

**Introduction to Experimental Music
MUSC_109**

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Final Paper

**North American Experimental Music Tradition and The
Chapareke Hidrocálido
Particular encounters and possible relations in the context of
MUSC109 and its knowledges**

ignition

I would like to begin this writing with a comment on the Mexican notion about “Experimental Music”, because this lack of understanding could be the first sort of accidental relation between it and the Chapareke Hidrocálido.

In most of the music schools or universities with music studies over there in México, the idea of experimental music is not as precise as here in Wesleyan. For the common of the musicians, everything that is not tonal corresponds with experimental music, and of course is not always associated with North America. In this fissure of knowledge, the Chapareke Hidrocálido and its musical production, is viewed as experimental music in México, but despite the process of getting knowledge beginning with ignorance, this link is not so erroneous.

_chapareke?

The Chapareke Hidrocálido is an instrument and a part of a bigger artwork. As an instrument, it has a close relationship with the Rarámuri's Chapareke, but the Hidrocálido has its own cosmology, and this cosmology is both, part of a holistic work of art and part of its history.

Its organology locates it in the wide category of arc instruments, but its sound production technique would place it in another perhaps new.

The instrument it's a long semi-curved root from about 1.5 meters long. It has three strings, made out of simple wire. Its tuning its almost impossible as the root is very flexible.

The sound is produced from two actions at the same time. First the right hand plucks the strings, and then one extreme of the Chapareke Hidrocálido is situated on the lips of the mouth. Here is were the most interesting event takes place, the resonance of the string and the root is picked up by the oral cavity and filtrated by the changes of its size, produced by the tongue and the inner body of the oral cavity.

However, Chapareke Hidrocálido's cosmology and the birth and construction of its history have deployed several and constantly unfolding relations towards a multifaceted complexity of a work of art¹.

That is the space where the practices of experimental music have come to have contact with the Chapareke Hidrocálido.

¹ The Chapareke Hidrocálido has been well described in this article:
<https://ia601509.us.archive.org/18/items/chapareke-oegf/ch-oegf15b.pdf>

the musc109 factor

After being at MUSC109, the term 'experimental music' has become for me, at the same time, broader and accurate. I've found that it is perfectly located into a specific part of history and geography, but its manifestations have immense and varied outputs, its history intricacy reminds me the multiple interactions that the Chapareke Hidrocálido has had with unusual realms for music.

This is why I realize that the presence of the Chapareke Hidrocálido in a historically meaningful class for experimental music tradition –as MUSC109– is not fortuity. Also, the instrument is a piece of research; its ethnography grows with each established relationship it can make, for it, being here is to generate a branch in its own history, to be porous in its ways of existence, to let be contaminated by its new context and became hybrid with experimental music.

_chapareke + wesleyan

The first contact in Wesleyan occurred in the context of Proseminar in World Music Studies due to a midterm paper where mine was based on the instrument. After the instrument arrived to Wesleyan, I presented it as part of a class at Graduate Pedagogy. These two events have drawn an important step in the Chapareke Hidrocálido's research stage, and of course in its history.

The instrument appeared first at 109, when Paula Matthusen –the professor of the class– asked me to present the instrument before class. We were about to perform 'Musicircus' by John Cage, the students had made original instruments for the performance and every one of them was presenting their musical device, their inspirations and the sound material they were supposed to play at 'Musicircus'. Everyone had two small participations in a performance that last about one hour.

This was historic for the Chapareke Hidrocálido, given the fact that this was the first participation in a Cage piece, and it was in a very significant place related with him; that is to say, this paper is been done in the same university that published 'Silence'. And here we can find one aspect in common.

invention

This practice is not exclusive of course, of experimental music. What makes this approach to be exceptional and related with Chapareke Hidrocálido is both the specific context at where this happen and the freedom it builds.

David Tudor's electronics gave him the possibility to invent a distinct sound approach; the implicit politics around the idea of getting your own musical instrument produce the necessary autonomy to construct an independent corpus defined by particular works and producing a particular cultural identity. We can see experimental music as a population of these specific cultural identities. In that sense the Chapareke Hidrocálido, as a work of art, generates its own specific cultural processes, objects and relations, i.e. a cultural entity. The Chapareke Hidrocálido generates specific sound production techniques starting from its own particularities. The fact that it is a root, that is very flexible and with it requires a specific attitude to tuning, in other words the instrument's characteristics lead compositional parameters and conform a special subjectivity towards itself. This process is embedded in Tudor's instruments also and in the performative focus in which Tudor was very aware. This context is quite often present in experimental music phenomena.

Although its construction begins quite different, the Chapareke Hidrocálido has more than a mystic relationship with the Rarámuri's Chapareke, but the circumstance of its construction allows seeing the Hidrocálido as an always-changing sound device. For that reason, Chapareke Hidrocálido is conceived porous as a potential possibility toward a growing cultural identity.

In that sense the instrument was modified for its participation in Cage's 'Musicircus', while was not a strict preparation –in the sense of the Cage's prepared piano– the instrument was exited with a pocket fan, assuming more a strategy of extended technique than a preparation. However this kind of strategy has also lead to the preparation of the instrument², and this technique could not be possible without the awareness of Cage's prepared piano. Experimental music answered the need from the Chapareke Hidrocálido to extend its musical boundaries.

² An example of this preparation: <https://soundcloud.com/omar-fraire/sinergia-serendipia>

indetermination

When the Chapareke Hidrocálido was born, the performance techniques were not specified as with the western musical instrument that born having already a developed history in that realm, the only boundaries our instrument had was its own construction limits. These conditions shaped the way in which an instrumentalist could approach toward the Chapareke Hidrocálido, thus, anyone can play it, and therefore the open composition methods from experimental music are more than appropriate to generate works for the instrument. In different pieces from the experimental music repertoire it can be seen the instruction 'for any instruments', while it cannot be completely said that this is very direct benefit for Chapareke Hidrocálido, this strategy allows to have a place in experimental music, no matter the instrument you play. This sense of openness increases the possibilities for the Chapareke Hidrocálido and it has been used in a couple of performances dealing with indeterminate number of instruments, in this photo we are rehearsing a piece in which the only premise was to draw traces with the instrument on a table full of soil and then follow those traces with a sound interpretation on the Chapareke Hidrocálido. The number of Chaparekes is open.



_amateur



As it can be inferred from above, experience with instruments is often not required to play the Chapareke Hidrocálido, as the possible failures in playing become potential to find fissures that could be developed toward nutritive interactions with everything that is not supposed to be included normally in for instance, western traditional music. In other words this sort of self-created sound production techniques accentuate the political aspect of the whole work of art in which the Chapareke Hidrocálido is embedded, they are points of articulation for the instrument identity.

This potentiality of failure is very consciously achieved by several scores of experimental music, where the music could be played almost by anyone willing to do so, although it is not the intention of this paper to point each work of this kind, the aim is to see that these strategies open the work and its practice in a very social way. One of the best examples of that happens particularly in the Portsmouth Sinfonia:

The idea was to create an orchestra of people with little or no experience on the instrument they were playing. Art student James Lampard was one of a dozen founder members. "I went out in the morning, bought a saxophone and tried to play it at the first rehearsal that afternoon."³

One of the paths that the Chapareke Hidrocálido has taken is to multiply its players to develop its repertoire and its community. By doing so the Chapareke Hidrocálido also spreads its history and the related history of the Guggenheim Aguascalientes⁴. So, having no experience with any instrument is a way to develop all this social processes around the instrument, and to share this experience creates knowledge about how the Chapareke Hidrocálido is being understood⁵.

³ "The world's worst orchestra!", The Sunday Telegraph (Uk) Sunday May 23rd 2004, at: <http://www.portsmouthsinfonia.com/media/sundaytelegraph.html>

⁴ This history is related with political power issues happened in the Aguascalientes community about 100 year ago: <http://guggenheimaguascalientes.com/himnodelosdurmientes.php>

⁵ A child playing Chapareke Hidrocálido share her experience: <https://youtu.be/mDzZyQ8C6dc>

multi-inter-trans

The historical and geographical context of experimental music was diverse in art disciplines, 50's –to nowadays– New York's scene offered a contact with different artists that generated collaborative work between them. multi-disciplinar production is very often intertwined in experimental music:

At Black Mountain College in 1952, I organized an event that involved the paintings of Bob Rauschenberg, the dancing of Merce Cunningham, films, slides, phonograph records, radios, the poetries of Charles Olson and M. C. Richards recited from the tops of ladders, and the pianism of David Tudor, together with my *Julliard* lecture⁶

Being the Chapareke Hidrocálido, a work-in-progress, it is susceptible to its environment and to the possibilities that each performance with it, could open. The physicality of the way one can play the instrument, soon directs from the facial movements to speech articulations and body activity. One of the collaborators in the project, Pilar Ramos, is a visual artist, who perceived this relation when she saw the traces on the soil and the drooling produced by playing the Chapareke Hidrocálido for extended periods of time. So we included a body in the performance, and we related the body's skin with the traces/score we were generating on the soil⁷ (not a dancer but a cleaning lady from the place we were rehearsing). The crossing relations caused inside the experiments reminds me a lot to the situations experienced in pieces like the mentioned above.



⁶ John Cage, "Silence", US, New England, Wesleyan Univeristy Press, 1973, p. X.

⁷ Part of the process, under the label "Mayo"

http://guggenheimaguascalientes.com/chaparekehidrocalido_2_proceso.php

looking forward

Of course the relations between the Chapareke Hidrocálido with experimental music are endless, for instance, the political aspect of them is a topic that should also be explored as well as the sound phenomena and how in both historical events provide us a question to listening. However the points are given in this writing and are both, an exploration of how to address this interesting links and departure paths to be followed in the next experiments.