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DIPLOMAT

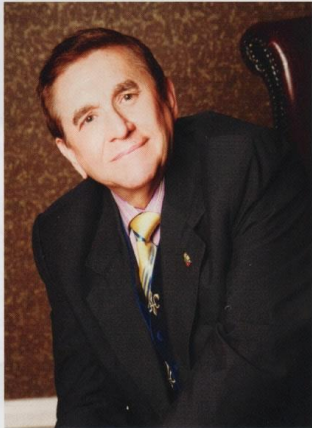
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AWARDS
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35 YEARS OF CULTURAL DIPLOMACY

Diplomat meets the Founder and Honorary Chair of LACCS-UK
Professor J.L. Sylvester and Professor J.R. Monroy



Founder and Honorary Chair of LACCS-UK Professor J.R. Monroy



Founder of LACCS-UK Professor J.L. Sylvester receives a Heads of Mission Award from FCO Director of Protocol Mr Philip Astley in 1996



Professor J.R. Monroy receives a Head of Mission Award in 2000

CAN YOU GIVE ME A BRIEF RUN-DOWN OF YOUR CAREER, IDENTIFYING WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO THE UK?

Prof Sylvester (PS): I am a Social Psychologist, freelance writer and emeritus university professor at the University of Chile. I travelled to the UK to expand my knowledge in Social Psychology, completing a PhD among other courses and diplomas. I always, however, combined my scientific knowledge with the calm of classical music to fulfil my intellectual mind.

Prof Monroy (PM): Growing up in Chile, I was attracted by music from a young age, and soon I learned to play guitar. Later at university, I always played popular music in groups and I helped create a local cultural centre in Iquique, with a summer school open every year.

I became Professor of Sociology at the University of Chile in 1971, and was later elected to become a member of the University Senate and President of the Cultural Commission. I came to London to complete a PhD at Birkbeck College.

HOW DID LACCS-UK COME ABOUT?

PS: I came across a group of diplomats with the same vision as me in 1984, including Ambassador de Venezuela Dr Jose Luis Salcedo Bastardo, Director of Canning House John Heath, Ambassador of Costa Rica Jorge Borbon and Ambassador of Brazil Mario Gibson-Barboza, and many others.

Among LACCS-UK's first activities was the organisation of Latin American films in Hampstead and Brighton cinemas, with the purpose of bringing together Latin people living in the UK.

PM: My first real experience of cultural diplomacy came in 1983, with the organisation of the first International Festival of Latin American Culture, an initiative launched by various Latin American intellectuals living in London. I became President of this new organisation named Latin American and Caribbean Cultural Society (LACCS-UK), an independent and non-profitable organisation, with the aim to promote better cultural understanding between all nations.

PS: The first Latin American & Caribbean Cultural Festival was held at the Southbank Centre in September 1984 involving over 100 participants. The event was supported by the GLC, Canning House, and participants included the Embassies of Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica and Venezuela.

WHY WAS THIS FIRST FESTIVAL SO IMPORTANT?

PM: I can honestly say that those six days of culture at the Southbank in September 1984 inaugurated a new chapter in London, bringing for the first-time Latin and Caribbean music – both classical and popular – literature, poetry, dance, and film to the British audiences. It was a great achievement: to open new venues of better understanding of the cultures of the new world in England.

The LACCS-UK programme started to bring soft diplomacy via culture to the Heads of Mission, creating a new space of communication and bridges of understanding. After 1989, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and the opening of new embassies from central Europe and central Asia, LACCS-UK added music from all over the world to their programme.

HOW HAS THE DIPLOMATIC AND CULTURAL LANDSCAPE IN THE UK CHANGED OVER THE PAST 35 YEARS? WHAT MAJOR CHANGES HAVE YOU OBSERVED?

PS: Because of the growing importance of 'soft diplomacy' over the past three decades, many embassies have formed their own cultural institutes or organisations to help them be more active promoting their own cultural identities. Nevertheless, there is always room for a non-profit organisation such as LACCS-UK to be involved.

LONDON IS OFTEN DESCRIBED BY DIPLOMATS TODAY AS ONE OF THE MOST DIVERSE CITIES IN THE WORLD. CAN THE SAME BE SAID FOR ITS CULTURAL LANDSCAPE?

PS: London is a multicultural and cosmopolitan metropolis that is quite unique due to the centuries of mass immigration changing its social and cultural environment. Latin American nations also have strong historical ties with Britain. For example, a story of a Chilean woman RAF pilot is a marvellous insight into Chilean and British relations. Captain Margaret Duhalde travelled from Chile to France and on to London to be part of the Royal Air Force in 1943-45, fighting against the German Luftwaffe bombers.

WHAT ARE YOUR MAIN PLANS AND PRIORITIES FOR LACCS-UK GOING FORWARD INTO 2018 AND BEYOND?

PM: LACCS-UK has contributed to cultural diplomacy in the UK for 35 years. We continue to explore new ideas to innovate and introduce new initiatives that can potentially enhance cultural understanding. We look forward to the future, just as we did 35 years ago.

PS: In Santiago, Chile, Radio Beethoven, the only Chilean radio broadcasting 24-hour classical music, has agreed to act as correspondent for LACCS-UK concert programmes to be

held at the Southbank Centre and to be radio broadcasted later in the year.

WHAT DO YOU THINK HAS BEEN THE MOST MEMORABLE DAY OR EVENT OF YOUR CAREER TO DATE?

PS: One of my most memorable days was when we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Royal Visit to the UK of Her Majesties the King and Queen of Thailand with the Thai Ambassador Kitti Wasinondh. I wrote the Programme Notes of Suite 1 and 2 by H.M. King Bhumibol Adulyadej who was an outstanding composer of jazz music. During his career as a musician His Majesty composed 48 songs, and played the clarinet, trumpet and guitar.

In my 35 years working with LACCS-UK I have been rewarded with two Heads of Mission Awards, in 1996 and 2000, which was a great honour.

PM: I too, twice received Heads of Mission Awards in 1995 and in 2000.

Over the years, I also received congratulatory letters from the Queen, along with King of Spain Juan Carlos, and Presidents and Prime Ministers of Chile, Bolivia, Honduras, Argentina, Brazil, Trinidad & Tobago, Slovenia, Mozambique, Angola, Guatemala, Romania, Bahamas, Jamaica, Malawi, Azerbaijan, Mongolia, and the UK.

I still especially recall my last visit to Vietnam in 1995, when I had the opportunity to visit the modest home of Van Kau, an illustrious poet, writer, musician and composer. In French, I explored the marvellous mind of this patriot intellectual, and had an opportunity to listen to his various cassette recordings. To this day, I still have the colourful notes of Van Kau's music in my soul.



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