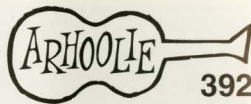


LYDIA MENDOZA

First Queen of Tejano Music

1. **AMOR BONITO** (*Lydia Mendoza*) (Canción) with Conjunto de Gilberto Lopez (2176) (4/21/64)
2. **CONTESTACIÓN A AMOR QUE MALO ERES** (*Marquette-Morante*) (Bolero) Enrique Rodríguez- requinto (732A) (4/12/52)
3. **EL DEBER DE LOS DOS** (*Lorenzo Caballero*) (Fox-Canción) with Beto Villa Orquesta (593A) (5/21/51)
4. **SOY REBELDE** (*José Morante*) (Canción) with Mariachi Ideal (513B) (10/27/50)
5. **VOLVER A VIVIR** (*Lorenzo Caballero*) (Canción) Narciso Martínez-accordion; Reynaldo Barrera-bajo sexto; Lorenzo Caballero-contrabajo (418B) (2/1/50)
6. **TE QUIERES IR** (*José Morante*) (Bolero) with Beto Villa Orquesta (480B) (8/9/50)
7. **AMOR CON AMOR SE PAGA** (*Esperón-Cortazar*) (Canción) with Mariachi Ideal (513A) (10/27/50)
8. **EN CADA COPA** (*José Morante*) (Corrido) duet vocal with José Morante and Mariachi Ideal (525A) (10/27/50)
9. **SEGUIRÉ TUS PASOS** (*Lorenzo Caballero*) (Canción-Redova) with Mariachi Ideal (519B) (10/27/50)
10. **INFAME TRAICIÓN** (*M.M. Carreón*) (Canción) with Los Rebeldes (659A) (11/11/51)
11. **A TI MADRE** (*Chicho Farfan*) (Canción) with Conjunto Narciso Martínez (accordion), with sax, bajo sexto, and bass (553A) (2/9/51)
12. **PRISIONERA** (*José Jiménez*) (Canción) vocal & 12-string guitar with Conjunto de Al Méndez (670A) (12/14/51)
13. **ACÁBAME DE MATAR** (*F. Cuellar*) (Bolero) with 12-string guitar, Enrique Rodríguez-requinto, 2nd guitar, bass, and percussion (732B) (4/12/52)
14. **CARIÑO CIEGO** (*José Morante*) (Tango) two guitars, bass, Enrique Rodríguez-requinto (743A) (4/12/52)
15. **AMOR EN DUDA** (*José Morante*) (Canción) two guitars, bass, standard guitar-Enrique Rodríguez (752B) (4/12/52)
16. **TÚ SABES BIEN** (*J. Ramos*) (Ranchera) two guitars, bass, Enrique Rodríguez-requinto (743B) (4/12/52)
17. **TINIEBLAS** (*Pablo Codesal*) (Bolero) with two guitars, bass, percussion, Enrique Rodríguez-requinto (752A) (4/12/52)
18. **QUÉ HICISTE CON MIS BESOS** (*Mariano Peña*) (Ranchera) vocal & 12-string guitar, bass (784A) (7/15/52)
19. **CUANDO SE PIERDE LA MADRE** (*Esteban Ortiz*) (Canción) with Conjunto Narciso Martínez (797B) (7/18/52)
20. **VI PASAR** (*Aurelio García B.*) (Ranchera) with Conjunto Narciso Martínez (1066A) (4/16/54)
21. **SIN QUERER** (*Conde Dracula*) (Bolero) with Conjunto Narciso Martínez (1059A) (4/16/54)
22. **HOY QUE VUELVO** (*L. Caballero*) (Ranchera) with Conjunto Narciso Martínez (805A) (7/18/52)
23. **PORQUE PIENSAS EN TI** (*Manuel Imperial*) (Bolero) with Tony de la Rosa-accordion (1092A) (5/54)
24. **ENREDASTE MI VIDA** (*DAR*) (Ranchera) with Gilberto Lopez y Conjunto (2165B) (4/21/64)
25. **AMOR MALDITO** (*Carlos Crespo*) (Bolero) with Tony de la Rosa y conjunto (1103A) (5/54)
26. **PA' QUE ME DICE COSAS** (*DAR*) (Ranchera) with Gilberto Lopez conjunto (2265A) (4/21/64)



LYDIA MENDOZA

First Queen of TEJANO Music





Lydia Mendoza, ca. early 1950s.

LYDIA MENDOZA

First Queen of Tejano Music

The year is 1952. Lydia Mendoza is preparing for an appearance at the Teatro Esperanza Iris in Mexico City where she is to perform with a number of other acts. 1952 is also the year when several of these recordings were made, Lydia is thirty six years old and after a brief respite from the music industry to raise her family she has begun touring and recording in an effort to resume her professional career. At this point in her life she has weathered the strains and growing pains of becoming a recording artist as a very young girl. She finds herself approaching her forties with a tentative, yet natural foothold on very familiar ground, that of the stage where she faces an audience of fans who have followed her career and love her music.

When the stage manager at the Teatro Esperanza Iris sees Lydia rehearsing alone with her guitar, he panics. He is convinced that Mexican audiences would be appalled at the idea of a relatively unknown singer from up north appearing in Mexico City with only a

guitar. He assumes the audience will want a more extravagant and bigger production than what Lydia alone can deliver. Of course, there was also a certain regional prejudice that factored into his underestimation of Lydia's popularity. In Mexico City, any music coming from the North was regarded as low class and unrefined. To Lydia's dismay he hires a *mariachi* to accompany her, but the assumptions he has made about the impact of Lydia's performance were soon proved wrong, as Lydia recounts (in **Lydia Mendoza, A Family Autobiography**, as told to Chris Strachwitz and James Nicolopoulos):

"Of course those *mariachis* hadn't practiced 'Mal Hombre' or anything, and furthermore, they didn't even know it. Well, the audience started off, 'Play "Mal hombre," Lydia Mendoza! Play "Pajarito herido,"' and all the other songs from my records. And the *mariachi* just stood there watching me. They were standing behind me, I was playing my guitar alone, and the audience was loving it all, no flying tomatoes or anything of what the stage man-

ager had been talking about."

Today in 1996, Lydia Mendoza is considered the leading pioneer Tejano recording artist and the most enduring performer in the history of Mexican-American music. As one of the most important figures responsible for the popularization of Mexican-American music in the United States, Lydia performed for thousands of fans, who came to love her as a songstress of the people. She was billed as "La Alondra de la Frontera" and "La Cancionera de los Pobres," the Meadowlark of the Border and the Songstress of the Poor People, she was considered someone who came from humble beginnings and understood the lives of hard working laborers and immigrants. The recordings on this CD are a fine sampling of Lydia Mendoza's recordings for the Ideal label in the early 50s and 60s. She is accompanied by some of the best and most popular *conjuntos* and *orquestas*, proving that she could indeed deliver songs with all her emotional intensity, with other musicians of diverse styles supporting her.

As a vital yet marginal genre recorded for major U.S. record labels, regional Mexican-American music suffered neglect during World War II due to an almost total shutdown of the

record industry. However, as soon as the war was over, local entrepreneurs and music loving jukebox operators with an ear for songs that would do well in honky tonks and bars used their technical know-how to record local talent. Their aim was to supply records for their own jukeboxes and others in the area. Armando Marroquín, the original producer of the recordings heard on this CD, was one of these jukebox operators turned record producer. What soon evolved was a unique community of singers and musicians who recorded on local record labels in Texas, laying the foundations for what is today known as the Tejano music industry. Tejano and Conjunto music were also steadily proving to be a profitable and substantial business as record producers, jukebox operators, ballroom and night club owners all propagated this energetic and lively Mexican-American genre in postwar south Texas and throughout the American Southwest. Lydia Mendoza played a pivotal role in the postwar boom of Tejano and Conjunto music. In the midst of this boom of activity, Lydia was one of the premiere entertainers who by the 1950s had already been a famous and established name for over two decades. She was extremely productive, recording as a soloist, with her

family, with her sisters, and in combination with other musicians for a variety of regional and national labels.

After pouring through **Lydia Mendoza, A Family Autobiography**, the oral history retrospective of the Mendoza family, as well as various articles in the Arhoolie archives, I felt I was forming mental snapshots of who she was. Aided by anecdotes from her biography, I tried to envision Lydia as a child, trying to sing with a travelling *conjunto* who was passing through the neighborhood; Lydia as a teenager agonizing over her father's refusal to allow her to marry the boy she loved; and Lydia as a grown woman dealing with the responsibilities of marriage and motherhood while trying to maintain her artistry and provide for her family.

Early this January I was able to speak to Lydia Mendoza by phone and wished her a happy new year. I was feeling a little nervous about talking to an artist who was so highly esteemed as a musical figure and a cultural icon. In 1982 she was granted the National Heritage Award by the National Endowment for the Arts. On the afternoon that I planned to call Lydia, I told Chris Strachwitz that I felt a little nervous about actually making the call. He laughed as he flipped through his Rolodex for

her phone number, "You don't have to be nervous. It'll be just like talking to your mother... actually your grandmother!"

That association immediately helped, and in no time I was relaxed and talking easily with Lydia. I described to her the picture that would be used for the cover of this CD, and she reminisced a bit, about how gorgeous some of the costumes from that era had been. She also commented that Tony De La Rosa was one of her favorite orchestra leaders, and how she thought that today's Tejano music had lost some of its original romance and character.

The many recordings Lydia Mendoza has made, and the number of awards, plays and books that have been written in her honor can attest to the fact that she is valued as an artist. Measuring her value based on the amount of attention she has received or how prolific she has been is only a part of assessing her importance as a cultural figure. As a student of Chicano history, and a lover of literature and music, the only way I know to really value the contributions of Lydia Mendoza is to recognize that listening to her music is also like talking to my mother or my grandmother. The best thing about music from another era is that a particular song or melody can serve as a touchstone to a

time gone by. The first time I played songs from "La Gloria de Texas" (Arhoolie CD/C 3012) in my home, I was struck by the beauty of a lone voice whose only solace and echo seemed to be the guitar that accompanied her. As I listened intently, I heard my mother's voice coming from the other room, singing along to "Delgadina," and "Collar de Perlas." To my surprise, I realized she also knew every word to a 1936 version of "Piensa en Mí." I was amazed to find that these songs were part of my mother's history, as they were a part of Lydia's mother's history or practically any other person of Mexican descent. When I asked my mother how she knew these songs she told me that they had always been around, and she remembered singing with her cousins as they did their chores. She of course, also knew Lydia's later recordings such as "Amor Bonito," "Aunque me odies," and "Prisionera." It is amazing that Lydia's repertoire of both older traditional songs handed down from her grandmother and the later more experimental boleros and *canciones* had such far-reaching exposure among native Mexicans and Spanish-speaking Americans of my mother's generation.

As Lydia Mendoza was experiencing changes in her style and repertoire, and her career took

on new directions, both the older songs and the *orquesta* numbers became the soundtrack to the lives of most Mexican-American immigrants. It is no wonder that Lydia enjoyed such popularity. It is a treasure for people to hear songs from their youth, whether they first heard them in rural villages working on ranches, or whether they suffered bone cold poverty in urban areas and heard the songs elsewhere. The fact that "La Cancionera de los Pobres" could be teamed with a professional *orquesta* years later and still enjoy popularity, only proves that some Mexicans and Mexican-Americans during the 40s and 50s were growing with her, enjoying perhaps some economic success. They were thrilled to have music from their past evolve into something they could enjoy at an elegant nightclub.

Of course, it is an incredible accomplishment if an artist can embody and share with their audience the duality of the immigrant experience. It is an undeniable blessing to be able to sing of an economically impoverished and long-suffered experience and live through it, in order to rejoice later on with music infused with hope and a sense of well-being. The danceable sophisticated tunes that constituted the early boom in Tejano music, especially

these recordings produced by Armando Marroquín for Ideal, are an important part of a collective Mexican-American heritage.

Lydia Mendoza was born on May 31, 1916, to Leonor and Francisco Mendoza, immigrants from Monterrey, Nuevo León, Mexico who fled to the United States to avoid the chaos and violence surrounding the Mexican Revolution. Lydia was taught to play guitar and mandolin by her mother, and by age seven was already a proficient guitarist. By 1927, Lydia, sister Francisca, along with their mother and father were roaming the Lower Rio Grande Valley as itinerant musicians. They performed outside bars, or in restaurants wherever they could, mostly for contract laborers and in *carpas*, tent shows where folks would gather in a marketplace type atmosphere to eat, drink and maybe hear some music or see a funny skit.

In 1928 Lydia made her first recording with her family as "Cuarteto Carta Blanca," (note ARH/FL CD 7002) playing mandolin and singing behind her mother, in a San Antonio hotel room. They were paid \$140 for twenty songs, little money by today's standards, but the experience was enough to encourage them to continue performing. In the early thirties, the Mendoza family also tried to earn a living by working

the sugar beet fields in Michigan. This back-breaking work, however, proved to be a miserable way for the family to earn money, and so they relied again on their musical talents and put together a vaudeville-type variety show and travelled to Detroit. When the Depression hit, the Mendoza family returned to Texas and eventually settled in San Antonio. With a five dollar gold coin that the Mendoza family won as first prize in an amateur talent contest, they were able to buy furniture and rent a house.

In San Antonio the Mendoza family worked in the Plaza del Zacate, setting up their musical act near food vendors. It was quite unusual to see adolescent girls performing along with their young mother, as most musicians in the Plaza del Zacate were male trios or *conjuntos*. While these groups actively followed around would-be patrons, offering their musical talents, the Mendoza family would always set up near the same food vendor, and always drawing a sizeable crowd.

Lydia was in her early teens and a strong and able guitar player, with a resounding, passionate voice, and striking good looks. She was an obvious attraction. When Lydia sang as a soloist, people paid more money and more attention than when the entire group performed. One

night a man named Manuel J. Cortez who ran a radio program called "Voz Latina" on local radio station KABC, invited Lydia to sing on his show. At first Lydia's mother was reluctant to allow her to go, since Lydia was needed to sing in the Plaza to earn money for the family and the radio station would not be paying her. Mr. Cortez assured Leonor Mendoza that appearing on the radio would allow people to hear Lydia and it would boost her popularity. Sure enough, Lydia's radio debut made such an impression on the public that the station offered to find her a sponsor so that she could be paid to sing nightly on "Voz Latina." Soon the Mendoza family group gained enough popularity to meet a demanding schedule performing in restaurants and they no longer needed to work in the Plaza del Zacate. Having proven herself as a local talent, Lydia was one of the artists chosen to record for Blue Bird Records when Eli Oberstein came to San Antonio with an assignment to record locally popular musicians and singers. "Mal Hombre," Lydia's first hit (note ARH/FI 7002), was recorded in 1934. The popularity of her widely distributed recordings allowed her to become well-known throughout the American Southwest and most of Mexico.

The recordings heard on this disc were

originally made for Ideal Records between 1950 and 1964. The Ideal recordings were a unique departure for Lydia as they presented her in combination with other outstanding Tejano artists. It was a chance for Lydia to work with other popular and well-loved musicians and experiment with different styles and arrangements. Ideal producer Armando Marroquín paired her with such artists as Tony De La Rosa, the Orquesta de Beto Villa, various *conjuntos* such as the Conjunto de Gilberto López, and Conjunto de Narciso Martínez. He also used the talented guitarist Enrique Rodríguez along with a fine percussionist to accompany Lydia on boleros. "Seguiré Tus Pasos" and "Soy Rebelde" showcase Lydia accompanied by the Mariachi Ideal. Armando Marroquín seemed to make a conscious effort to present Lydia in a variety of groupings, that also reflected the range of musical styles he promoted through the diverse performers on the Ideal label. It was probably an attempt to appeal to the varied tastes of every strata of the Spanish speaking population. Armando Marroquín also recorded many of the early *orquestas* (note ARH CD 369 "Orquestas Tejanas") which appealed to the more upwardly mobile Texas Mexicans. His Tejano music had a slicker sound that combined *ranchero* or Mexi-

can country music with what was essentially an American Big Band sound. Since Lydia already had a large audience of devoted fans who recognized and wanted more of her passionate and much loved *canciones*, the addition of professional backup musicians served to broaden her repertoire and allowed her to work closely with her Tejano contemporaries.

The early songs that still make up the major part of Lydia Mendoza's repertoire and helped launch her career were mostly traditional Mexican songs she learned from her mother and grandmother. However, as a young girl of eleven or twelve she put together what was, in effect, a chewing gum wrapper *cancionero*, a mini song book she would take with her wherever she went.

"I learned the words from those little improvised song books that I collected from each piece of gum I bought. The gum came wrapped up like a little finger, but there were songs printed on the wrapper. And those were the same songs that I learned from those musicians that came every Saturday (to play in front of a corner store in the Bella Vista neighborhood of Monterrey, Nuevo León). Those songs were the beginning of my career." Whenever she saw a performance by a street conjunto or an enter-

tainer at the *variedades* her father used to take her to see, she finally heard the melodies these popular songs were sung to. So she carefully studied these singers, learned the melodies, and adapted them to her own style.

Unlike those early traditional songs in her repertoire mostly written by unknown composers whose talents would rarely be appreciated, the compositions on this collection of recordings were written by some of the gifted song writers of the day. Local San Antonio composers such as José Morante and Lorenzo Caballero, are represented as well as popular Mexican writers like José Alfredo Jiménez. With the exception of songs written by Mexican composers and artists such as José Alfredo Jiménez, Tejano producers deliberately hoped to provide what eventually became a homegrown pool of artists and composers primarily in Texas, which would rival the music business in Mexico while catering to the Spanish-speaking market on this side of the border. This has proven to be a very difficult challenge in view of the power and popularity of Mexican composers and artists. Also included is "Amor Bonito," one of the few songs that Lydia composed herself. In 1964, after her husband Fred had left for a visit to Denver, Lydia was inspired to write a song about

the love she felt for her husband, and how his presence in her life was a beautiful blessing. "Amor Bonito," went on to become one of her most popular numbers.

Today Lydia Mendoza lives in retirement in Houston, Texas, the town she was born in. Whether she is called the Lark of the Border, the Glory of Texas, or the Poor People's Songstress,

she can be proud of a legendary career that had its beginnings in a stark and urgent need to make music in order to help her family. It is this need and love of music, that is the core of her artistry. With such a prolific and enduring career, Lydia Mendoza, now also recognized as the First Queen of Tejano Music, is truly deserving of her place in the ranks of Tejano royalty.

(Leticia Del Toro – 1996)

*Quotes taken from **Lydia Mendoza, A Family Autobiography**, compiled and introduced by Chris Strachwitz and James Nicolopoulos, Arte Público Press.*



Left: IDEAL label for "Tinieblas" (752-A) by Lydia Mendoza.

Original recordings produced by Armando Marroquín for IDEAL Records.

Re-issue edited and produced by Chris Strachwitz
Cover photo tinted and cover art by Beth Weil

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Lydia Mendoza

A Family Autobiography



COMPILED AND INTRODUCED BY

Chris Strachwitz with James Nicolopoulos

The family's story as told to the authors. The book includes a comprehensive discography listing all recordings made by members of the family.

410 pages

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TEJANO ROOTS

LYDIA MENDOZA

First Queen of Tejano Music



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 23. **PORQUE PIENSAS EN TI** (*Manuel Imperial*) (Bolero)
 24. **ENREDASTE MI VIDA** (*DAR*) (Ranchera)
 25. **AMOR MALDITO** (*Carlos Crespo*) (Bolero)
 26. **PA' QUE ME DICE COSAS** (*DAR*) (Ranchera)
- Total Time: 73:00*

*Original recordings produced by Armando Marroquín
for IDEAL Records.*

*Re-issue edited and produced by Chris Strachwitz
Cover photo tinted and cover art by Beth Weil*

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