

Isidro López - vocals and alto sax  
with accompaniment by his orchestra - unless otherwise noted

1. Tarde pa' arrepentirnos (ranchera) (Isidro López, S.A.M.P)(1957) 2:50
2. La bicicleta (ranchera) (DAR)(1960) 2:37
3. Inconsolable (bolero) w/ Conjunto de Tony De La Rosa (E. Ruiz)(1954) 2:27
4. La Calloza (polka) (Isidro López, S.A.M.P)(1959) 2:40
5. Comprende Cariño (vals ranchera) (Isidro López, S.A.M.P)(1957) 3:00
6. Quin va a pensar (ranchera) (Isidro López)(1959) 2:20
7. A ver si me olvidas (vals ranchera) (Isidro López)(1958) 2:33
8. Sufriendo y penando (ranchera) (A. Huesca)(1960) 2:17
9. La tripa (chivirico) w/ Juan Colorado's Orchestra (DAR)(1954) 2:30
10. Emocion Pasajera (ranchera) (Isidro López, S.A.M.P)(1960) 2:12
11. Y (bolero) (Mario de Jesus)(1961) 2:58
12. Marcho Rock & Roll (rock & roll) (DAR)(1960) 2:25
13. Mala Cara (rock-ranchera) (Oscar Martinez)(1958) 2:29
14. La Hiedra (danzón) (DAR)(1960) 3:13
15. Nuevo Contrato (ranchera) (Isidro López, S.A.M.P)(1960) 2:23

Original recordings produced by Armando Marroquin for IDEAL Records

Re-issue produced and edited by Chris Strachwitz and Tom Diamant

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# ISIDRO LOPEZ

"El Indio"

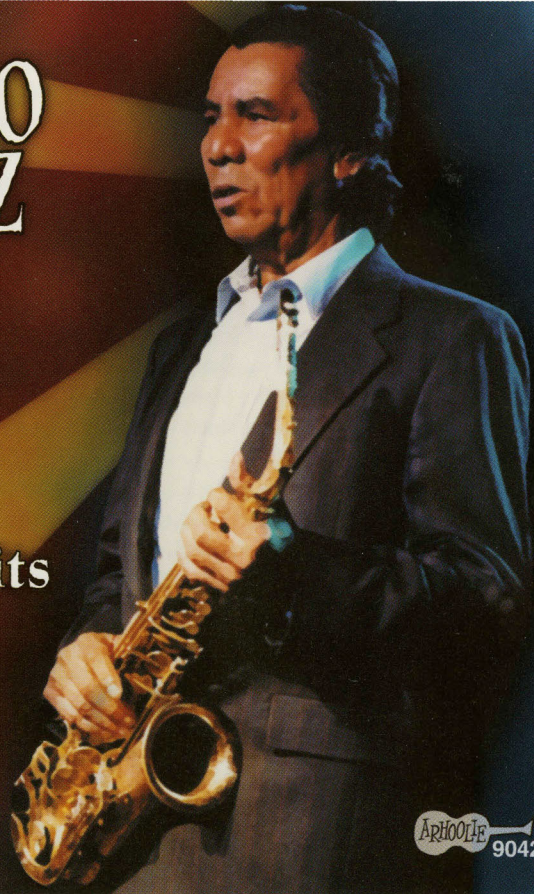
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Original Hits



15

Exitos





# ISIDRO LOPEZ Orchestra - mid 1950's





Isidro "El Indio" López is the acknowledged father of TEJANO MUSIC. His appealing, smooth yet emotional voice, charismatic personality, and straight ahead saxophone sound fronting a distinctly hot Tejano dance orchestra, turned Isidro López into the brightest star on the emerging Tejano music scene of the late 1950s. The selections on this CD are the original recordings of some of Isidro's first hits and were recorded in a small studio in Alice, Texas, where Armando Marroquin was almost daily recording the finest local Tejano talent.

Band leader and saxophonist Beto Villa (ARH CD/C 364) laid the foundation with his very successful Texas-Mexican orchestra and became known as the father of ORQUESTA TEJANA. It was Isidro López, however, who, as a popular singer, successfully utilized not only a big 15-piece ORQUESTA TEJANA, but also accordion *conjuntos*, *bolero* combos, and *mariachis*, thereby establishing TEJANO MUSIC which embraces all of these popular Texas-Mexican musical traditions.

Isidro López was born May 17, 1933, in Bishop, Texas. He got his nickname "El Indio" because his mother was a full-blooded Apache "Mescalera." Her family were members of an Apache tribe from Riodoso and Isidro recalls them going to Mexico for pow wows where they would set up their own tents. Neither US nor Mexican immigration would bother them because they were Indians. Isidro López went to Ray Miller High School in Bishop and then attended Texas A&I for a year. During cotton picking season, when the whole family had to get up especially early, the radio was tuned to a station in Monterrey, N.L. There Los Madrugadores were singing their hearts out every morning while Isidro's mother fixed lunches to take to the field. One year the family was picking cotton out in west Texas. Every time young Isidro came to the end of a row, the Anglo boss was sitting in a shack at the edge of the field, listening to Eddie Arnold on the radio and Isidro became enamored with country-western music. An uncle who played

guitar made quite an impression on Isidro and he also enjoyed seeing *mariachis* and loved their duet singing. By the time he was seventeen, Isidro had picked a lot of cotton and on a good day he would pull as much as 1500 pounds.

In school Isidro had learned to play saxophone and by the early 1950s he got his first job playing with Narciso Martínez and his *conjunto* for dances and in beer joints around San Benito. After several months Isidro started to play with the orchestra of Eugenio Gutiérrez (see Arhoolie CD/C 368) from Weslaco and made his first recordings as a session musician for the studio in Alice, Texas, operated by Mr. Marroquin who made all the recordings for IDEAL. Isidro recalls playing behind various singers as well as with accordionist Tony De La Rosa. Isidro considered himself foremost a saxophonist and was shy about his singing ability even though he loved to sing and had written a bunch of songs. One day, during a recording session with saxophonist Juan Colorado's orchestra (his real name was Juan Garcia), the band's

regular vocalist, Lupe López, did not show up. According to Isidro, recording director Armando Marroquin suggested that since Isidro had composed the songs, he ought to try to sing them. One of the songs was *Todo O Nada* and when they finished the side, Armando Marroquin told them: "forget the other singer, you record from now on." The public seemed to agree and liked what they heard.

Isidro was soon making recordings under his own name and most of them became best sellers for IDEAL. His orchestra, ranging in size from eight to seventeen members, included some of the finest Tejano musicians of the time. Among them were the Compean brothers from Laredo, Henry Cuesta (who later played reeds in the Lawrence Welk band), trombonist Joe Gallardo, and saxophonist Max Bernal. At various times the band also included Lee Martínez, brother of Freddie Martínez who became a well-known orchestra leader and founder of the Freddie Record Company, and pianist/arranger Pine Caceres, brother of Emilio Caceres

the famous violinist and orchestra leader from San Antonio who also became one of the great jazz fiddlers. All of the musicians in his band, according to Isidro, could read but also played by ear.

Isidro López soon played all over the US and drew enormous crowds especially in Chicago, California, New Mexico, Arizona, and of course all over Texas. Isidro became very popular on the Mexican side of the border where he was nicknamed by some as “El Elvis Mexicano” and by others as “El Pedro Infante Tejano.” One day at Las Terrazas Americas in Nuevo Laredo, Isidro recalls: “We had over 16,000 people there – I had to borrow one of my boy’s tuxedo because they had torn mine. When we were there, the Mexican Immigration people came over and asked us what we were doing here – didn’t we know that we were not supposed to play in Mexico? I told them I had my permit but they said if this little ‘pocho’ come in here, we’re going to put his butt in jail and throw the key away – they wouldn’t let us work in Mexico at all – they didn’t let my band play – they finally let me

sing and play my saxophone – some musicians from Mexico finally backed me up. My guys just stood on the side – they wouldn’t let them play. We were booked to play in Mexico City but the musicians’ syndicate in Mexico have it their way and immigration wouldn’t let us go.”

This lack of opportunity to work in Mexico has long been a sore point with many Tejano musicians and continues to be a problem to this day. But Mexico was not the only place where Tejanos met with discrimination. Once when Isidro López and his 17-piece band were in Los Angeles, California, he personally took one of his records to a DJ/band leader in San Pedro and the man, believing he was talking to a distributor’s representative, told him: “‘if you leave this record here I will toss it in the trash – we don’t play this kind of *puerceria*.’ He sang with a *mariachi* and didn’t know he would be on the same show with us that night! The people hardly wanted to hear the *mariachi* that night – they wanted us to play the whole dance – they came to see us. He sure tried to

apologize when he saw who I was! There are still a lot of radio announcers that don’t want to play Tejano music.”

Isidro López, like so many other Tejanos in those days, encountered yet another and possibly even more insidious form of discrimination. He recalls one night in Plainview, Texas: “We were there for an appearance with other groups – including Chelo Silva and Richard De Leon (a member of a trio) who had been a prisoner of war in Germany during World War II. We entered this cafe right in the center of town. We were all nicely dressed but they just came up and told us: we don’t serve Mexicans here – they didn’t even care that Richard had served his country.”

After forty years in the music business, Isidro López still plays today and sings from time to time but mostly he takes it easy at his home in Corpus Christi and

lets his son Xavier López take care of the band. A niece, Lisa López, is today one of the brightest singing stars in the Tejano music world. Isidro’s appearance at the 1991 annual Conjunto Festival in San Antonio sponsored by the Guadalupe Cultural Arts Center, gave many younger fans a chance for the first time to see and hear this marvelous singer, musician, composer and father of Tejano Music.

Chris Strachwitz – 1993

(The above notes are based on interviews conducted with Isidro López by Chris Strachwitz, Roy Flores of KLRN-TV, and Manuel Peña with additional comments from Amadeo Flores of Conjunto Ideal. Manuel Peña’s books: **The Texas-Mexican Conjunto** and **The Mexican American Qrquesta** (both Univ. of Texas Press) are an invaluable resource and deal extensively with the music of Isidro López.)

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