

THE HUMANITIES INSTITUTE PRESENTS

Tuesday, March 28
11:00 a.m.–noon EDT
[Register on Zoom](#)



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“Origins in Tradition: Carlos Chávez at the MoMA”

In the summer of 1940, the Museum of Modern Art in New York held the exhibition *Twenty Centuries of Mexican Art*. In combination with the exhibition, the museum sponsored a program of Mexican music arranged by Mexican composer and director Carlos Chávez. The composer aimed to represent in his program the various musical cultures and traditions of Mexico and their historical evolution from an imaginary Aztec music performed with original instruments (*Xochipilli-Macuilxochitl*) to orchestral arrangements of *corridos*, *sones* and *huapangos*. The program presented a historicist and teleological vision that corresponded to official post-revolutionary discourse and, in turn, sought to insert Mexican music within the Western canon. Analyzing the funding, musical selections, and reviews of these concerts, Marco Martínez demonstrates Chávez’s significance in the New York modernist musical scene, as well as his role as spokesperson and official translator of exported Mexican musical nationalism. Martínez proposes that Chávez translates a sanitized version of Mexican music infused with an idea of authenticity for a North American audience by integrating Indigenous musical instruments and practices with cosmopolitan sophistication in arrangements of traditional pieces for the chamber orchestra.

