



Sones de México Ensemble Chicago • Fiesta Mexicana

SUMMARY [50 words]: This group of accomplished musicians and educators specializes in *son*, a rich and lively Mexican music tradition. Over twenty-five folk instruments are featured along with lush vocal arrangements and dance demonstrations. The Chicago Tribune says "[They] move seamlessly between styles and instruments playing with rock'n'roll energy without sacrificing cultural authenticity."

Sones de México Ensemble was founded in Chicago in 1994 by a group of accomplished Mexican musicians and educators. The group specializes in *son*, a rich and lively Mexican music tradition and its many regional styles. Over twenty-five folk instruments are featured along with four-part vocals and acrobatic dance demonstrations. Today, Sones de México travels around the country presenting concerts, accompanying professional dance companies, playing clubs, and offering lectures and workshops.

Sones de México also teaches and performs for children. They have toured over 100 different schools with this program in the past four years. The group embarks on a journey through Mexican music and the magic world that surrounds it. Children begin by learning about the four sacred elements of nature for the Aztecs: Water, Earth, Fire, and Wind. Then they learn songs about different animals that inhabit the Mexican ecosystem, like the *acamaya*, the crocodile, the legendary mermaid, a mouse, a buzzard, a duck, and even a cat! They also clap Mexican rhythms and learn the difference between a slow and a fast tempo. First and foremost, they learn how fun it is to play and dance Mexican music.

Already popular throughout the midwest, their CD release ¡Que Florezca! (Let it Bloom) has received critical acclaim from both Spanish and English press. Sing Out Magazine calls them "...serious artists who have chosen to renew and embellish their heritage..." A new CD released in 2002 is entitled Fandango on 18th Street and it focuses on dance styles of music from throughout Mexico in a tribute to Chicago's 18th Street, the main artery of Chicago's Mexican neighborhood, Pilsen.

THE ENSEMBLE:

Victor Pichardo, *music director*
Juan Dies
Renato Cerón
Joel Martinez
Rodolfo Piñón
Lorena Iñiguez

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Education Programs Description

PRESENTATION

The *Chicago Tribune* says "...*The best son happening right now is Mexican, and the group that's taking it up a notch is Sones de México, based in—of all places—Chicago.*" Chicago's premier Mexican folk music group, Sones de México Ensemble, specializes in *son*, a rich and lively Mexican music and dance tradition. The group's cross-cultural approach links *son* to the diverse ethnic roots of Mexico's *mestizo* culture: Native American, Spanish, and the often-overlooked influence of Black music in México. The members of the group are all-Mexican and may teach as a group or individually. All programs educate and entertain, may be integrated with a school's curriculum, and may be conducted in English, Spanish, or both for any age group. Students acquire music and dance skills and learn important lessons about Mexico's diverse culture.

GROUP BIO

Sones de México Ensemble is a 501(c)3 non-profit arts organization founded in Chicago in 1994 by a group of accomplished Mexican musicians and educators. The group specializes in *son*, a rich and lively Mexican music tradition and its many regional styles. The *Chicago Tribune* says "[They] move seamlessly between styles and instruments playing with rock'n'roll energy without sacrificing cultural authenticity." Over twenty-five folk instruments are featured along with four-part vocals and acrobatic dance demonstrations.

Sones de México Ensemble has performed throughout the midwest in Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, Ohio, North Carolina, New York City, and Tennessee. Sones de México work has included concerts, dance parties, street festivals, private and corporate functions, jingles/studio work, accompaniment and/or choreography of Mexican folkloric ballets, K-12 school programs, music and dance instruction, workshops, lectures, and residencies. A special children's program includes audience participation, a masked dance, important lessons about Aztec cosmology, the ecosystem, musical concepts of tempo and polyrhythms and the most famous Mexican *son* "La Bamba".

MISSION

The mission of Sones de México Ensemble is to educate, research, preserve, arrange, present, perform, and disseminate Mexican folk and traditional music and dance to children and adults of all nationalities, physical abilities, and cultural and ethnic backgrounds.

PERSONNEL

The group is formed by director **Víctor Pichardo** (formerly with Amparo Ochoa and *Zazhil*), ethnomusicologist **Juan Díes** (Director of Community Programs at Chicago's Old Town School of Folk Music), and multi-instrumentalist **Renato Cerón** (a talented all-around musician and educator), percussionist **Joel Martínez** (innovative world music drummer, marimba player, and music teacher), and dancer and musician **Lorena Iñiguez** (a principal dancer with the Mexican Folkloric Dance Company of Chicago). Besides the ensemble members, the group often collaborates with other artists in the community.

PROGRAMS FOR THE SCHOOLS

Sones de México Ensemble teaches and performs for children, unfolding a world of experience for students of all backgrounds in the context of Mexican traditional music and dance. They have toured hundreds of schools since 1994 with English, Spanish and bilingual programs designed especially for kids and mindful of the State of Illinois Education Goals for Music and Dance which seek to empower students to:

- I- Understand the principal sensory, formal, technical, and expressive qualities of music and dance.
- II- Identify processes and tools required to produce music and dance.
- III- Demonstrate basic skills necessary to participate in the creation and/or performance of music and/or dance.
- IV- Identify significant works in the arts from major historical periods and how they reflect societies, cultures, civilizations, past and present.
- V- Describe the unique characteristics of music and dance.

Sones de México Ensemble also combines the expertise of its members to offer a wide menu of units that draw general lessons in Math, Science, Social Studies, Humanities, Physical Education, and the Arts from the wealth of the Mexican folk music and dance experience.

The next section is a menu of sample units that integrate Mexican music and dance with important lessons in other academic subjects. In the coming years, new units may become available and old units may be retired according to the success they have in the classroom. Teachers are encouraged to call Sones de México to get an updated menu of available units.

Units may be available in a variety of formats: performance, workshop, lecture/demonstration, residency, professional development or in-service for parents and teachers, student performance, and student ensemble. These formats and their specific features are discussed further ahead.

SAMPLE UNITS THAT CAN BE DEVELOPED FOR INTEGRATED CURRICULI

- 1. “La Danza del Sol” (the Dance of the Sun) [a lesson in Astronomy and Physical Education]**

This ritual, circle dance has been performed by the Aztecs in Mexico since pre-Columbian times. It represents their view of the cosmos, with a large drum placed in the center to represent the sun and the orderly movement of the planets represented by the dancers around it. The cumulative “theme and variation” form of this dance allows students to quickly learn this dance. Students will learn the names of the four sacred elements of nature for the Aztecs: water, earth, fire and wind, and the names of the planets of the solar system.
- 2. “The Mexican Corrido” [a lesson in Folk Literature]**

A *corrido* is a Mexican epic ballad that tells the tragic story of a folk hero, who invariably dies at the culmination of the song. Corridos flourished during the 1910 Mexican Revolution as a ‘chronicle of the people’. Students learn that subscribing to form is a key element of good storytelling, and that the corrido provides a narrative formula for telling tragic stories. Students may be assigned to write their own songs based on someone’s tragic story. The tragic story of the late Tex-Mex pop singer Selena is a favorite topic.
- 3. “Black Music in the Americas” [a lesson in History and Anthropology]**

The folk music of Mexico is often seen as the marriage of Spanish and Native American traditions and the influence of Black music has been ignored and forgotten. People interested in Black music in the Americas usually turn to Brazil, the Caribbean, Perú, or the U. S. where substantial Black populations still exist. However, recent anthropological studies have revealed significant African imprints that have survived in various folk music and dance traditions of Mexico. Students will learn to perform the Afro-Mexican *chilenas* from Pinoteca Nacional and the ‘mimetic’ dances of *El Zopilote*, *El Pato*, *El Gato*, and *La Iguana* from Tixtla as well as the more recent influence of *cumbia*, *merengue*, and *son cubano* in modern Mexican pop music.
- 4. “Animals in Mexican Folk Music” [a lesson in Mythology and Zoology]**

Animals are a source of inspiration for folk songs around the world, and Mexico is no exception. This class is an opportunity to learn about animals that live in different Mexican ecosystems and about the folk legends and stories that are sometimes associated with them. Children will learn about the birds from Mexico (*guacamaya*, *pájaro carpintero*, *pájaro cú*, *gavilán*, *zopilote* etc.) and the magic qualities that characterize them in the songs that are written about them. Students will also learn about the river *acamaya* (crawdad), the *manatí* (which sailors often mistook for the mythical mermaids), the iguana, a heroic horse (*Caballo Prieto Azabache*), and others. Children will discuss their favorite animals and the qualities that characterize their behavior.
- 5. “The Latin American *nueva canción* Movement” [a lesson in Social Science]**

The *nueva canción* (new song) movement was a folk music revival that begun in the 1960’s in South America and that quickly spread among young, politically aware young people throughout Latin America. By reviewing the history, the issues, and repertoire of this movement, students will gain awareness of their own opinions, learn about an artistic channel to express them, and get encouragement about their power to change the world. Students will learn pick out an issue from the newspaper and write a song about it.
- 6. “Flute Making & Proportions” [a lesson in Music and Chemistry]**

A story about former Mexican President Benito Juárez tells that young Benito grew up as a shepherd near the village of Guelatao, Oaxaca in the mid 1800’s, and that he carved flutes out of reeds with his jack knife to entertain himself. The places where soundholes are carved along the shaft of the flute determine the pitches that can be played with it. Chemists, like flute makers, must be very aware of proportions in the lab. By filling test tubes with water in different proportions and blowing air into them the class can build a musical scale and learn to play songs with it. Students may also be asked to create a pan-pipe from segments of tubes of different lengths. This class teaches that Benito Juárez used important scientific principles in flute making.
- 7. “Los Viejitos of Michoacán” [a lesson in History, Geography, Music, and Dance]**

Michoacán is one of the richest Mexican states when it comes to folk music & dance traditions, spanning from the roots of mariachi music in *son planeco* and *gustos* to the *pirecuas* and the popular festivals of the Purepecha Indians like the *Danza de Los Viejitos*. Children will learn about the History and the Geography of this state and learn some important lessons about “tempo” in music and dance by performing a “El Trenecito” (The Little Train) from the Festival of *Los Viejitos*.
- 8. “The Spirit of the Dance” [a lesson in Anthropology, Spirituality and Physical Ed]**

Much of the music and dance activities of the many Native American groups in Mexico past and present have had spiritual objectives, celebrating their connection with nature or with the universe. World class dancer, René Cardoza will involve students in the performance and the significance of the “Deer Dance” of the Yaqui

Indians, the war dances of the Mexica Indians, and the astral dances of the Concheros. The dances can be physically demanding and students are encouraged to wear comfortable clothing and soft shoes.

9. **“Mariachi Music”** [a lesson in Music Theory]
“Mariachi” music is one of the best-known styles of Mexican folk music, however the history of its development is less well-known. Victor Pichardo will involve students in taking apart the various elements that constitute mariachi music: the instruments, the repertoire, the ‘seisquialtera’ polyrhythm, the old vs. the new sound., etc. Students will learn to identify what makes mariachi music sound the way it does.
10. **“The Music of Veracruz”** [a lesson in Cross Cultural life]
Veracruz is Mexico’s oldest seaport, and like New Orleans, New York, and other important centers of world trade by sea, it has been a hub of cross-cultural encounters and the cradle new and exciting music for many years. The music of Veracruz, also known as *son jarocho* and exemplified by Mexico’s most famous folk song, ‘La Bamba’, has a reputation for being one of the liveliest styles of folk music in Mexico. This class invites students to explore the instruments, the rhythms, the dances, and the poetic song topics of *son jarocho* while they learn about the benefits of cross-cultural collaboration.
11. **“The Mexican Fiddle”** [a lesson in Cross Cultural life]
The violin is one of the oldest, most cross-cultural and versatile instruments ever built. A descendant of the Middle Eastern *rabab*, today it plays a leading part in the folk and classical music of many countries around the world: U. S., Ireland, India, Egypt, Ecuador, and many more. In Mexico, the fiddle is used in a range of musical traditions from the music of the Tarahumara Indians to *mariachi*, *gusto*, *son huasteco*, and even Mexican Classical music. After this class students will gain a broader appreciation of the violin, a true citizen of the world!
12. **“The Harp in México”** [a lesson in History and Physics]
The harp in Mexico has uncertain origins, some say it is a cousin of the Irish Celtic harp brought to Mexico by Jesuit missionaries in the 17th and 18th Centuries, others attribute its playing techniques to the *kora* used by *griots* in West Africa. Whatever its origins are, we know that its sound is rich and beautiful, and we also know that it has been key in the development *mariachi* music in Western Mexico and the music of Veracruz, like ‘La Bamba,’ in the Gulf of Mexico. By stretching nylon strings of various lengths, widths, and tensions students will learn the acoustic principle upon which a harp works. At the end of the class, students will see various demonstrations of styles and techniques of Mexican harp playing.
13. **“Mexican Songs and Algebra”** [a lesson in Music Composition and Algebra]
A big part of Music composition is the ability to build aesthetically pleasing structures of rhythmic and melodic patterns. Algebra and patterns are good friends because algebra lends itself well as a shorthand expression of patterns. For example: **(a) basic exercise:** if the chorus of a song is repeated twice, we can express it as $2x$, where x =the chorus, **(b) midlevel exercise:** if a drum pattern is repeated eight times and is followed by a different pattern that is repeated four times, we can express it as $8a + 4b$, where a =the first drum pattern and b = the second, and **(c) advanced level exercise:** How many $[X=?]$ 4-bar phrases $[P=4]$ in a jingle of 60 seconds in length $[L=60]$ played at a tempo of 120 beats per minute $[T=120]$ with six beats to a bar $[B=6]$? The answer is $X=L/[(60/T)(B \cdot P)]$ =five. Students will be challenged and rewarded to find a real-world application of algebra in music.

PROGRAM

Xipe

The program begins with this Aztec ritual piece that serves to awaken the senses, inviting all to make tribute to Mexico’s native cultural roots and the sacred elements of Aztec cosmology: Water, Earth, Fire, and Wind (learn the Spanish words for the 4 elements: Agua, Tierra, Fuego, Viento). Dancer, Lorena Iñiguez calls upon the energy of these elements in a ritual dance where he faces the four sacred directions: North, South, East, and West. On his head, he wears a feathered headpiece called *copilli*. Incense —called *copal*— is burned, the conch shell—called *caracol*—is blown, and the *huéhuatl* and *teponaztli* beaten, accompanied with the strumming of the *concha*—a guitar made on an armadillo shell—, and the ankle shakes of the *ayoyotes*—made with dried seeds from a plant sown on a leather strip.

La Acamaya

Buried in the banks of a Mexican river in the *huasteca* region lives a small, ugly-looking, relative of the shrimp known locally as “La Acamaya.” When children don’t behave, they are told about “La Acamaya” similar to the way American children are told about the bogey-man. The song tells about dangerous magical creatures that inhabit the waters: a crocodile, a mermaid, and *la acamaya*, warning children to be careful when they bathe by the river or at the beach. In the chorus the children in the audience can respond with a fretful “uy, uy, uy” “ay, ay, ay”.

The *huasteca* is a mountainous region in central Mexico that includes the states of San Luis Potosi, Tamaulipas, Querétaro, Hidalgo, Guanajuato, and Veracruz.

El Ratón Vaquero (The Cowboy Mouse)

This song was written by Mexico’s premier children’s music composer Francisco Gabilondo Soler (also known as *Cri-Cri*), a well-known radio host on the XEW station in Mexico City during the 1950’s. He wrote all the songs for his show, from which came this fun, bilingual song about a Texan cowboy mouse who did not speak Spanish and who at one point found himself put in a Mexican jail. The song is set to a lively polka beat in a 2/4 meter, popular in folk songs along the Tex-Mex border. In the song, frustrated by his new home, the cowboy mouse sings the following chorus in English which can be taught to the children beforehand so that they may sing along during the performance. Try also the Spanish response:

“What the heck is this house
For a manly cowboy mouse,
Why don’t you let me out
And don’t catch me like a trout?”

“Conque si, ya se vé,
que no estás agusto aqui
y aunque me hables inglés
no te dejaré salir.”

Danza de Los Viejitos (Dance of the Old Men)

In the Mexican state of Michoacán, the Purépecha Indians celebrate a festival where a series of comical or satirical dances known as “old men dances” are performed. The selection chosen for this program is a circle dance called “El Trenecito” (The Little Train), and it is used to teach the meaning of *tempo* in music (i. e. “fast” *tempo* vs. “slow” *tempo*). The audience is asked to summon “Doña Sabina” (who is actually one of the musicians in costume). She emerges wearing a hat with multicolor ribbons, a cane, a straw wig, a mask carved from white wood representing a smiling, rosy-cheeked old man, and lively, forceful foot-tapping. About 8-10 volunteers from the audience are asked to form a train-like chain by holding hands together. The music begins in a slow 2/4 meter and the audience is asked to follow the beat with hand-claps. As the train speeds up around the room the tempo increases too and the clapping must get faster to keep up with the train.

WANT TO KNOW MORE? There are 3 theories attempting to explain the origins and/or meaning of this piece: (1) that it begun in the 16th century to make fun of Spaniards’ rosy-cheeked complexion; (2) that it portrays a pre-Hispanic, humorous attitude that the Purépecha people have towards their elderly, and (3) that it dates back to an Olmec worship of *Huehuetéotl*, the “Ancient” or “Elderly God” who was the purveyor of fertility —the colored ribbons in the hat representing the rays of the sun, the cane stands for the sowing stick, and the forceful tapping is the rain.

El Zopilote/ El Patito/ El Gato (The Buzzard/The Little Duck/ The Cat)

This medley from the Mexican state of Guerrero introduces some dances from the Tixtla region. These dances are often referred to as “mimetic” because dancers imitate the movements of different animals. Children in the audience can participate from their seats by moving their arms and heads like a buzzard, a duck, or a cat, as led by dancer Lorena Iñiguez. Children can learn to clap along the rhythm of *chilena*: 1-(pause)-3-4-5-6, 1-(pause)-3-4-5-6, 1-..., etc.; and they can sing along with the bilingual words to ‘El Patito’ from an arrangement recorded by Los Lobos in the album *Papa’s Dream*.

A mi me llaman El Pato (patito)
porque vivo en la laguna (patito)
luego que me ven venir (patito)
ahi viene el pato sin plumas (patitos)

Everybody calls me duckie (patito)
‘Cause I live in *la laguna* (patito)
Later when they see me coming (patito)
They say here comes the duck *sin plumas* (patito)

Ay, ay, ay, ay, ay patito (patito)

Ay, ay, ay, ay, ay patito (patito)

A mi me llaman El Pato (patito)
porque vivo entre las flores (patito)
luego que me ven venir (patito)
ahi viene el pato de amores (patitos)

Everybody calls me duckie (patito)
‘Cause I live among the flowers (patito)
Later when they see me coming (patito)
They say here comes the duck of ours (patito)

WANT TO KNOW MORE? The rhythm used, is often called *chilena* for its relationship to the Chilean *cueca*. It can be traced to an African origin, brought to Mexico, not through the Caribbean or the Atlantic as one would expect, but through the Pacific Ocean. African mining slaves based in Perú were brought North during the California Gold Rush. Along the way, they stopped in Mexico, leaving behind the *chilena*.

Particular to this style is the beating on an empty overturned wooden box called *cajón*, and waving a handkerchief, *paliacate*, by the dancer.

La Bamba

The show culminates with two versions of this festive Mexican standard, one American rock'n'roll arrangement popularized by California-based 1950s teen idol, Ritchie Valens, the other in the original Veracruz folk style. The audience is invited to clap along to the beat: 1-2-3-(pause), 1-2-3-(pause), ..., etc. and everyone may get up and dance to this song stomping the beat with their feet on the floor. The song has as many verses as the performers can improvise. When they can sing no more, they all sing together "Ay, te pido de compasión que se acabe La Bamba y venga otro son." [I beg you please to finish this song and play something else!]. With this the show ends.

WANT TO KNOW MORE? The style of the music reflects yet another example of Mexico's African heritage brought via the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean. Although most of Mexico was cultivated on a *hacienda* system (Spanish patronage over the indigenous population), a number of African slaves were brought to the coastal plains of Tabasco, Campeche, and Veracruz to plant sugar cane and coffee from plantations which were transplants from the Caribbean and they knew how to grow. These slaves eventually escaped to form their own inland communities and leave their mark on the people and the music. Recognition of widespread African roots in Mexico have only been acknowledged in recent years. Africanism in Mexico is still a young science.



Sones de México Ensemble

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. What country are the songs that you saw in the performance from? What is the name of the performing group?

answer: All the music you heard is from Mexico (find it in a map). The name of the group is Sones de México Ensemble. They are Mexican, and they live and work in Chicago.

2. What are four sacred elements of nature for the Aztecs?

answer: Water (Agua), Earth (Tierra), Fire (Fuego), and Wind (Viento).

3. Which of the following musical instruments were used in the Aztec ritual dance you saw? (circle all that apply)

Huehuetl	Concha	Harp	Piano
Teponaztli	Caracol	Violin	Accordion
Ayoyotes	Bass	Marimba	Cello

answer: Huehuetl (a large, old drum that can be heard for miles, and that represents the heartbeat of the dance), Teponaztli (a slit drum with a high tone and a low tone), Ayoyotes (a set of shakers worn around the ankles), Concha (a guitar or a mandolin built on an armadillo shell), Caracol (a conch-shell that is blown like a trumpet).

4. What is an Acamaya?

answer: an "acamaya" is a small shrimp-like animal that lives in some rivers in Mexico. It is similar to the American cray fish or the crawdad.

5. Where is the mouse in "El Ratón Vaquero" (the Cowboy Mouse) from? Why was he in trouble?

answer: he is from Texas. He is in trouble because he was put in jail, the jail is in Mexico, and he doesn't speak any Spanish. He can only sing "What the heck, is this house, for a manly cowboy mouse?, Why don't you, let me out, and don't catch me like a trout."

6. Where is Doña Sabina from? What does her dance represent? Did she dance fast or slow?

answer: Doña Sabina is an old woman from the Mexican state of Michoacán, where they celebrate an annual festival for old people, where everyone dances and wears masks representing old people. This dance was called "El Trenecito" (The Little Train). Doña Sabina used it to teach us the difference between "fast" and "slow" tempo in music. As an old woman, she begins dancing on a "slow tempo," but after seeing so many children and getting excited she speeds up the train to a "fast tempo."

7. What is a "mimetic dance"? What "mimetic dances" did you see? What is the ethnic origin of the dances that you saw?

answer: A dance where dancers immitate the movements of other things is called "mimetic," in this case the dancer mimed the movements of different Mexican animals: "El Zopilote" (the buzzard); "El Patito" (the duck); "El Gatito" (the cat); "La Iguana" (the iguana). These traditional dances from the Mexican state of Guerrero are rooted in an Afro-Mexican music tradition.

8. What is the name of the song that ended the program?

answer: La Bamba. This song, an early rock and roll hit recorded by Ritchie Valens in the 1950s, was based on a Mexican folk song from the Mexican state of Veracruz which was also called "La Bamba" which is danced with forceful foot tapping and a beat of "one-two-three-(rest), one-two -three-(rest), etc."

9. How many places in Mexico can you name? Do you have any friends from those places?

answer: look at a map of Mexico and see how many places you can recognize (eg. Mexico City, Monterrey, Guadalajara, Acapulco, Chiapas, Michoacán, Chihuahua, Sierra Madre, Yucatán, Cancun, Veracruz, Baja California, Michoacán, etc.). Is there anyone in the classroom from these places? What can they tell us about them?

10. Can you draw a picture of yourself on the stage playing your favorite instrument along with Sones de México Ensemble?

answer: the members of Sones de México play the following instruments: Juan plays the "guitarrón" (a large bass guitar), Lorena dances on the "tarima" (wooden stage) and "donkeyjaw," Rudy plays the "vihuela" (a small guitar), Victor plays the guitar and "jarana" (a small guitar). Renato plays the harp and the accordion, Joel plays the drums... and Doña Sabina dances with her cane. What instrument would you like to play? harp, drum set, electric guitar, synthesizer, saxophone, etc.?

We hope you enjoyed today's program.