

## Paula Sanchez-Kucukozer

Mexico: Spanish teacher, son jarocho dancer, musician, cultural organizer

Object: calavera Día de Los Muertos skull

*Los retos de recrear una tradición cultural en un contexto distinto al original se convierten en oportunidades de re-pensar dichas tradiciones y adaptarlas a nuevas necesidades. (Spanish)*

*[The challenges of re-creating a tradition in a new context offers opportunities to re-think these traditions and adapt them to new needs.]*

I come from Guadalajara, Jalisco in Mexico. I met my husband there while I was in college and he was studying for a Masters degree. We got married and decided that, to further our education and professional opportunities, we had to come to New York. His family was already here, and he had a network of friends. Before that, I never entertained the idea of coming to the U.S. I studied for a Masters in language education at NYU and then I started teaching because that was what I did in Mexico. I taught Spanish as a second language.

When I came here, I got a feeling of nostalgia for my county, and I wanted to learn more. I joined the Ballet Folklórico Mexicano de Nueva York, and then Calpulli Mexican Dance Company, and I attended my first fandango. That is when I started getting involved with son jarocho. From that, I learned that the purpose of the dance in son jarocho is percussion. I had to relearn everything. It's hard at the beginning for someone with a dance background to make that step.

I am very attached to traditional folk crafts. That is something I brought with me. I have a huge collection of masks and calaveras from different states of Mexico. People who visit my house think it is Halloween all year long. The crafts tell wonderful stories about the people who made them, but also about their culture. In Mexico they are very nationalistic about certain traditions. They might say that son jarocho is purely from Veracruz. But really it has roots from Africa and Spain and the Middle East. It's the same with any object I have. It gives me a sense of belonging not only to Mexico but to the whole world.



### Bio:

Paula Sánchez-Kucukozer is a Mexican-born educator and teaching artist based in NYC. She holds an MA in Foreign Language Education from NYU and a Specialist Diploma in Educational Leadership from Queens College. She teaches Spanish using examples of folk culture. She is a founding member of the musical ensemble Son Pecadores, which performs son jarocho, a folk music and percussive dance style from Veracruz, Mexico. Paula collaborates with the Encuentro de Soneros en NY, creating local community events and traveling to Mexico to research cultural traditions. She also works to promote, educate on, and share son jarocho and foster the exchange of knowledge between New York and several parts of Mexico. For more information, visit: [sonpecadores.com](http://sonpecadores.com)