

Cabrillo Festival Becoming A Chavez Affair

Carlos Chavez, the Mexican composer and conductor, is returning to Aptos this year to direct a Cabrillo Music Festival which is quickly becoming his own.

The 71-year-old Chavez, one of the few remaining "grand" figures on the podium, put his own mark on the Cabrillo festival last summer, and this August it'll again be a Chavez, production from beginning to end.

Chavez, who has been called "one of the most significant musicians of our time," will conduct five of his own works during the three-weekend concert series Aug. 13-29.

The works range from his complex and frenetic "Symphony V for Strings," all full of dissonances and heady contrapuntal writing and strong Latin rhythms, to his "Ten Preludes for Piano," which is built along more classical lines.

All of his five works — the others are his "Suite from the Ballet HP (horsepower)," "Double Quartet from the daughters of Colchis," and "Concerto for Piano and Orchestra" — have been enthusiastically received by critics here and abroad.

But Chavez the composer is inseparable from Chavez the conductor. Any summary of his conducting achievements would read like a guidebook to the world's musical centers. He's been everywhere and the audiences have loved him.

With Chavez last year the Cabrillo Music Festival had full houses, complimentary reviews and standing ovations. It was, said festival Executive Director Timothy Welch, "our best year ever." And people in the audience agreed wholeheartedly. They flocked to the festival but more especially to Chavez.

Chavez shook all the hands and took all the congratulations, but he was looking toward this year. Chavez indicated that the combination of climate, location and the acoustically perfect Cabrillo College theater could be the ingredients for a nationally-known festival. He said he'd like to leave his mark on the Cabrillo Festival.

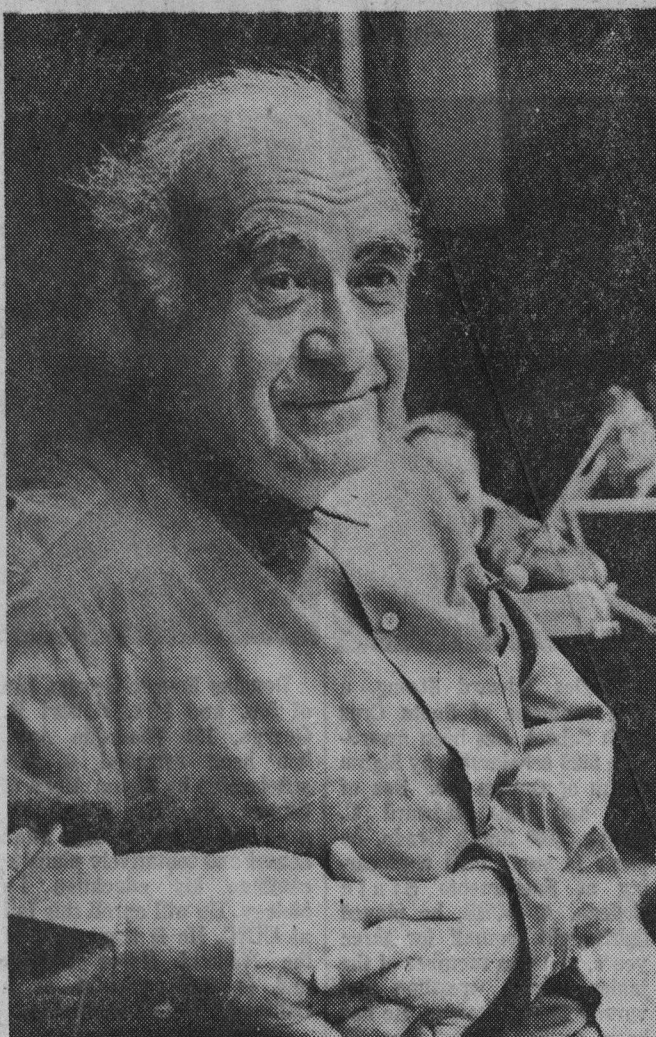
He wanted to expand the festival to three weeks. Sponsors weren't sure it could be expanded. Chavez insisted. And this year the festival will last three weeks.

Chavez insisted on a lot of other things, too. The Cabrillo Guild of Music couldn't afford all of them, at least not this year, but Chavez said he wouldn't mind waiting, as long as he doesn't have to wait too long.

All this extra enterprise costs money, but the guild expects it all to come out even, because of Chavez' presence.

Chavez is very much to the point, when it comes to the festival.

He told the guild simply, "I can not associate myself with anything that is not a success."



Carlos Chavez

He told them that they'd have to be willing to pay for a bigger program.

And he added that if they did their part, he'd do his.

"I only want," he said, "to make the music as good as possible."

Chavez, who is considered by many as the finest composer in Latin America, was born of a Mexican father and an Indian mother. His music has always shown strong traces of that heritage. Before he was 30, he organized Mexico's first orchestra, and today he's almost a legend in his own country, and a sort of guru to all the aspiring young musicians in Mexico City.

Chavez usually conducts without a baton, or a score.

Aaron Copland, writing of Chavez the composer, said, "Singlehandedly, he has created a tradition that no modern composer can afford to ignore... It is music of persistence — relentless and uncompromising."

... It is music that knows its own mind — stark and clear, and, if one may say so, earthy in an abstract way... Chavez' music is above all, profoundly non-European. To me it possesses an Indian quality that is at the same time curiously contemporary music I know, not in the superficial sense, but in the sense that it comes closest to expressing the fundamental reality of modern man after he has been stripped of the accumulation of centuries of aesthetic experiences...

It was as a composer that Chavez first came to the Cabrillo Music Festival. To commemorate the 200th anniversary of Portola's explorations in the Monterey Bay Area, the Portola Bicentennial Committee and the music guild commissioned Chavez to write his "Discovery," a stringent and tightly drawn piece, full of sensuous imagery and impulsive rhythms; it jerked the audience into a standing ovation. That work was the highlight of the 1969 festival and one of the few totally bright points in a rather dim year. To save the festival, backers asked Chavez to take over as music director.

Chavez' own compositions were

a musical study on the contrasts between the industrialized Northern Americans and the tropical south, a sort of Symphony of the Americas.

Also on the program is the ballet suite the "Daughters of Colchis," which Chavez composed for dancer Martha Graham. The work utilizes a double quartet (strings and woodwinds) and is based on a series of haunting melodies suspended in a classic equilibrium. The order and balance and probing quality of the work arise from its associations with Greek mythology. The ballet is based on the story of the enchantress Medea and has a strong sexual undertow.

Chavez' "Concerto for Piano and Orchestra" had its world premiere in 1942 with the New York Philharmonic, Leopold Stokowski conducting. The New York Times said the work is "built on a heroic scale, powerful and barbaric."

Mexican pianist Maria Teresa Rodriguez, a favorite at last year's festival, will play the Chavez concerto.

She'll also play Chavez' other work, "Ten Preludes for Piano." Chavez began to write this piece as a series of "easy" exercises for piano students. He admits it didn't work out that way and the work is quite complex.

The rest of the festival program makes the musical rounds from Bach's "Fourth Brandenburg Concerto" to Beethoven's "Eroica," to Ravel's "Daphnis and Chloe" to two original works by San Francisco Bay Area composers.

Robert Hughes of Oakland was commissioned to write his "Radiances" (with Moog Synthesizer). Aptos composer Lou Harrison is presenting a preview performance of "Young Caesar," a chamber opera "for X-rated puppets." The opera, which will receive its official world premiere in Pasadena this fall, deals with the life of Julius Caesar from his initiations into manhood until his affair with the King of Bithynia.

One of Chavez' goals for the festival is to present new works as often as possible.

For tickets and program information call 475-6000 or write the Cabrillo Music Festival, 6500 Soquel Drive, Aptos.