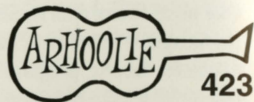


## CHELO SILVA

*La Reina Tejana del Bolero*

1. TRISTEZA DE QUERERTE (Rubén Miranda)
2. SABES TÚ (Manuel E. González)
3. AMOR BURLADO (Jorge Contreras)
4. PERLA NEGRA (Renán Jiménez)
5. YA LO VERÁS (DAR)
6. MAL CAMINO (DAR)
7. ESTOY SIN TI (Emilio Barney)
8. INOLVIDABLE (Roberto Soto Mejía)
9. MALOS PENSAMIENTOS (Alberto Domínguez)
10. AHORA ES CUANDO CORAZÓN (Benny Molina)
11. MI SINCERA EXPLICACIÓN (Antonio Mata)
12. YA NO TE QUIERO (Rafael Hernández)
13. ESTA NOCHE TÚ VENDRÁS (Pedro Medina)
14. TE ENGAÑARON CORAZÓN (Sally Newman)
15. CONTARÁS CONMIGO (Pablo Beltrán Ruiz)
16. TU INDIFERENCIA (Juan José Barrientos)
17. MENOS QUE NADA (Chucho Martínez Gil)
18. NI FALTA QUE HACE (Ray Pérez Soto)
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**KCOR RADIO BROADCAST:**

20. EL CHEQUE EN BLANCO (Ema Elena Valdelamar)
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22. IMPLORACIÓN (Mario Camacho)
23. PREGÚNTAME A MÍ (Luís M. Dueñas)
24. SOY BOHEMIA (Pablo Mata)

**Chelo Silva** - vocals accompanied by various trios, groups, or orchestras.

# 12, 16, & 17 with Conjunto de Pine Caceres

# 10, 11, 13, & 14 with Conjunto de Chuy Compean

# 5 (the only *ranchera*) with Wally Armendarez - accordion & his *conjunto*.

# 20-24 with Flaco Jiménez y his *conjunto*.

All other accompanying groups are unidentified on the original releases.

Re-issue edited and produced by Chris Strachwitz

Cover by Beth Weil

Cover photo (early 1950s) courtesy Manuel Peña

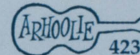
Original recordings made for the IDEAL label between 1958 and 1964 in Alice and San Benito, Texas.

*Chelo Silva can also be heard singing "Quiereme Vidita" on ARH CD/C 341; and "Si Acaso Vuelves on ARH CD/C 343.*

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## Chelo Silva

La Reina Tejana del

**Bolero**

# Chelo Silva

## *La Reina Tejana del Bolero*

**I**magine a young girl, standing on a soapbox, in the alley outside a Brownsville, Texas cantina. She is singing along with the *conjunto* inside, pretending that the audience who is listening to the *conjunto* is actually listening to her. She loves to sing and she believes in herself. She knows all the words to the songs, but when her mother calls to her from the restaurant across the alley where the family is employed, the girl hops off the soapbox, and abandons her pose as the gutsy, much adored cantina songstress. This is one of the many images that appear in the stories told by Chelo Silva's children as they recall their mother's passion for singing and how it manifested itself at an early age.

Now imagine La Reina Tejana del Bolero, the soon-to-be Texas Bolero Queen as part of her grammar school chorus. She is positioned in the front row of the group and her voice rises above the others carried forth by its clarity and strength. She is not boasting or

mischievously drowning out the others. She is simply blessed with a deep, resounding, vocal prowess that distinguishes her from the rest. Upon hearing her, the teacher says, "Little girl, move to the second row." So she takes her place in the second row. The choristers barely get going again, before the teacher interrupts the rehearsal again to ask the young girl to move back yet another row. No matter how far back she is positioned, her voice overpowers the rest, until she is finally assigned to sing from the very last row. This too, is part of the lore that her children mention in an attempt to recount Chelo Silva's early history. Supposedly this teacher did not like Chelo's singing, thinking it too loud and too strong for the chorus. Luckily, Chelo found encouragement outside of school. She possessed a vision of herself pursuing a musical career which allowed her to persevere even during the mid-1930s when it seemed unlikely that a young Mexican-American woman could have success in a male-dominated business.

La Reina Tejana del Bolero was born Consuelo "Chelo" Silva on August 25, 1922 in Brownsville, Texas, but she would later spend most of her life at her home in Corpus Christi, Texas. The oldest daughter of seven children, Chelo came from a Brownsville family that often struggled financially. Unlike her female contemporaries, such as Lydia Mendoza or Rosita Fernández, Chelo did not come from a musical background. When Chelo chose to pursue a musical career, she was exploring an avenue that was relatively closed to the average young Mexican-American woman at the time. Not only were a woman's chances of succeeding in a male-dominated business extremely limited, but a woman's participation in such a nontraditional career was almost always frowned upon and discouraged by her family. Her parents, however, encouraged Chelo to develop her talents, possibly because they hoped their daughter could earn an income as a performer.

As Chelo grew into her teens, she began to sing not only in school and in the Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church Choir, but she is also remembered appearing at local clubs singing boleros, canciones, huapangos and tangos. By her mid-teens Chelo began to per-

form regularly with the local Tito Crixell orchestra. Meanwhile, in another part of Brownsville, a then unknown poet and composer, Americo Paredes was hosting his own radio program primarily as an outlet for his own performances and compositions. The young Paredes convinced a local grocery store to sponsor his program, an association which would last for several years. One day a guitarists who performed with Americo on the radio recommended that a girl named Chelo be invited to the program to sing some of Americo's songs since she was becoming well known locally. After a sometimes stormy courtship, Chelo Silva and Americo Paredes were married in 1939. This union, however, was short-lived. Americo became a reporter in the army and later a prominent scholar and historian at the University of Texas at Austin, while Chelo pursued her dream of becoming a recording artist. It was to be another decade before her dedication to performing paid off, as she was later billed as the "Queen of the Bolero" not only in Texas, but throughout the Spanish-speaking hemisphere.

However, their years performing together on Americo's program were enriching. As Chelo worked with Americo, and was asked to



perform his material, she often expressed her individuality and insisted on singing other compositions which reflected her own personal taste. While only a tender teenager, Chelo was immersed in a musical community as she sang in clubs and on the radio. Americo also had other young artists such as Eva Garza on his program. Often Chelo and Americo visited the powerful border station, XERF in Villa Acuña, Coahuila, where singers were welcome to just drop in and perform. The performers ranged from amateurs with little talent to more experienced singers and musicians whose popularity grew from this exposure. Chelo fell into the latter category and it was soon apparent that her temperament and unique vocals lent themselves best to interpreting boleros.

After Chelo and Americo parted, Chelo's musical activities declined, perhaps due to the lean war years or possibly she found it difficult to combine the role of motherhood with her performances since she now had a son, Americo Jr. As late as 1948, Chelo held various jobs working for J.C. Penney as a clerk and also as a window decorator. While working as a window decorator, she was asked to sing a radio announcement promoting Día de Los Charros.

This was her first on-air radio performance in years. People took notice and started asking about the voice they had heard singing on the ad. Perhaps it was this favorable attention that in 1952 motivated Chelo to revitalize her musical career, taking a job singing at the Continental Club in Corpus Christi, Texas. She soon began to woo audiences with her stormy and brooding boleros, and consequently record companies noticed her talents. Among them was Discos Falcón of McAllen, Texas, for whom she recorded over 70 titles, (distributed by Peerless in Mexico) beginning in 1954.

In 1955 Chelo Silva signed with Columbia Records who had wider distribution and helped to make her a bigger star in Mexico. Audiences in the United States, as well as Mexico, Latin America, and Spain were soon to become enamored with her recordings. Chelo began to tour widely often paired with big name Mexican artists, such as José Alfredo Jiménez, Javier Solís, Vicente Fernández, and Lola Beltrán. She also made appearances in New York with Xavier Cugat's and the Ran Wilde orchestra. In the summer of 1958 she travelled throughout Mexico, headlining with José Alfredo Jiménez in San Buenaventura, Chihuahua and in Villa Hermosa, Tabasco. These were just a few of the

towns they visited. They actually performed at many small towns in between pre-scheduled events whenever they could find a plaza to stage a performance. In October of that same year she appeared with Javier Solís in Mazatlan, Sinaloa. In 1962, she performed in Mexico again from July through November, travelling through the states of Guerrero and Jalisco. In the early 70s Chelo toured Guadalajara, Jalisco and Monterrey, Nuevo León, including appearances in 1973 headlining with Yolanda Del Rio. In 1982, a Mexican newspaper, *El Redondel* (July 11), ran an article on the astounding popularity of Chelo Silva. It mentioned that her first single, "Imploración," had been on the market for thirty-two years and it was still selling daily. She outlived many of her contemporaries and her popularity continued well into the 1980s.

Chelo's link to Mexico was especially important because not many Mexican-American artists were successful with Mexican audiences. As she was constantly touring in Mexico, she was able to maintain a presence with the Mexican public. She not only appeared with other star performers, but also with Mexican composers and orchestra leaders.

While visiting Mexico, D.F., achieving her

longtime dream of singing live on the capital city's largest and most popular radio station, XEW, Chelo Silva was able to meet with Felipe Padilla. Chelo Silva enjoyed performing Felipe Padilla's compositions, and his "Fracasé" and "Mi vida se acabó," became part of her repertoire. At the time of her appearance on XEW, she had a top ten hit in Mexico with, "Fichas negras" (Falcon). Chelo also expressed a commitment to help out up and coming composers, by choosing to perform their songs. Her support of Mexican composers undoubtedly strengthened her ties to the Mexican public, since she was performing contemporary songs written by native Mexican composers as well as those written by Tejano songwriters.

Along with the famous guitarist and singer, Lydia Mendoza, Chelo is one of the pioneer Texas-born Mexican-American recording artists responsible for the popularization of Mexican music in the United States. She achieved the status of an internationally acclaimed performer, whose work was known and loved throughout the Spanish-speaking world.

Many of the boleros that Chelo Silva performed and included in her repertoire also reflected a certain nontraditional, almost rebellious image, generally not adopted by fe-



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**Chelo Silva**  
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con ROBERTO SOTO JR.

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"Caravana" poster advertising performance at Cine Tropical, in Villa Hermosa, state of Tabasco, Mexico, on July 3, 1958, showing Chelo Silva, Virginia Lopez, Lydia Mendoza, the famous composer José Alfredo Jiménez, the very popular Trio Los Aguillillas which in actuality was a conjunto Michoacano with harp, fiddle and guitar, along with numerous other performers.



male singers. Early female performers, soloists or *duetos*, usually performed compositions from the male point of view, the exception being Lydia Mendoza's "Mal Hombre." These songs espoused melancholy themes of being maligned in matters of the heart or being relegated to a life of drunken misery, because a woman had wronged a man or failed to redeem him. This idea of redemption was based upon the commonly held belief that a man's life was good and worth living if it was graced by a woman's love and dedication. However, if a woman had broken his heart or failed to forgive him for his mistakes, he was given free license to lose himself in alcohol and bitterness and the woman was always to blame for his depraved existence.

Many of the songs in Chelo Silva's repertoire depart from this tradition, in that they are sung from the female point-of-view, and although they deal with the same kinds of themes, the tables are now turned and the male is the object of the woman's suffering or corruption, in which the aftermath of heartbreak usually entails an existence of desolation or intoxicated oblivion. A good example on this CD is "Mal camino." Although many of Chelo's later songs were sung from a woman's point-of-

view, only a few were actually written by female composers, such as Sally Newman's "Te engañaron, corazón."

Aside from the lyrical content of her songs, Chelo Silva appealed to her audiences with her personal performance style and delivery of boleros. Perhaps the use of the Spanish term *interprete*, when referring to a performer, as opposed to the words *cantante* (singer) or *artista* (artist), provides an insight as to what the Spanish-speaking public values. The use of the word *interprete*, places the emphasis on what the individual can bring to a song or a performance. It focuses on how the individual interprets a composition, lending their own experience or understanding to an artistic piece in order to color the performance and substantiate it with depth and realism, so that others can identify with it.

Chelo Silva displayed true mastery in this regard. Her low, sultry voice, by turns laden with gravelly and dulcet tones, infused each melancholy and life-scourging song with a note of authority. Her songs spoke of love affairs gone awry, betrayals, and desires that could not be subdued. Turntables and radios in kitchens and living rooms all over the Southwest and Mexico, along with cantina juke-

boxes, poured out her songs, and those who listened or danced alongside them would remember love pangs of their own. Chelo's emotive recordings imparted a certain grace to the whole notion of love gained, love lost, love ruined. The few minutes spent listening to an exquisite bolero could echo a passion that lasted a lifetime. In a May 1994 interview with Chelo's son, Leslie Pérez, he expressed what he thought the public loved about his mother's singing: "The public could feel what she was going through with my dad (Leopoldo Pérez Morales) . . . the problems, and in reality that's what all the other Mexicans were going through and the people could relate to that."

Chelo Silva clearly performed from a definite source of inspiration, the well of personal experience. Chelo married twice in her life, first, Americo Paredes, and later Leopoldo Pérez Morales. Chelo carried out the multiple roles of career woman, mother and wife. However, managing a career and touring constantly takes its toll, and like many artists, especially women, she faced problems in both her marriages. Her marriage to Leopoldo Pérez Morales, who was the owner of a nightclub where she had appeared, was also a short-lived union. Her children Garnette, Leslie,

and René, recall that their father also managed her career until the conflicts between work and marriage became too thorny. Chelo then decided that she would continue on her own.

Chelo Silva remained active artistically even in the later years of her life, although her popularity probably reached its height in the late 1950s and early 1960s. During this time, she was perhaps one of the best-selling recording artists in the Spanish-speaking world. When the recordings on this CD were made for the IDEAL label she was in her 40s. At age 60, she was still touring, mostly in California, and she continued to record annually for Columbia / CBS Records (now Sony). Although Chelo gained fame and international acclaim for her emotive and inspired performances of boleros, many of her neighbors and even her family sometimes forgot that "their" Chelo was the internationally loved **Queen of the Bolero**. She lived a very simple life in Corpus Christi when she was not on tour, often lending her talents to the community by singing during such occasions as Mother's Day mass at the request of the local parish priest.

This CD represents the fruits of Chelo's recording sessions for IDEAL Records, and ends with an excerpt from a 1983 live radio

broadcast which allows us a glimpse of Chelo's performance style later in life in front of an appreciative audience. The IDEAL recordings from the late 1950s and early 60s showcase Chelo's artistry about a decade after she had established herself as one of the most popular performers that emerged on the Tejano and Mexican music scene in the 1950s. The live 1983 performance at Rosedale Park in San Antonio, Texas, broadcast by KCOR, also reflects Chelo's loyalty and enthusiasm for the public, and the affectionate response of the audience shows that her *cariño* was well received. Judging by the enthusiasm of the crowd during that concert, one can only imagine that this was the kind of audience Chelo hoped to be singing for when she pretended to be a famous star as she sang outside the cantina propped up on that soap-box. Accompanied by Flaco Jiménez and his *conjunto*, we are lucky to hear Chelo in the later years of her life, songs interspersed with tearful dedications and anecdotes. Since she suffered from failing health her voice had somewhat deteriorated. In fact, she confessed to her audience that she had felt ill that morning and she wondered if her last days might be spent in San Antonio.

Chris Strachwitz made the KCOR recordings

almost by accident. He was driving in San Antonio during the week of the annual Conjunto Festival, when he tuned in KCOR on his car radio. Hearing this remarkable performance, he grabbed his cassette recorder and placed the mike on top of the car speaker while driving towards the source of this extraordinary "live" event, once he heard the announcement from Rosedale Park. Since he desperately wanted to see and hear this concert in person, he parked his car and unfortunately turned off the cassette machine. Chris called KCOR afterwards with the hope that the station had taped the performance, but no such luck! So, all that remained was this brief, badly recorded excerpt, but it is a fascinating and rare historic audio snapshot of Chelo Silva in her later years.

On April 2, 1988 Chelo Silva passed away at age 65, having suffered from cancer. It is only fitting that any comment on the life and achievements of Chelo Silva should be considered alongside the contemplation of some of her best songs. "Preguntame a mí," a raucous and gritty recording from the KCOR performance best exemplifies Chelo, audaciously addressing the questions of her life. It is quintessential Chelo Silva, offering the public all her glory, bravado, and *corazón*. Let her tell it to you herself:

Que no te cuenten mi historia.  
No indagues: "¿Qué es de mi vida?"  
Si quieres saberla, pregúntame a mí.  
Que no te tengan con cuentos.  
Si tienes valor para oirlo,  
yo puedo decirte por qué me perdí.  
Se sufre mucho en la vida;  
y nunca se aprende que  
dejando un cariño, nos paga mal.  
Es fácil equivocarse,  
pensando que entre las copas  
es el remedio para olvidar.

Don't let them tell you my story,  
Don't ask, "What's become of my life?"  
If you want to know, come ask me.  
Don't let them tell you any tales.  
If you have the courage to hear it,  
let me be the one to tell you why I strayed.  
One suffers much in this life;  
there is a price to be paid for leaving  
a love, and one never learns.  
It's easy to make mistakes,  
believing liquor is the cure,  
believing the cure is to forget.

We have not forgotten you, Chelo. *No te hemos olvidado.*

(Leticia Del Toro – 1995)

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*Based primarily on an interview with René Pérez, Leslie Pérez, and Garnette Pérez Silva, conducted by Chris Strachwitz and James Nicolopoulos in Corpus Christi, Texas, on May 9, 1994 and various publications.*

*Cover photo courtesy Manuel Peña*

*Cover design and tinting by Beth Weil*

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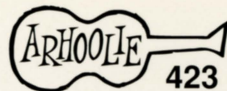
*Original recordings made between 1958 and 1964 in Alice and San Benito, Texas, for IDEAL Records.*

*#20–24 are from a remote radio broadcast from Rosedale Park in San Antonio, Tx, on May 21, 1983, taped by Chris Strachwitz.*

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**CHELO SILVA***La Reina Tejana del Bolero*

1. **Tristeza De Quererte** (*Rubén Miranda*) (2:47)
2. **Sabes Tú** (*Manuel E. González*) (2:35)
3. **Amor Burlado** (*Jorge Contreras*) (2:33)
4. **Perla Negra** (*Renán Jiménez*) (2:50)
5. **Ya Lo Verás** (*ranchera*) (DAR) (2:17)
6. **Mal Camino** (DAR) (2:20)
7. **Estoy Sin Ti** (*Emilio Barney*) (2:10)
8. **Inolvidable** (*Roberto Soto Mejía*) (2:35)
9. **Malos Pensamientos** (*Alberto Domínguez*) (2:46)
10. **Ahora Es Cuando Corazón** (*Benny Molina*) (2:57)
11. **Mi Sincera Explicación** (*Antonio Mata*) (2:25)
12. **Ya No Te Quiero** (*Rafael Hernández*) (3:10)
13. **Esta Noche Tú Vendrás** (*Pedro Medina*) (2:45)
14. **Te Engañaron Corazón** (*Sally Newman*) (2:42)
15. **Contarás Connigo** (*Pablo Beltrán Ruiz*) (2:37)
16. **Tu Indiferencia** (*Juan José Barrientos*) (3:03)
17. **Menos Que Nada** (*Chucho Martínez Gil*) (3:05)
18. **Ni Falta Que Hace** (*Ray Pérez Soto*)
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