Maximiliano y Carlota*, 308.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 326.

offering “a liberalism of freedom in which the church could exercise its spiritual role without the legal hurdles imposed on it by the Laws of Reform.”⁷⁰ During his regime he took up some of the ideals of the Second Empire, being an enthusiastic promoter of French arts: architecture, painting, and music (his favorite among the pieces dedicated to him). Ironically, in his old age, the president appears in photographs with a huge mustache, military gala uniform, and chest crammed with medals, in a way strangely similar to the pictures of Maximilian.

Conclusion

In mid-1866, when Empress Charlotte began her journey to Europe to solicit aid for the collapsing empire, “along the way there were several French guards, and as Her Majesty passed, after giving her honors, they cheered her, and some people came out into the road with music and fireworks, and the natives were full of satisfaction and rejoicing.”⁷¹ Days later, she arrived at the port of Veracruz and, “without stopping at all, proceeded aboard the steamer *Empress Eugenia*.”⁷² However, before boarding the French ship, she requested that the Mexican flag be raised instead of the French badge, and “waited in the port authority building until her wish was satisfied.”⁷³ But Charlotte did not know that in Europe no one would offer help, nor that she would never return to Mexico, nor that her husband would be shot the following summer in Queretaro after shouting ¡Viva! to the land he loved and admired.⁷⁴

The above-mentioned Enrique de Olavarría y Ferrari was a defender of the republican system. During the French intervention, he collaborated in the newspaper *La Sombra*, and at the fall of the Second Empire he became editor of *El Boletín Republicano*.⁷⁵ We can thus consider him an impartial witness when he describes the final hours of the empire: “Little I have seen or I remember [was] as terrifying as that sad night of Thursday, June 20, 1867, the imperialist government’s last night in the capital.” Even this fervent republican noted the resentment and thirst for revenge of the liberal forces, pointing out that “it was good to evade the looting and persecution to which the victorious troops were undoubtedly going to surrender.”⁷⁶ The same author condemned the “terrible and disgusting spectacle,” the “cruel and scandalous mockery” as well as the “luxury of cruelty” with which the former liberal governor of Nuevo León, Santiago Vidaurri, was shot on July 8. The death penalty was not enough: to the sound of a band that

⁷⁰ François-Xavier Guerra, *México: del antiguo régimen a la revolución* Tomo I (México: FCE, 2000), 223.

⁷¹ HNM, *El diario del imperio*, July 17, 1866, 61.

⁷² HNM, *El diario del imperio*, Julio 14, 1866, 56.

⁷³ Conte Corti, *Maximiliano y Carlota*, 458.

⁷⁴ See *Ibid.*, chaps. X and XI.

⁷⁵ Juan de Dios Peza, *Memorias, reliquias y retratos: De la gaveta íntima* (Paris: Imprenta y librería de la vda. De Ch. Bouret, 1900), 148–149.

⁷⁶ Enrique de Olavarría y Ferrari, *Reseña histórica del teatro en México* Vol. II. (México: Porrúa, 1961), 729–730.

performed polkas, and *cangrejos*, the joyful music was brandished by the restored republic as if it were a weapon in order to insult human dignity as deeply as possible, humiliating and mocking the old man who was being led to the gallows and sacrificed. While Vidaurri's death sentence was presented as a grotesque comedy that did not require a trial, General Tomás O'Horan, a former hero who joined the empire after fighting various battles against the French and Americans, was tried. Not for nothing did the court martial that judged him and ordered his execution meet on August 18 at the Grand National Theater.⁷⁷ Everything indicates that the return of the republic also required theatrical drama to legitimize itself: music and theater at the service of power in shaping the collective imagination and produce terror in traitors.

Eventually, Juárez would be re-elected until his death, and Porfirio Díaz would consolidate his myth,⁷⁸ but here we have been able to confirm that the "structures and practices" implemented by the Second Empire would endure, and that they were not only economic and political: even today, many of the cultural and artistic ideas that Maximilian brought to the country are still valid. To begin with, the polkas, mazurkas, redowas and waltzes that the military bands popularized continue to be performed by hundreds of musical groups, and are significant to millions of people, especially in the north of the country and the American Southwest.⁷⁹ In the same way, the current municipal and state bands are heirs to the instruments, and the discipline, left to Mexicans by the imperial ensembles. In addition, thanks to the impulse of the Second Empire, Mexican musicians were able to create conservatories in the image of their European peers; these were the origin of the high-level music education that is currently offered in many of the Mexican universities. As if that were not enough, Maximilian was an example to follow for the Mexican State in terms of direct subsidies to musicians, instrumental ensembles, and institutions of teaching and artistic dissemination.

Poet and essayist Octavio Paz declared that, after independence, "Mexicans felt lost in the modern world: nothing and no one had prepared them to face the dominant motive in world history to this day: change, progress."⁸⁰ More than one hundred and fifty years after the execution of Maximilian in the *Cerro de las Campanas*, we still have a long way to go to reach a balance in our perception of the period of the Second Empire, to contemplate it with all its complexities and in its precise dimension, and estimate its immense tangible legacy of progress and modernity: political, economic, educational, scientific and artistic. Let us not allow that "the idealization of the past" take the place of memory.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 733–740.

⁷⁸ See Alma Silvia Díaz Escoto, "Juárez: la construcción del mito," *Cuicuilco* 15, no. 43 (2008): 33–56.

⁷⁹ See Luis Díaz-Santana Garza, *Between Norteño and Tejano Conjunto: Music, Tradition, and Culture at the U.S.-Mexico Border* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2021).

⁸⁰ Octavio Paz, *Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz o Las trampas de la fe* (México: Seix Barrial, 1985), 620.

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