

CHANGING WORLDS' "Connecting Cultures Award" acceptance speech by Juan Díes on behalf of Sones de Mexico Ensemble read on May 15, 2008.

Thank you. On behalf of **Victor Pichardo** (our music director and my co-founder of this group), and also **Lorena Iñiguez, Juan Rivera, Zaché Pichardo** and **Javier Saume**. Also two of our board members present here tonight: **Queta Bauer** (of Cultural Communications Consulting) and **Randy Adamsik** (of the National Museum of Mexican Art)

We want to thank **Changing Worlds** for this recognition. For selecting Sones de Mexico Ensemble as an artistic organization that represents the ideals **Changing Worlds**: the importance of education and the importance of cross-cultural understanding. As the name appropriately describes it: this award is for **"Connecting Cultures"**. And indeed, Connecting Cultures is a big part of what we are all about.

Sones de México Ensemble is an artistic group that champions the preservation of a family of Mexican folk music and dance styles broadly defined as "SON". Son is at the heart of our regional identity, not only as Mexican, but also as **Potosinos, Michoacanos, Tapatios, Chilangos**, and now also as **Chicagoans** and as **Americans** too (none of these are mutually exclusive).

Our artistic goal is to seek excellence and professionalism in carrying on this task, and to push forward to bigger and better personal challenges. Our accomplishments, including this award, push us forward to do even better. So thank you for this pat in the back.

But we cannot stop at our personal artistic excellence. We are part of a community. And from the very beginning, we have been aware of the need for education and cross-cultural understanding, and we have been doing something about it.

The Mexican community in the United States has, for many years been subject of negative stereotypes in popular culture: as the burro-riding side kick of the Cisco Kid, as a dirty "bandido", or the carefree sombrero-clad, siesta-sleeping *compadre* in rural Mexico, somehow technologically inferior, intellectually quaint or endearingly comic. Still, in our very present national debate over immigration, we continue to hear the news discussing the Mexican community purely as an amorphous "labor force" or even as a public service liability to be contended with. Less frequently do we hear about our cultural (and scientific) contributions. Our music digs deep into the rural culture of Mexico, and I tell you that it is... DEEP, technically challenging and worthy of the greatest concert halls of the world.

So, beyond artistic excellence, there is an element of pride in raising the profile of our culture in America. When we go to schools, I like to see Latino kids approach us after the show and tell us that they are proud of their heritage, or if they are not Mexican, to tell us what they have learned in class about Mexico and how that makes them feel smarter.

Again, we hear the news talk about of a **national economic crisis** in America. But we also have an **education crisis** and a **cross-cultural crisis**. And this crisis begins when our government says that "the arts are not essential for the education of our children." And our state and national funding gets cut time and time again. I know I am preaching to the choir here. You have come here tonight to do something about it. It is organizations like **Changing Worlds** that are doing something about it. So congratulations **Changing Worlds!** We too are proud to be among your friends!

Thank once again. THANK YOU VERY MUCH!