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Hear the authentic

07/12/2008

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Visitors at Longwood Gardens tonight will be able to hear a rare collection of Mexican folk music performed in authentic style by Sones de Mexico.

In the early 1980s, Víctor Pichardo, the group's music director, spent several years touring Mexico as a musician with a folkloric dance company before forming his first band. In his free time, he would search out local musicians and document what he heard. He also traded instruments and tapes with local musicians.

"I had this project in Mexico City, so when I moved to Chicago in 1994, I wanted to do another like it," Pichardo said during a phone interview. "I met Juan Dies and we formed Sones de Mexico.

"I got my start professionally with a dance troupe in Mexico. It was a nice way to build a repertoire dedicated to folk music. With our current group, we try to represent all the styles of music we have in Mexico. Each region is different, so we have the traditional instruments to get that authentic sound."

The band plays more than a dozen regional guitars in a variety of sizes, along with a rhythmic wooden box called the tarima (which is played with hard-heeled dancing shoes) and a variety of percussion instruments made from donkey jaw bones, tortoise shells and deer antlers. The musical genre is the son.

"Son is a generic name for mariachi music," Pichardo said. "It's danceable music. You can find it in every region and every style. Mariachi has developed over more than 100 years. When the movies started in the 1930s, mariachi was the main type of ensemble.

"Right now, we have six people in our band. Juan Dies and I are the original members. He plays bass, guitarron (a fretless acoustic bass) and marimbol (a bass thumb piano). I play a variety of different guitars - also violin, clarinet, flute and marimba."

What: Sones de Mexico

When: July 12, 7:30 p.m.

Where: Longwood Gardens, Route 1, Kennett Square

Tickets: Adults: \$16; seniors, \$14; students (5 to 22), \$6

Information: 610-388-1000 or www.longwoodgardens.org

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