

Sones de México Ensemble Chicago

¡Que Florezca! (Let It Bloom)

SM 1196

I- CONCHEROS (Air)

1. Toque de Flauta Triple 1:19
2. La Pasión (*llamada de ánimas*) 1:42
3. ¡Que Florezca la Luz! (*alabanza de concheros*) 4:29
4. La Cruz (*permiso*) 0:39
5. Xipe (*danza de concheros*) 3:23

II- HUAPANGO (Water)

6. Huapango por Bulerías (*bulería y fandanguito*) 3:01
7. La Huasanga (*son huasteco*) 3:29
8. La Rosa / La Petenera (*son huasteco*) 5:27

III- MARIACHI (Fire)

9. Toque de Chirimía (*toque de Semana Santa*) 1:06
10. Jarabillo (*jarabillo*) 3:58
11. El Relámpago (*son planeco*) 2:52
12. Las Conchitas (*gusto calentano*) 3:13
13. Jarabe Nayarita (*jarabe*) 4:17

IV- NEGRITUD (Earth)

14. Entrada de Jarabe 1:37
15. El Toro Rabón (*son de tarima*) 2:45
16. El Zopilote / La Iguana (*son de tarima*) 4:51
17. Zapateado / Aguanieve (*son jarocho*) 4:23
18. La Bamba (*son jarocho*) 5:53

19. Tonantzin (*alabanza de concheros*) 3:35

Total Time = 62:03

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CREDITS

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Recorded by: Stuart Rosenberg in The Batcave, Skokie, IL, August 1996.
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Re-Mastered in 2002 by: Collin Jordan, Alien Soundscapes, Inc., Chicago, IL.
Cover and band photos by: Todd Winters.
Liner notes and translations by: Juan Díes.
Graphic design by: Alien Arts

SONES DE MÉXICO ENSEMBLE CHICAGO IS:

René Cardoza foot tapping, *ayoyotes*, *teponaztli*, *guitarra conchera*, *vihuela*, *jarana huasteca*, *jarana 1ª*, donkey jaw, machetes, *pandero*.
Gonzalo Córdova guitar, *huapanguera*, *guitarra conchera*, *guitarra de golpe*, *requinto jarocho*, *vihuela*, *jarana 3ª*, lead vocals.
Juan Díes *guitarrón*, mandolin, vocals.
Raul Fernández drums & percussion, *huéhuatl*, rainstick, *cajón*, cowbell.
Víctor Pichardo violin, mandolin, *guitarra conchera*, *concha* (Conchero mandolin), *jarana 1ª*, *jarana 3ª*, harp, *arpa cacheteada* (slapped harp), vocals.

GUEST ARTISTS:

Luis Albán, *quena* on "Jarabillo."
Gideon Foli Alorwoyie, African drums, shakers, and bell on "Entrada de Jarabe" and "La Bamba."
Rubén Alvarez, congas on "El Toro Rabón," "El Zopilote/La Iguana," and "La Bamba."
Gonzalo Camacho, *chontal* drum on "Toque de Chirimía."
Mary Canning, vocals on "¡Que Florezca la Luz!" and "Tonantzin."
Renato Cerón, vocals on "¡Que Florezca la Luz!" and "Tonantzin."
Manuel Cervantes, trumpets on "Jarabillo."
Guillermo Contreras, *chirimía* on "Toque de Chirimía," and clay flutes on "Toque de Flauta Triple" and "Tonantzin."
Victoria Dorantes, vocals on "¡Que Florezca la Luz!" and "Tonantzin."
Héctor Fernández, flamenco guitar on "La Huasanga."
Beto Laguna, harp on "El Toro Rabón," "El Zopilote/La Iguana," "Zapateado/Aguanieve," and "La Bamba."
Howard Levy, penny whistle on "Jarabillo."
Jon Novi, clarinets and saxophones on "Jarabillo."
Agustín Reina, vocals on "¡Que Florezca la Luz!" and "Tonantzin."
Stuart Rosenberg, mandolin on "Xipe" and second violin on "Jarabe Nayarita."

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Special thanks to: Renato Cerón, Luis Jahn, Roberto Ferreyra, and to our families, friends, and compadritos. Special dedication from Víctor Pichardo to Amparo Ochoa (1946-1994) "*para que tu luz siga floreciendo.*"

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Sones de México Ensemble was born in Chicago in the Spring of 1994. Our goal was to play Mexican *son*, a term used to define a large family of regional music and dance traditions, and to teach others about playing it, dancing it, and appreciating Mexico's rich culture and musical heritage. Each region of Mexico has its own brand of *son* —*son huasteco*, *son jarocho*, *son planeco*, etc.— each with its own repertoire, instruments, dancing and singing style. We hope that one day, a distinctive *son* will flourish in Chicago. That is why we have entitled our first CD *¡Que Florezca! (Let It Bloom)*.

Flowers are the theme of this album. For the Aztecs, a flower represented a song or a poem, and still today in Mexico, the colloquial "echarle flores" (to throw someone a flower) means to praise or compliment someone. Flowers can also mark both births and deaths, perhaps not contradictingly because death can be seen as a birth into a new life. Other meanings of flowers include the recognition of success, a declaration of love, or an offering of worship. Flowers have even been called the jewelry of the poor when worn as a relatively inexpensive ornament.

For the members of the band, flowers could mean a coming of age, the maturity of a concept. While we are all Mexican, we have had different life stories. Since we met, we have shared a great deal of our lives in the making of this band, each of us bringing something unique into the formula. Victor came from a 13-year career with the group Zazhil and the late folk singer Amparo Ochoa. He developed a vision that *son*, while traditional, should not be crystallized in an idyllic past, but move on with the times and the places you go. Chicago would become the cradle of a new life and a new *son* for him. René danced as a soloist and toured internationally with Mexico's Amalia Hernández National Folkloric Ballet Company for several years; he always had a passion for music, which he saw as inseparable from dance and which he intended to develop. Gonzalo was a well-known singer of *nueva canción* in Chicago, and he quickly established himself as the lead vocalist of the band. Raúl was an adventurous drummer who was thrilled by the idea of forming a group that would redefine *son* by adding drums to the arrangements, where he would invent his own parts. I was fresh out of graduate school with a degree in ethnomusicology and a new job as Director of Community Outreach for the Old Town School of Folk Music in Chicago, and felt excited by the potential of these great musicians, who later became good friends.

Ancient Aztec cosmology tells that the world has seen the light of five suns. The first sun was the Sun of Water, in a time when all people lived in it as fish. The second sun was the Sun of the Tiger, where people were earth-dwelling giants so large that when they would fall they could not get up again and would be devoured by tigers. The third sun was the Sun of Raining Fire that consumed all life, where people were relegated to live as rocks. The fourth sun was the Sun of Wind, where all people were monkeys that the wind eventually blew away. The fifth sun, the one that we live under today, is the Sun of Movement, and according to the legend, earthquakes and hunger will be our demise.

¡Que Florezca! (Let It Bloom) is arranged in four sections, each exploring a root of Mexican music and paying tribute to one of the sacred elements of Aztec cosmology: Air, Water, Fire, and Earth, respectively.

PART I- CONCHEROS is named after a revivalist faith of Aztec soldiers who once defended Catholic missionaries against rebel Indian groups. They have since become independent, worshipping a synthesis of indigenous and Catholic deities at churches and sites that were deliberately built by missionaries to bury ancient Aztec temples underneath. Concheros diligently preserve the use of ancient instruments like the *huéhuetl* (a large drum), the *teponaztli* (a slit drum), and the *ayoyotes* (shakers worn around the ankles) combined with the *concha*, an indigenous steel-string instrument modeled after the European guitar or mandolin but fashioned around an armadillo shell resonator that also accounts for the name given to this faith.

The album begins with **“Toque de Flauta Triple,”** an improvisation by maestro Guillermo Contreras played on a Mayan-style clay triple flute that emerges from a gust of wind and summons the light to emerge from darkness. As the light emerges, **“La Pasión”** calls upon all souls to bless the sacred space where the dance will take place. Our title track, **“¡Que Florezca La Luz!”** is a praise to the four winds, the four elements of nature, the four sacred colors, and the four human virtues (eg. when traveling to the East white flowers must be planted and joy is found), and it sets us out on a journey in four directions in search for our cultural roots. Víctor takes the *primera palabra* (lead voice) and our *compadritos* join us in the chorus. Roberto Ferreyra, who has done much to revive the Conchero tradition in Chicago, while not performing here, should be credited for teaching us this song and suggesting that we record it since it has not been recorded before. The song concludes seeking a fifth direction —toward the center— where yellow flowers are planted and equilibrium is found. The structure of this song parallels that of the album, where different styles of Mexican *son* are explored only to return to the beginning. **“La Cruz”** is a short request for permission to dance performed by René, who traces the sign of the cross on the floor as he points toward the four winds. **“Xipe”** is the dance that culminates this section.

PART II- HUAPANGO is named after a fiesta, not unlike a *fandango*, in the Huasteca region of Mexico, where a raised wooden stage is built for people to dance and play *son huasteco*. Locals congregate on these special occasions, sometimes traveling long distances by foot. The style is almost like a lament, with a distinctive use of virtuoso improvisations on violin and high vocal lines that occasionally break into a short falsetto for one or two syllables. The rhythmic accompaniment is the strumming of a *huapanguera* (a deep-sounding 8-string guitar) and a *jarana huasteca* (a high-sounding, small 8-string guitar). We have added the drums in triple time and a *guitarrón* (bass guitar) to accentuate the beat. In more recent times, the term *huapango* has been used in more commercial arrangements of *son huasteco* that feature a mariachi accompaniment, some rhythmic influences of the *chilena* style, and trained vocalists who can extend their falsettos for a long time and get standing ovations from the audience. We like to base our arrangements on the old and less flamboyant *son huasteco* style.

The section begins with **“Huapango por Bulerías,”** an original composition that traces *son* to the music of Spain. A flamenco guitar in the able hands of Héctor Fernández emerges from the water. I sing about the growth and transformation of *huapango*. The Spanish *bulería* rhythm is gradually transformed into a *fandanguito* and eventually segues into **“La Huasanga,”** a classic *son huasteco* that talks about the ephemeral quality of love which, like flowers, must necessarily wither. This is followed by a medley of **“La Rosa,”** a love song, and **“La Petenera,”** another well-known *son huasteco* that talks

about a legendary woman who is half fish and wanders the rivers of Mexico at night luring men away with her song. Those who follow her are never seen again. This story is also sung in Spain with a different rhythm, and the legend probably dates back to at least Homer's Greece, when mythical sirens tried to lure Odysseus away from his ship and into the sea.

PART III- MARIACHI commemorates the *old mariachi* style. In the early 20th Century, Mariachi bands, traditional to the Mexican states of Michoacan, Jalisco and Nayarit, were not like the *mariachi* bands we know today, with large violin and trumpet sections and musicians dressed in fancy silver lined outfits. Old *mariachi* groups, also known as *conjuntos de arpa grande*, used a large harp called *arpa planeca* with a deep sounding bass register, one or two violins, and a tandem strumming section formed by a *vihuela* (a 5-string guitar, which actually predates the modern guitar) and *aguitarra de golpe* (also 5-string). A new instrument was later developed for this ensemble which eventually displaced the harp: the *guitarrón* (a five, then six-stringed fretless bass guitar that is always played in octaves). Brass bands were simultaneously developed from a military marching models to groups that performed popular music around the turn of the century. The merging of the *old mariachi* string ensembles and a trumpet or two borrowed from the brass bands resulted, in the hands of classically trained arrangers, in the *mariachi* sound we know today. The film industry can be credited with turning the *mariachi* into the icon of the Mexican musician. In this section however, our arrangements draw from the forgotten sounds of the *old mariachi*.

The section begins with a short piece, "**Toque de Chirimía**," that arises from the sound of a burning fire and features a *chirimía* (double reed oboe-like instrument) played by Guillermo Contreras, and a *chontal* drum played by Gonzalo Camacho, both guest artists from Grupo Jaranero. "**Jarabillo**" is performed in a *jarabe* (or medley) style that combines three songs: "Flor de Piña" from Guerrero, "Picota" from Tamaulipas, and "Jarabillo de Tres" from Michoacán. These geographically dissepate songs were brought together by John Manns, a Chicago priest from St. Agnes Church, who requested that these songs be played at his ordination as a Bishop at the Holy Name Cathedral (this innovative choice for such ceremony undoubtedly endeared him to Chicago's large Mexican community). The piece was choreographed for the occasion by Ofelia and Serafín Guevara, and after we performed it, we liked it so much that we decided to keep it in our repertoire. Victor later arranged it for winds, and after recording it with the talented winds of Howard Levy, Jon Novi, Luis Albán, and Manuel Cervantes, the result was very powerful. "**El Relámpago**" uses a traditional old *mariachi* lineup, and it talks about fly-by-night cowboys riding through town. The dramatic solo singing style is brilliantly executed by Gonzalo. This is followed by "**Las Conchitas**," a simple love song, sung in three part harmony, with a theme that transcends international borders: "if you don't love me back, I will die." The section ends with the "**Jarabe Nayarita**," a five part medley of "El Coamecate," "Los Bules," "Los Diablos," "El Ardillo," and "Los Negritos," all traditional from the state of Nayarit. Distinctive in this song is an acrobatic and daring dance with machetes and a blindfold performed by René. It seems natural that campesinos from Nayarit who spend a great deal of time perfecting the use of this tool for harvesting would want to show off their skill at handling it with a great deal of accuracy in their festival dances. Raul's drum accompaniment and solos also add to the energy of this song.

PART IV- NEGRITUD explores the influence of Black music in *son*, a facet of Mexican music that has been underestimated, perhaps because the number of Black Mexicans is so small. In Mexico, the paternalist Hacienda system, where European land owners “adopted” the indigenous people as their “children” to work for them, did not create a widespread use of African slaves. Some African slaves brought to the Gulf of Mexico coastal areas of Tabasco, Campeche, and Veracruz escaped and formed inland communities where some of their traditions were maintained. However, as opposed to African communities in Brazil, the Caribbean, and the U. S., Blacks in Mexico intermarried with the locals and their traditions lost the clear link to the African motherland. In the 19th Century, during the Gold Rush in California, Blacks working in the mines of Perú were often brought by ship via the Pacific coast of Guerrero and Oaxaca where they left their mark both in the race of people the musical traditions. It is believed that the South American *chilena* style that is prominent in these areas, and the use of the *cajón* (a wooden box used as a drum) are marks of Black influence. Some researchers also trace the origin of the *harp* and the *marimba* to African models. Another distinctive influence is the performance of ‘mimetic’ dances where performers immitate the movements of different animals.

This section begins with “**Entrada de Jarabe**” consisting of the rich sound of the earth and an African drum, bell and shakers played by master drummer Guideon Foli Alorwoyie, former director of the National Dance Company of Ghana. The beat mimics a traditional Mexican beat, and it is eventually transformed into a traditional call to dance that is played throughout the mountainous region of Guerrero. “**El Toro Rabón,**” a song about a tail-less bull introduces the sounds of the harp, *jaranas*, drums, *cajón*, donkeyjaw, and cowbell, and it serves as an introduction to “**El Zopilote/La Iguana**” a medley of mimetic dances about a buzzard and an iguana respectively played with a *chilena* beat. A switch of gears brings us to “**Zapateado/Aguanieve**” which shows that in in the state of Veracruz, the feet can be used as an instrument. Star harpist and good friend Beto Laguna is featured along with René’s melodic foot tapping. A set of ten-line verse poems called *décimas* usually improvised, but this time borrowed from the legendary Arcadio Hidalgo follow. A change to a slower tempo marks the beginning of “Aguanieve” which talks about the loss of innocence. Finally, a special arrangement of “**La Bamba,**” which is probably the most famous *son* there is, culminates the album. While the beginning is fairly traditional, the song progresses to a middle section where Beto’s harp and René’s foot tapping are featured, Victor interjects with a *pregón* (a chanted poem) praising fugitive slaves, and guest artist Rubén Alvarez breaks into a conga drum solo that takes the song back to the chorus, but this time grooving to a “world beat” that taunts at new directions for Mexican *son*.

The sound of wind, the triple flute, and “**Tonantzin,**” a chant to the *nahuatl* name for the Virgin of Guadalupe, close the circle that opened at the beginning of the album, seeking equilibrium between the various roots of Mexican *son*. We hope you enjoy this recording.

Juan Díes
October 1996