



Sones de México Ensemble is Chicago's premier folk music ensemble specializing in Mexican 'son' including the regional styles of huapango, gustos, chilenas, son jarocho, and more.

The group formed in 1994 to keep the tradition of Mexican 'son' alive in its many regional forms. As performers and recording artists, the ensemble has developed and popularized many original arrangements of Mexican traditional tunes through touring the United States and internationally, including such prestigious venues as the Getty Museum in Los Angeles and Carnegie Hall in New York. They have released six albums, including the GRAMMY® nominated *Esta Tierra Es Tuya (This Land is Your Land)*.

Each Sones de México album has told a story. Their debut *¡Que Florezca!* (1996) celebrated their rebirth in Chicago. *Fandango on 18th Street* (2002) was a dance party set in Pilsen, the artistic hub of Chicago's Mexican community. *Esta Tierra Es Tuya* (2007) served as an immigrant manifesto, and earned both a GRAMMY® and a Latin GRAMMY® nomination. *Fiesta Mexicana* (2010) was a children's album, followed by *¡Viva La Revolution!* (2010) which celebrated the centennial of the Mexican Revolution. Their most recent release, *13 B'ak'tun* (2013) marked the turning of the Mayan calendar in 2012, which was most definitely not the end of the world.

In addition to researching and performing traditional Mexican 'son', the group has developed a body of original work that has experimented cross-culturally with classical, Irish, blues, C&W, jazz, and rock music through collaborations with several artists across many genres.

Sones de México is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization with a mission to promote a greater appreciation of Mexican traditional music through world-class performance and education programs.

Sones de México Timeline 1994-2015

- 1994 Victor Pichardo, Juan Díes, Gonzalo Córdova and René Cardoza form Sones de México Ensemble. Their first public performance is on April 9 at *Taller Mexicano de Grabado*, an art gallery in Chicago's Pilsen neighborhood for an exhibit opening commemorating the death of Mexican Revolution land rights hero Emiliano Zapata. Drummer Raul Fernández joins shortly afterward. During the first year, Sones de México completes 54 public performances.
- 1996 The quintet releases their first album, *¡Que Florezca! (Let it Bloom)*, a four-part suite of songs based on the elements of Air, Water, Fire and Earth. Guests on

- the album include Gustavo Contreras and Gonzalo Camacho of Grupo Jaranero. Other guests, Ghanaian Yewe drum master Gideon F. Alorwoyie, Flamenco guitarist Héctor Fernández, and Chicago musicians Howard Levi and Stuart Rosenberg hint at the group's early interest in cross-cultural collaborations.
- 1997 Multi-instrumentalist Renato Cerón joins the group, solidifying the 6- member format that continues today.
- 1999 Sones de Mexico begins long-time cross-cultural collaborations with Irish fiddler Sean Cleland (The Drovers, Bohola, and the Irish Music School of Chicago) and with CSO trumpet player John Hagstrom and his brass quintet with whom they perform and record numerous times in the coming years.
- 2002 The group records and releases their second album, ***Fandango on 18th Street***. The album captures the spirit of a “fandango,” or dance party, on the main street of Pilsen, the artistic heart of Chicago's Mexican community. Later that year, Gonzalo Córdova leaves the group and is replaced by Hermo Contreras. Later that year, the group is invited to perform live on *A Prairie Home Companion* with Garrison Keillor, a syndicated radio show, and they are heard by 5 million people across the U.S.
- 2003 René Cardoza leaves the group and is replaced by Lorena Iñiguez from the Mexican Folkloric Dance Company. In addition to dancing zapateado, Lorena quickly learns several traditional string instruments, percussion and flute.
- 2005 Violinist Juan Rivera, an occasional guest performer with the band since 2002, officially joins Sones de México, replacing Hermo Contreras. Also, drummer Joel Martinez replaces Raul Fernández. Later that year, the group meets young Mexican-American trumpet player Victor García who becomes a reoccurring guest in performances and recordings since.
- 2006 Javier Saume replaces Joel Martinez, and Renato Cerón also leaves the group. Zacbé Pichardo, son of founding member Victor Pichardo, joins the group as a multi-instrumentalist, playing harp, marimba, stringed instruments and percussion. This line-up—Victor, Juan, Lorena, Javier, Zacbé and Juan Rivera—becomes the solid core that records the next four albums.
- 2007 The group releases their third album, ***Esta Tierra Es Tuya (This Land is Your Land)***. The album serves as an immigrant manifesto, as exemplified by the title song, a *norteño* arrangement of the great Woody Guthrie song that celebrates all of America's people. The album also marks a new confidence in the band's musicianship and ambitions by including original arrangements of music from other genres, including Bach's *Brandenburg Concerto No. 3* and Led Zeppelin's *Four Sticks*. The album is nominated for a Latin GRAMMY™ in the “Best Folk Album” category. The band travels to Las Vegas for the ceremony. The ensemble also records two songs for YoYo Ma's Silk Road Project: “Crossroads,” featuring Chinese-Mexican collaboration with the Yellow River Performing Arts Ensemble (this material was released years later in the band's 2013 album). On May 1, members of the ensemble marched among thousands of protestors on Chicago's Grant Park to demand immigration reform. Images of this march can be seen in the band's music video for *Esta Tierra Es Tuya (This Land Is Your Land)*.

- 2008 The group's third album is nominated for a GRAMMY™ in the "Best Mexican/Mexican-American Recording" category along with stars Antonio Aguilar, Vicente Fernandez, Paquita la del Barrio, and Christian Castro. The band travels to Los Angeles for the awards ceremony. The ensemble is invited to perform at the World Folksong Festival in Beijing China following the Olympic Games.
- 2009 The band does a serendipitous, impromptu performance of "La Bruja." a *son jarocho*, with blues harmonica master Billy Branch at the Chicago Blues Festival Kick-Off Party at Buddy Guy's Legends bar where they had been invited to play. Both artists hope to try it again some day. That year, the ensemble tours 13 different states with concert performances and educational residencies.
- 2010 Sones de México continues on a rich musical course with not one, but two new album releases: ***Fiesta Mexicana***, a 2-CD children's album with narratives in both English and Spanish and ***¡Viva La Revolución!***, which celebrates the centennial of the Mexican Revolution. The group toured coast-to-coast promoting their albums at the Getty Villa Museum in Santa Monica, CA and Carnegie Hall in New York City. On November 20, the group's releases *¡Viva la Revolución!* exactly 100 years after the start of the Mexican Revolution at the House of Blues in Chicago. Special guests include Guillermo Velazquez y Los Leones de la Sierra de Xichú and Alejandro Flores of the Mexican rock band Café Tacvba. In the summer the group opens for trumpet player Doc Severinsen, of Johnny Carson's Tonight Show fame. Severinsen sits in with Sones for a memorable performance of the mariachi classic "El Niño Perdido."
- 2011 Some band members begin independent musical projects. Fiddler Juan Rivera forms the *son huasteco*-style trio Los Condenados Huastecos with Alex Chavez (huapanguera) and Carlos García (jarana). This trio also collaborates frequently with the Mexican Dance Ensemble troupe. Music Director Victor Pichardo forms Los Pichardo, a family band with his two sons Yahvi (vihuela) and Zacbé (harp) and daughter Gabriela (violin) specializing in *son planeco*.
- 2012 In anticipation of the coming turn of the Mayan calendar, which many had sensationalized as the "end of time", the group conceives of a new multi-media stage show to celebrate the dawn of a new age. The work, titled ***13 B'ak'tun***, incorporates original compositions as well as works drawn from jazz, Irish and Chinese traditions. Sones de Mexico begins a collaboration with the Academy of Mexican Dance and Music, a Chicago-based Mexican folkloric dance company, who appear in face paint and stylized Mayan costumes for this concert. Its premiere coincides with the calendar turn in December 2012.
- 2013 The album, ***13 B'ak'tun*** is released on CD, with original cover art by noted Pilsen artist Héctor Duarte, one of the artists who once invited Sones de Mexico Ensemble to perform for the first time in 1994.
- 2014 Victor Pichardo leaves for a sabbatical in Mexico, though still keeps close ties with the group. The ensemble begins a new collaboration with the group Third Coast Percussion, while doing an artistic residence for the Rush Hour Concerts in Chicago's Back of the Yards neighborhood. Founding member Gonzalo Córdova returns to take his place in the performing line-up. Jorge Leal replaces Javier Saume on drums. The group prepares to celebrate its 20th anniversary in

September with an all-star concert featuring past and current members and several special guests from across their many collaborations.

- 2015 Sones de México performs three ambitious concerts premiering new concepts and collaborations. ***The Afro-Mexican Blues Connection*** featured a collaboration with Chicago blues group Billy Branch and the Sons of Blues. It explored the musical and cultural similarities and differences between the African Diaspora in Mexico and the United States. The Ensemble then collaborated with The Irish Music School of Chicago to tell the story of ***Los San Patricios*** (the St. Patrick's Battalion), Irish immigrants to the U.S. who fought on the side of Mexico during the U.S. invasion of 1846-47. Finally, the Ensemble arranged, composed and performed a new live score to silent cinema pioneer Sergei Eisenstein's lost classic ***¡Que Viva México!*** for the Chicago International Music and Movies Festival. Also in 2015, Ensemble co-founder Juan Díes toured the country leading a workshop on Corrido songwriting, including one at the Library of Congress in Washington D.C. that included the participation of new U.S. Poet Laureate Juan Felipe Herrera. The group opened the 10th Latino Music Festival with a multimedia performance of ***Cantata Santa María Iquique***, Chilean composer Luis Advis' story about the dramatic struggle of the workers on the salt fields of northern Chile in the early part of the 20th Century.