

Enrico Chapela has chosen an exciting, little-known chapter of German-Mexican history for his commissioned work for the Deutsche Welle: *Zimmergramm* alludes already in the title to the "Zimmermann Telegram" with which Germany attempted to bring Mexico over to its side against the then still neutral USA during the First World War. In January 1917, Arthur Zimmermann, undersecretary in the Foreign Office, sent an encoded dispatch to the German envoy in Mexico: Heinrich von Eckardt. However, the British secret service was able to intercept and decipher Zimmermann's telegram – the highly sensitive contents led to a change in the established American policy of neutrality. Already provoked by Germany's intensified submarine warfare, President Wilson finally declared the USA's entry into the war in April 1917. Thus the Zimmermann telegram, intended as a diplomatic coup de main, ultimately had the opposite effect.

Chapela relates the Zimmermann episode primarily from the Mexican perspective. The German move is embedded in the complicated domestic political situation in Mexico after the outbreak of the revolution in 1910. Chapela divided his mini-opera, for which he wrote the text himself, into three acts of two movements each: a folkloristic story that emulates the "*son huasteco*" of Mexican dance and folk music (stamping rhythms, guitar sounds, percussion instruments such as maracas and güiro, and historical legends as content) and a dialogue scene in contemporary language.

The first act includes the movements "La Gran Guerra" (The Great War) and "Guerra Submarina" (Submarine Warfare): the *son* chorus initially reports about the course of the war in 1917, the German submarine warfare, and President Wilson's reaction, mirrored in the words of the two envoys in Mexico, Eckardt (Germany) and Henry P. Fletcher (USA). In "Guerra Submarina," Eckardt recites the key statement of the Zimmermann telegram to abundant glissandos and staccato phrases into which the chorus enters when the inquisitive people look over the shoulder of the reading diplomat. In contrast, Fletcher prepares himself with militant declarations by his president.

The second act contains "Revolución Mexicana" (The Mexican Revolution) as *son* section and "Alianza Seductora" (Seductive Alliance) as dialogic passage. The chorus tells of the intrigues of the revolutionaries between 1910 and 1917: the fall from power of the dictator Porfirio Díaz, the murder of the next president, Francisco Madero, by Victoriano Huerta, and the latter's overthrow by the troops of Emiliano Zapata and Pancho Villa – Chapela also quotes here Zapata's battle cry "¡Tierra y libertad!" The new president, Venustiano Carranza, maneuvers between recognition by the USA (supported by deliveries of arms) and fighting the guerilla army at home. Villa's attack on the US border town of Columbus results in a new US military invasion in Mexico. Zimmermann had wanted to take advantage of precisely this political instability and Mexico's hatred of the US occupiers. Chapela illustrates this strategy in the discussion between the German diplomat Eckardt and President Carranza.

The third act has as *son* "Flamante Embajador" (Brand-new Ambassador) and as dialogue scene "Bravata Americana" (American Bluff). The Zimmermann Telegram

has meanwhile been deciphered. Fletcher's mission to issue an ultimatum to Venustiano Carranza is depicted chorally. However, Carranza does not let himself be intimidated. The last scene is a showdown between the US ambassador and the Mexican president. Carranza cleverly keeps his true interests in mind: "¡Que viva la revolución!" – for only a few days after the Zimmermann Telegram, the Mexican constitution can be proclaimed and the country finally begins to stabilize. Admittedly, in 1920 Carranza, too, will be murdered.

Zimmermann's Telegram came at a very opportune moment in this phase of the Mexican Revolution, ultimately giving Mexico the opportunity to put an end to the fighting stage of the revolution without having the northern neighbors trying to shape the outcome according to their interests .

From the Mexican point of view, the German offer was by no means as far fetched as it seems today. For the Mexicans, the constant conflicts with the USA were much more present than the German aggressions.

"Considering the recent unfriendly rethoric against Mexico, this issue seems all to pertinent nowadays. When the events here described are almost 100 years old, we surely miss having a president capable of standing firm against threats and blufs. Not Eckardt, but rather Fletcher is the 'bad guy' in my piece," says Enrico Chapela.
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