

## Raúl Orlando Edwards

Raúl Orlando Edwards is the recipient of a United States Certificate of Congressional Recognition, a Jefferson Award, and numerous commendations from the civic and private sectors. A distinct achievement is Raul's official recognition from four consecutive City of Houston mayors: Lee Brown, Bill White, Annise Parker and Sylvester Turner.

He continues to use the arts to positively impact communities. His formal music studies music began at *Conservatorio Nacional de Panamá*. He went on to earn a Bachelor of Arts in Music from University of Houston's Moores School of Music, with a minor in Spanish. He established Houston's first official salsa studio in 1998, known as Strictly Street Salsa. His passionate pursuit to showcase the many cultural components that influence Latin American and Caribbean cultural communities led him to establish FLAMART (Featuring Latin American Music and Art) in 2006. In 2011, Raul launched *Salsa y Salud* at Miller Outdoor Theatre, the nation's first and largest Salsa and Health initiative and in that same year unveiled *Navidad Latina* at the Museum of Fine Arts-Houston. He established Houston's first annual *Afro-Latin Fest* in 2014, and several other programs and collaborations.

The work of Raúl Orlando Edwards has been featured locally and nationally in more than twenty-five newspaper articles and over thirty-five appearances on television and radio. Raul has also published in *Journal of Obesity* with the Research Article '*SALSA: Saving Lives Staying Active to Promote Physical Activity and Healthy Eating*' – a collaborative project with Texas Obesity Research Center, Health and Human Performance Department, University of Houston; Strictly Street Salsa Dance Company; and Department of Health Disparities Research, M.D. Anderson Cancer Center, University of Texas. Civic and artistic engagements include: City of Houston, VH-1 movie *The Way She Moves*, Houston Grand Opera, Consulates General of: Panamá, México, Israel, Spain, Egypt, Italy and Ukraine Houston Association, Houston Ballet, Latin American Cultural Week (NY), Latino Cultural Center (Dallas, TX), Miller Outdoor Theatre, Society for the Performing Arts (SPA), Ensemble Theater, San Francisco Rueda Festival (CA), Rice University Office of Multicultural Affairs, Multicultural Education Counseling through the Arts (MECA), University of Houston, Sam Houston State University, Texas Southern University, Houston Community College, Texas A&M University, and others. Rice University's Boniuk Institute for Religious Studies extended him an invitation to create an outreach and education program designed to promote tolerance, diversity and unity through the arts. This resulted in the development of the artistic initiative, *Arts of Tolerance*, established in 2017 with Raúl as its Executive Director. He is currently engaged in building nationwide and international collaborations, while expanding existing programs that continue to improve communities in the Greater Houston Area and beyond.