

## **Mexico through your senses**

We Mexicans are mostly made out of song. Rubén Bonifaz Nuño, the poet, used to say that we were born in a ritual of “breathed-in sound, dreaming with the rhythm of our mother’s heart”. It is for these reasons that I am delighted to launch the second edition of “Mexico Through Your Senses”, with a night specially dedicated to the sense of sound, for music is one of my greatest pleasures and is an unrelinquishable companion in both times of work and leisure. It is also worth noting that music is the most kindred art to Mexico’s vibrant personality, a country that wakes up each morning to the sound of song.

In Spanish speaking countries they say that we Mexicans sing when we talk. And how could this not be the case? For our tongues are so closely entwined with the rhythmic and lilting octosyllabic meter brought to us by the Romancero Español –a lyric tradition born in Spain- and with that prehispanic Mexico, haunted by the sound of rattles, conches and poets such as Nezahualcoyotl, who amidst the inexorable passage of time sings to us thus: “Is it vane that we come here/ sprouting from within the earth?/Let us at least leave behind flowers/ Let us at least leave behind songs/

Those remote times are where we find the origins of Mexico’s musical legacy, one we are gathered here to pay homage to. Nowadays, the world receives the flood of our joyful musical traditions, which began when Fray Pedro de Gante founded in our country the first music school of America during the sixteenth century (1524) and was extended by the great masters of holy music that made my country that largest home to the most beautiful church organs in the whole continent.

We are a seedbed of rhythms and forms that have nurtured the whole world. To mention a few: jarabes, huapangos y zandungas of old accompany salsas, quebraditas and redovas danced today along with the boleros, rancheras, sones and corridos to that are sung across the country. These are but a few of all the musical worlds that inhabit my country, a country so large in its musical appetite that it has also been a space for rhythms from other latitudes that have projected themselves in Mexico, such as merengue, mambo and ballenato.

Popular music acknowledges Agustín Lara as a transatlantic figure that sang to Madrid and Granada with such success that he is heard up till today in Spanish bars, not to mention that international anthem titled “Bésame Mucho” by Consuelito Velasquez.

In terms of cultured music, Mexico has no minor history. This is proven by composers such as Ricardo Castro, Felipe Villanueva y Miguel Bernal Jiménez, or Julián Carrillo y Manuel M. Ponce, who were later joined by our modern masters: Silvestre Revueltas, Blas Galindo, José Pablo Moncayo, Mario Lavista, Federico Ibarra, Daniel Catán and Ana Lara.

However, these days, what is probably our greatest source of pride are our contemporary renowned singers, both in popular music and opera. A few days ago, for example, we witnessed Rolando Villazón’s success playing Werther here in London. In this sense, the range of Mexican singers keeps growing with names such as Ramón Vargas, Alfredo Portilla, Fernando de la Mora, Rafael Rojas y Jorge López Yáñez, Lourdes Ambriz, Olivia Gorra and Maria Alejandres. This is why a tenor such as Jesús León is an ideal testimony of such a vibrant tradition which will continue to delight not only our, but the sense of sound of many generations to come.