Sinfonía india

Instrumentation: 4 flutes/2 piccolos, 2 oboes, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, Eb clarinet, 3 bassoons, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 2 trombones, timpani, percussion, harp, strings.

Duration: 12 minutes.

THE COMPOSER – CARLOS CHÁVEZ (1899-1978) – To call Carlos Chávez the most important Mexican composer of the 20th century doesn’t do him full justice. Certainly, he represented his country with persistence and flair, but he was much more than just a cultural ambassador. Well-traveled and well-versed in multiple compositional schools of thought, Chávez had a career that was truly international in scope and historical in impact. Some of his best-remembered works come from the period that followed his first professional visit to the United States.

THE HISTORY – The 1924 trip north was fruitful in almost every possible way for Chávez. He made important friends (Copland, Varese, etc.) and had opportunities to conduct his own music before appreciative New York audiences. Brimming with confidence upon his return to Mexico in 1928, Chávez founded the Orquesta Sinfónica de México, got a job at the National Conservatory and began a phase of significant compositional productivity. Sinfonía india was born of this fertile period, a bit later in 1935, and was premiered on U.S. radio a year later and then quickly presented live with the Boston Symphony Orchestra. In both cases, Chávez himself conducted and the response was overwhelmingly positive. Listeners who know Chávez only from this music might assume he made regular use of Native Mexican folk traditions but, in truth, he did so sparingly and deliberately. He was resistant to the common portrayal of folk idioms as “relic[s]” meant only to quench the “curiosity of intellectuals.” He saw indigenous art as art, not only as history. The tripartite Sinfonía india flows in one continuous movement but still feels traditionally constructed as each section represents a different people – the Huichol, Yaqui and Seri respectively. Chávez’s own program note from the premiere speaks of the lasting strength of native art and how it had been able “to resist four centuries of contact with European musical expressions.” An interesting thing to say, given how wonderfully he had synthesized the old the new in this fascinating work.

THE WORLD – Persia began to be known as Iran in 1935. Also that year, Adolf Hitler officially violated the military limitations of the Treaty of Versailles and introduced the Nuremberg Laws, and Babe Ruth played his final Major League game.