CENTRAL AVENUE SOUNDS:

Paul R. Lopez

Interviewed by Steven L. Isoardi

Completed under the auspices
of the
Oral History Program
University of California
Los Angeles

CONTENTS

BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

PERSONAL HISTORY:

Born: December 9, 1923, Los Angeles.

Education: Roosevelt High School, Los Angeles; Los Angeles City College.

Spouse: Divorced, one daughter.

CAREER HISTORY:

Played trumpet and/or arranged music for:

Bardu Ali

René Bloch

Phil Carréon

Sal Cervantes

Jack Costanzo

Don Ellis

Woody Herman

Hispanic Musicians Association Salsa/Jazz Orchestra

Stan Kenton

Elliot Lawrence

Tillie Lopez

Paul Martin

Art Mooney

Noro Morales

Johnny Otis

Boyd Raeburn

Bobby Ramos

Freddie Slack

Miguelito Valdes

AFFILIATIONS:

Hispanic Musicians Association, vice president, 1991-96.

RECORDINGS:
Earle Spencer and his Orchestra, Jazz Technocracy (Tops Masterpiece Records, 1946).

Noro Morales, Rhumba with Noro Morales (MGM Records, 1949).

Jack Costanzo and his Afro Cuban Band, Mr. Bongo (Zephyr Records, 1956).

Jack Costanzo and his Afro Cuban Band, Mr. Bongo Has Brass (Zephyr Records, 1956).

Jack Costanzo and his Afro Cuban Band, Mr. Bongo Plays Hi-Fi Cha-Cha (Tops Records, 1956).

Jack Costanzo and his Afro Cuban Band, Latin Fever (Liberty Records, 1957).

René Bloch, Mucho Rock with René Bloch (Andex Records, 1958).

Jack Costanzo, Jack Costanzo's Afro Can Can (Liberty Records, 1958).

René Bloch, Everybody Likes to Cha-Cha-Cha (Hi-Fi Records, 1959).

René Bloch, Let's Dance the Mambo (Capitol Records, 1960).

Jack Costanzo and his Orchestra, Naked City (Liberty Records, 1960).

Machito, The World's Greatest Latin Band (Crescendo Records, 1961).

René Bloch, La Pachanga (Capitol Records, 1962).

Don Ellis, Live at Monterey (Pacific Jazz, 1966).

HMA Salsa/Jazz Orchestra, California Salsa (Sea Breeze Records, 1991).

HMA Salsa/Jazz Orchestra, California Salsa II (Discos Dos Corenas, 1994).

INTERVIEW HISTORY

INTERVIEWER:

Steven L. Isoardi, Interviewer, UCLA Oral History Program. B.A., M.A., Government, University of San Francisco; M.A., Ph.D., Political Science, UCLA.

TIME AND SETTING OF INTERVIEW:

Place: Lopez's home, Los Angeles.

Dates, length of sessions: June 16, 1997 (85 minutes); July 2, 1997 (87).

Total number of recorded hours: 2.85

Persons present during interview: Lopez and Isoardi.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEW:

This interview is one in a series designed to preserve the spoken memories of individuals, primarily musicians, who were raised near and/or performed on Los Angeles's Central Avenue, especially from the late 1920s to the mid-1950s. Musician and teacher William Green, his student Steven Isoardi, and early project interviewee Buddy Collette provided major inspiration for the UCLA Oral History Program's inaugurating the Central Avenue Sounds Oral History Project.

In preparing for the interview, Isoardi consulted jazz histories, autobiographies, oral histories, relevant jazz periodicals, documentary films, and back issues of the California Eagle and the Los Angeles Sentinel.

The interview is organized chronologically, beginning with Lopez's childhood and early musical experiences in Los Angeles and continuing through his transition from playing trumpet in swing bands to playing and arranging for Latin jazz bands. Major topics discussed include music in the Mexican American community of Los Angeles during the thirties and forties, jazz venues on Central Avenue, Latin jazz venues in Los Angeles and New York City, and the genesis of Latin jazz music.

EDITING:

Kathleen McAlister, editorial assistant, edited the interview. She checked the verbatim transcript of the interview against the original tape recordings, edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling, and verified proper names. Wherever possible, the proper names of nightclubs were checked against articles and advertisements in back issues of the California Eagle. Words and phrases inserted by the editor have been bracketed.

Lopez reviewed the transcript. He verified proper names and made minor corrections but no additions.

Alex Cline, editor, prepared the table of contents. Jennifer E. Levine, editorial assistant, assembled the biographical summary and interview history. McAlister compiled the index.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS:

The original tape recordings of the interview are in the university archives and are available under the regulations governing the use of permanent noncurrent records of the university. Records relating to the interview are located in the office of the UCLA Oral History Program.

TAPE NUMBER: I, SIDE ONE

JUNE 16, 1997

ISOARDI: Paul, let's begin with your life story, talking about maybe where you were born and raised, your family as far as you can trace them back.

LOPEZ: Well, I was born in Boyle Heights.

ISOARDI: Here in Los Angeles.

LOPEZ: Here in Los Angeles. Do you want to give the year?

ISOARDI: Sure.

LOPEZ: December 9, 1923. And near the intersection of Mott [Street] and Brooklyn Avenue. In a house.

ISOARDI: Oh, really? Not in a hospital?

LOPEZ: Not in a hospital. Yeah.

ISOARDI: Did you have a midwife there?

LOPEZ: I don't know. [mutual laughter] Yeah. Well, anyway, that was in Boyle Heights. That's where I was raised.

ISOARDI: Who were your parents?

LOPEZ: My parents were Timothy Lopez and Adele [Ramos] Lopez. And they were from Arizona. I think my father was born in Arizona and my mother came over as a child from northern Mexico.

ISOARDI: Do you know what city or what town or village?

LOPEZ: Well, let me see. It could have been in Sonora, maybe in Sonora.

ISOARDI: Somewhere in Sonora?

LOPEZ: Could have been. I'm not quite sure. You caught me off guard. [mutual laughter] But I haven't done much tracing into my past.

ISOARDI: So you don't know much about your--

LOPEZ: I don't know much about the lineage.

ISOARDI: --grandparents or--?

LOPEZ: The grandparents-- Actually, I was raised by my grandparents [Ignacio Ramos and Gertrude Ramos] after I got out of the hospital. I had polio when I was a year and ten months.

ISOARDI: That's when it first hit you?

LOPEZ: That's when it hit me. And I was in the hospital for seven years. And when I came out--

ISOARDI: Seven years you were in the hospital?

LOPEZ: Yeah, staring at the ceiling. And when I came out I lived with my grandparents. Because my mother and father, they both worked very hard, so there wasn't much that-- I had to be taken care of and changed and prepared for school, the school bus, and things of that nature. But to me, when I got out of the hospital and came home, I was like a sailor off a ship that's been on a boat for about twenty years. I said, "Fill me in! Fill me in. What's going on?" And my life was like--

ISOARDI: Everything was new to you then, I guess, right?

LOPEZ: Everything was new to me then. I didn't even know how to lie. I got in a lot of trouble that way.

ISOARDI: I'll bet. [laughs]

LOPEZ: When you're raised with kids in schoolyards and things, you pick up these little traits of how to defend yourself. But in the hospital I was-- I always say that I never even learned how to lie, so I used to tell the truth all the time to people. And, boy, I'd get in a lot of trouble. Oh, yeah.

ISOARDI: If you got out of the hospital around eight [years old], eight or nine--?

LOPEZ: Nine.

ISOARDI: At nine you got out the hospital. What about your first couple of years of schooling? Did you have that in the hospital?

LOPEZ: No. After I came home, they had a school in the children's hospital in the back for handicapped people, and they'd pick you up in a bus. We'd attend classes that way. But that was my first learning, going to this handicapped school. And there was a series of other schools after that, too. Widney [Junior] High School was over there on Washington Boulevard. They converted that for handicapped people, and then we used to have buses that picked up all the children all over the city and took us to school and brought us back in the evening.

ISOARDI: When you came home at nine and you started in school, did you have to start back a couple of grades? Or were you able to go in with kids your own age?

LOPEZ: I don't know. I don't know exactly how they worked it, because that was relatively new too for a lot of handicapped people. How were they going to run a school? "Do we have grades? Do we have kindergarten? Do we have first grade?" They were experimenting too, like "Where do we put these people?" you know. So evidently they-- Probably it was the first grade, first grade there. But I could speak very well because of all these years in the hospital speaking with nurses and doctors. In fact, I'd come home and I'd say, "It's time for my physio-therapy!" And my poor grandparents would-- "What the heck are you talking about?"

ISOARDI: [laughs] Because you were around adults all the time then.

LOPEZ: I was around adults all the time and speaking on the level of medical terms. My grandparents couldn't speak English at all, but they functioned very well, functioned pretty good, in the society. But there was no communication, you know. But I picked it up pretty fast--

ISOARDI: Spanish?

LOPEZ: Yeah, Spanish. I picked it up.

ISOARDI: When you came home from the hospital, did you know

any Spanish?

LOPEZ: No, not at all.

ISOARDI: Jeez. Just a sophisticated English?

LOPEZ: Well, yeah. Yeah.

ISOARDI: Where did your grandparents live?

LOPEZ: "Neurosurgeons" and things and "physiotherapy" and all that stuff.

ISOARDI: [laughs] So you had this great medical vocabulary.

LOPEZ: Yeah, yeah. But the actual real world out there I knew nothing about. When I started my autobiography, I started out the first few sentences, "I was born in a house near the intersection of Brooklyn Avenue and State Street in the section of Los Angeles called Boyle Heights." Now, I was debating whether the first page would say, "I'm riding in the school bus," because that's when my life started. You know, if it's a motion picture, the first scene on the picture, here's a nine-year-old kid riding the school bus. That's where my life started.

ISOARDI: What was the neighborhood like where your grandparents lived? Was it close to where your parents were?

LOPEZ: No, it wasn't. It took fifteen minutes--

ISOARDI: Where were they living?

LOPEZ: My grandparents lived on 211 South Chicago [Street], near First [Street] and Chicago in Boyle Heights. And my

parents lived in what they called-- It wasn't Montebello, but it was toward Atlantic Boulevard, in that area. Let me just see. Yeah, it wasn't even quite that far, near the Calvary Cemetery, Downey Road and Fourth Street or Sixth Street. So it only took fifteen minutes--because I used to time that. My parents would come and pick me up, and I'd stay the weekend with them. And they'd take about fifteen minutes in that Model T Ford. But-- Let me see. What were we getting at before that?

ISOARDI: Well, maybe you could talk about--

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. Yeah, the neighborhood.

ISOARDI: Yeah. What was it like?

LOPEZ: Oh, it was nice. It was nice. There were all kinds of people there.

ISOARDI: What do you mean?

LOPEZ: Well, there was Jewish, Japanese, Russian, and Mexican. And everybody got along just fine. Never any problems. I never knew that there were supposed to be problems, you know?

ISOARDI: When did you first find out? Do you remember?

LOPEZ: Well, I don't know. I guess in the Second World War. When they said they sent a lot of the Japanese people to these camps, I said, "Why are they doing that?" And Roosevelt High School is where I graduated from. We had all kinds of people there, and everybody got along just fine.

ISOARDI: What did most people do for a living?

LOPEZ: I don't know. I really don't know.

ISOARDI: Was it mostly a working-class kind of area?

LOPEZ: Yeah, yeah. Mostly working-class. Actually, all my attention was really focused on music. Because at that time, when I had gotten out of the hospital, a friend of my brother [Manuel Ramos Lopez]'s used to come over with a guitar. I used to play around with it, and I loved it, you know. And during that time, on the radio there was no FM, just AM. So all they played was-- The hits of the day were Tommy Dorsey and Glenn Miller and things of that nature. So even my grandparents were raised on that music, because I was always listening to it.

ISOARDI: So it was the swing era, and that was the music that--

LOPEZ: It was the swing era. That was the music. And I was just tunnel vision there. I didn't know like, "What do these people do for a living?" I don't know! Give me my guitar, you know.

They gave me a cornet at the Widney Junior High School. I took it home, and within two weeks I was already playing melodies on it.

ISOARDI: So you knew pretty early on you wanted to do something with music?

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

ISOARDI: When you were in the hospital, did you hear music? Or was that something you discovered when you got out?

LOPEZ: No, I don't-- It's a blank.

ISOARDI: Really?

LOPEZ: Yeah, from the age of nine back it's a blank. I can remember a few things.

ISOARDI: Right, but not much.

LOPEZ: Not much at all.

ISOARDI: So you came out and you started hearing these sounds, and you had a brother who played guitar.

LOPEZ: No, no. A friend of my brother's used to play the guitar. He used to come over with the guitar, and he played chords. I loved the chord progressions he used to play. It was like a different world in those days. It was just-- Everything was very positive. I didn't know we were poor. You know, my brother and I would sleep in one bed in the front room. It was a small little place. My grandparents would sleep in the other room, and there's no partition between. You just don't know. As you grow older you find out what you don't have, I guess.

ISOARDI: How many brothers did you have?

LOPEZ: One brother.

ISOARDI: You had one brother, older brother?

LOPEZ: Yeah, and one sister [Bertha Lopez Galindo], older sister, two years.

ISOARDI: And they also stayed with your grandmother?

LOPEZ: No, no, just my brother and I. My sister stayed with my mother and father, because she was going to a school over there, I think, and it was more convenient.

ISOARDI: What did your mom and dad do for a living?

LOPEZ: Well, let me see. My father used to work at the studios, at like MGM [Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer] studios, a prop man, something like that. I remember him telling me about a Tarzan picture and that he's splitting up the vines and things like that, you know. So that's as much as I remember there.

ISOARDI: Did he ever take you to the studio?

LOPEZ: No. No, those were different days. I wasn't actually very close to my father because I was always away from him. But I remember the whole family-- I mean, the whole family and the whole neighborhood, everything was American oriented. Baseball was my father's very favorite pastime. Everybody in the neighborhood put on the baseball game real loud so you could hear it all over the neighborhood--you know, the New York Yankees or something or other. I mean, I never liked baseball. I still don't like it. I don't like many sports. I guess it's because they don't interest me. That's just it, you know.

But I did not know I was Mexican. You understand? You go to school, and you're speaking in English, and you're talking the latest jargon, the latest vernacular of the school: "Did you hear the latest Glenn Miller record? Did you hear Gene Krupa or Roy Eldridge?" "Yeah!" I'd take that home. And I wouldn't hear any mariachi music at home. It just wasn't there. Here sixty years later I'm hearing mariachi music. [mutual laughter] "What is that?" I'm going like a twilight zone here or something. You know, it's backwards or something. It's probably because these people that are coming in from across the border are bringing that culture with them, so it's a big thing.

But everything was laughs, laughs, laughs, you know, just-- I laughed my way through high school, Roosevelt High School.

ISOARDI: Now, where did you go to grammar school when you came out? Was that the special school?

LOPEZ: At the special school. They used to pick me up in the bus.

ISOARDI: Right. And then you went to junior high school?

LOPEZ: Then they built this other place, Widney Junior High School. It was on the back of [Los Angeles] Polytechnic [High School] on Washington [Boulevard] and Widney Street. They had just built that. Let me see. [shuffles through papers] Oh,

yeah. Yeah, I see what happened. [reads] "When we'd go to a children's hospital--" I'm quoting from my autobiography here. Is it all right to do that, a few lines? Yeah. Talking about my grandma--"She'd get me ready for school, and the bus would pick me up, and we would go to a children's hospital orthopedic school. It was like a grammar school. The room consisted of two bungalows with two classrooms for each bungalow." So that's it. And then later at the age of ten, nine or ten, I remember being picked up and taken to a school called Cambria Grammar School. They were experimenting--"Try this." There was another school. I think it was right off of Seventh Street on Hoover Street. And I never learned much because, I don't know, my attention span was very bad. And I went there to get ready for junior high. [reads] "I remember being picked up and taken to a school named Washington Boulevard School for the Handicapped. I attended that school until I was ready for high school. The school was in the process of being built. In the meantime we were bused to a trade school called Metropolitan Trade School." You ever heard of that?

ISOARDI: No.

LOPEZ: I wish I knew what street that was at, down near the Olympic Auditorium where the fights used to be. And there was no yard, no nothing. The buses leave us on the sidewalk there, and they had makeshift classes in there. Meanwhile,

the school was being built. You know, I guess they were getting their work together of what to do with handicapped people in those days.

ISOARDI: Yeah, it sounds like it. It sounds like it.

LOPEZ: [reads] "It was very inconvenient. In the meantime, the new school was being built next to Polytechnic High School on Widney Street and Washington Boulevard." Okay. "It was here that I was given a cornet in the beginning, and I had been fooling around with the guitar prior to that." Okay.

"My attention span was very short, and I did not know how to study." That's another important thing, too. I didn't know how to study until about-- Let's see. I'm seventy-three years old right now. About twenty-five years ago, or thirty years ago, I went to the Bornstein Memory Training School as an adult. You know, I want to get my marbles together. And they said, "This is what you do, and this is--" I wished I'd had this before I even got in the class! You take notes, you keep this and that, a whole routine and methods of retaining knowledge and stuff. They just don't know how to teach, you know. They even told me, "Take notes." "What's--? How do you do that?" "My attention span was very short and I did not know how to study, a process I was to learn many years later attending a memory school." [laughs] "It was while I was at Widney [Junior] High for a while I decided I wanted

to go to Roosevelt High School." I wanted to transfer there because there were no music classes at Widney High School.

ISOARDI: So before you went to Widney, and before they gave you a cornet, you'd been fooling around with the guitar, but you hadn't been studying music or studying with a teacher or anything like that, right? This was just almost like a hobby.

LOPEZ: Right.

ISOARDI: Okay. But you were listening to the music. You loved the sounds of the big bands and had the guitar. Were you learning chords? Or were you even--?

LOPEZ: I was just fooling around.

ISOARDI: So when you got to Widney, why did they give you a cornet? How did that come up?

LOPEZ: Well, they had a whole bunch of instruments there, and they just decided to give instruments to some of the pupils.

ISOARDI: Did they have some kind of class for you?

LOPEZ: Well, it must have been a class. But I don't know if they had anybody there that could really teach you. They just gave this person a clarinet, another person a saxophone, and they gave me a cornet. "Take it home. Take it home with you."

ISOARDI: See what you could do with it?

LOPEZ: Yeah. [mutual laughter] And from there, you know--

ISOARDI: Did you ask for the cornet? Or did they just give it to you?

LOPEZ: I don't remember. I really don't remember.

ISOARDI: Well, after listening to the bands, right--? You'd been listening to the bands for a few years on the radio, and you were drawn to the music. Were you drawn to the horns? Do you remember if you had any preference or anything like that?

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. Yeah, sure. Ziggy Elman, Bunny Berrigan. I used to love Bunny Berrigan. I used to play his theme song. And I could do it too, just like him. You know, at that age.

ISOARDI: No kidding?

LOPEZ: Yeah, pretty close.

ISOARDI: On the cornet they gave you?

LOPEZ: On the cornet, yeah.

ISOARDI: So you had a good ear. No training.

LOPEZ: Yeah. The ear was it. The ear was it. You have to have an open ear for that. And I remember when I said I wanted to go to Roosevelt High School because there were no music classes-- Oh, I had joined a little band around the neighborhood where some of the students were at Roosevelt High School, because I lived in Boyle Heights, right? And to go to a handicapped school I was bused all the way downtown. So I wanted to go to Roosevelt High School, because they had harmony

classes--Harmony I, Harmony II, Harmony III, Harmony IV--and they had band and orchestra.

ISOARDI: And you saw some of the kids in the neighborhood from Roosevelt who were playing and forming bands?

LOPEZ: Yeah. And in my funny way I told these people at the Widney High School and the principal, "I want to go to Roosevelt. I want to transfer." They said, "Well, are you sure?" Yes, I did. They said, "Well, you'll be back." And I never did go back.

ISOARDI: So you were going to junior high at Widney, and you would have just stayed there through high school?

LOPEZ: Probably so.

ISOARDI: If you hadn't really fought for this transfer.

LOPEZ: Yeah, and learned nothing. And learned nothing, because they didn't have their act together on that kind of a school for handicapped and what the needs are of the handicapped. And, you know, it wasn't until many years later, after reading a few psychology books, I noticed that everybody there was pretty well screwed up, including me--you know, really screwed up. So they didn't know how to direct these people into the proper channels for thinking and their needs, you know. But my need was to try to catch up with the world and try to do as much as I can that the other kids can. Of course, I couldn't play baseball, I couldn't run, but I was pretty much of a

terror in the neighborhood.

ISOARDI: Why?

LOPEZ: Because I used to walk all over the place with my crutches. I'd walk for miles here, and I'd go to the park, Hollenbeck Park, and get in the canoe and go in the lake and everything. I wanted to live till I die, you know? It was one of those things--not knowing it, you know, not knowing I was like that. Somebody like put the brakes on me and kind of directed me. But as it is, I did go to Roosevelt High School.

ISOARDI: Who put the brakes on you?

LOPEZ: Myself.

ISOARDI: Really?

LOPEZ: Sure. You take a couple of nosedives and that will do it. In later life, you know.

ISOARDI: Did you have any friends at this time from the neighborhood that were interested in music also or anything like that?

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. Sure. In the school that I went to, Roosevelt High School, was [Lionel] "Chico" Sesma, the trombone player. He became a very big Latin disc jockey here. Do you remember? Chico Sesma? In the late forties and fifties he had a very big program here on the radio.

ISOARDI: What station? Do you remember?

LOPEZ: It was a station in Santa Monica. I forget what station that was.

ISOARDI: And what kind of music was it?

LOPEZ: The Latin music.

ISOARDI: It was Latin music? Traditional music?

LOPEZ: It was Caribbean. New York--

ISOARDI: Oh, the new stuff that was coming out of New York in the late forties? Like Machito and things like that?

LOPEZ: New stuff, yeah. Machito, all of those things there. He introduced it here in this town.

ISOARDI: Really.

LOPEZ: You ought to interview him.

ISOARDI: He's still around?

LOPEZ: Yeah, sure. He's got tons of history about that time, pictures and everything. Because he was on the air for--I just really don't know--ten or twenty years, from 1950 to the sixties. Chico, Chico Sesma.

ISOARDI: So you guys met when you were at Roosevelt?

LOPEZ: Yeah, we were at Roosevelt, and we were in the same band. I've got pictures of him here in some of the bands that we played in later on. But then he decided to become a disc jockey, and he did very well. He used to bring bands in from New York to the [Hollywood] Palladium ballroom here in town. Very big affairs. He'd bring in Tito Puente, Tito

Rodriguez, Machito, and all those bands from that era, from the late forties. But prior to that-- Like I said, I graduated '43, and so did he. So he worked around town. He worked with Johnny Richards's band, trombone, and he worked with Russ Morgan and a few other bands. But then he decided to become a disc jockey in the late forties. He became Chico Sesma and his Latin program.

ISOARDI: Anybody else?

LOPEZ: Yeah. Don Tosti.

ISOARDI: Oh, really? I've heard of him.

LOPEZ: Don Tosti was in the same class as me, the same orchestra. In fact, he was the leader of the dance band at one time. And there was just a lot of enthusiasm about music. And they had, like I said, the music classes. Lennie Niehaus was there, too.

ISOARDI: Lennie Niehaus was at Roosevelt?

LOPEZ: He graduated a couple of years after I did.

ISOARDI: Did you know him then?

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. I knew him. After he had graduated I decided to take some classes at L.A. City College, and he used to pick me up in his little car and we'd go to school. In fact, did you know that Lennie Niehaus's sister [Agnes Niehaus] was a concert pianist?

ISOARDI: No.

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah, very accomplished.

ISOARDI: Where were they living then? Were they in Boyle Heights?

LOPEZ: Boyle Heights.

ISOARDI: Interesting.

LOPEZ: On First Street, near First and Soto [Street], in that area. In fact, Brooklyn Avenue was like maybe Mott Street in New York, you know, nothing but Jewish people there. Funny, from First Street you can get your Mexican food, you walk over two blocks to Brooklyn Avenue you can buy a knish. You know? That was before Jewish people moved to the Fairfax [Avenue] area.

ISOARDI: That's where most of them were living then?

LOPEZ: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

ISOARDI: So it sounds like out there you didn't have sort of everybody mixed on a block, but you had these little-- A couple of blocks here would be Jewish, a couple of blocks here would be Mexican Americans, a couple of blocks here might be Italian or something else?

LOPEZ: Right.

ISOARDI: And all the kids would be together in school?

LOPEZ: Always. And there were no hang-ups there. It's strange, you know, just--

ISOARDI: So you go to Roosevelt as a freshman. You're thirteen,

fourteen years old?

LOPEZ: How old was I? No, I don't remember how old I was. No, that was Roosevelt High School. Because Widney was a junior high school. And I went to Roosevelt High School-- I don't know how I managed to keep track of where my grades were or anything, but I got in there, and I graduated from there.

ISOARDI: What year did you graduate?

LOPEZ: Nineteen forty-three.

ISOARDI: In '43. So you were twenty years old?

LOPEZ: No, winter '42. In '42, yeah.

ISOARDI: How many years were you at Roosevelt?

LOPEZ: Oh, about three years, three or four years. Gee, winter '42. Boy, I don't remember--

ISOARDI: Had the war broken out when you graduated?

LOPEZ: Yeah. When did the war break out?

ISOARDI: December '41. At least for the United States it was December '41.

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. That was very interesting too, because, as I said, I was playing with little bands around town, with Chico Sesma and Don Tosti in this one band, and we had a Japanese drummer. Yeah, his name was Hideo Kawano, but we used to call him "Little Krupa," because he used to play real good. Oh, yeah. This is very interesting. So you say-- Yeah, winter

'42. You're bringing these things back to me. And then Pearl Harbor was 1941?

ISOARDI: December '41. So you graduated a couple of months after Pearl Harbor.

LOPEZ: Yeah. In the meanwhile, this little Japanese drummer is with us, right? And that same day-- Was it December 7?

ISOARDI: Yeah.

LOPEZ: We had a gig somewhere. And he got some dark glasses to play. He had to put on some dark-- He was very embarrassed, you know. It must have really been traumatic for him.

ISOARDI: What happened to him? Did he get put into a camp with his family?

LOPEZ: Oh, well, it's a long story what happened to him, because that shoots off into him meeting other people that were devotees of Charlie Parker. And sometimes-- How can I say it? Some of the people that used to follow Charlie Parker in the beginning were a little erratic. They'd emulate Charlie Parker, take dope and things like that. Because they thought-- That was the bad influence that Charlie Parker gave. But Charlie Parker was a very positive-- What he's contributed to music is immense. I don't even consider his bad physical habits. But some people followed that, you know. So he got into some bad company there. But it wasn't that he was into the drugs, it was that he was into those type of people.

And as soon as those people dispersed and died, he was all alone. So he's not in the business anymore. He lives in Los Angeles. I don't know where he is or what he does.

But he was the type of person that-- In music, he wanted to go-- He gave no quarter. He wanted to be the absolute truth of everything. And he wouldn't settle for-- He would never play with a Mickey Mouse band even if you were to shoot him. He'd have to play with the best jazz musicians, listen to the best of everything--in other words, the highest standards of jazz music, the highest standards. And Lord knows, I didn't live up to that. I had to work with some bands in town just to pay the light bill. I wanted to puke every time I played with these dumb bands that couldn't read music, played the wrong chords and everything. But this type of a person wouldn't take those gigs. So he dropped out of the scene. See what I'm saying?

You know, you can keep one foot in by playing with the bad musicians or amateurs and leaders that know nothing about music but are very popular with the public. There's a few of those around that know absolutely nothing, and the people think they're marvelous. It's the musicians in the band that make the leader famous, you know. I had to work for one leader--I won't mention his name--you know, he's out there smiling and then somebody-- "Hey, play Beethoven's Fifth [Symphony]!"

"Yeah, Paul, play Beethoven's Fifth." You know, "Build a castle!" And here is me with other very good musicians, "Okay, well, here's another challenge. Let's try it. Beethoven's Fifth." You understand what I'm saying? And here "Mr. Personality" up there is ridiculous.

ISOARDI: After the war breaks out, what happens to your drummer? Does he get sent to the camps, the relocation camps for the Japanese people?

LOPEZ: What happened was-- Yeah, well, most everybody was sent to the camps. But they gave them a choice to move to the East. They gave some of these people-- They said, "You want to move back East? It's not so bad, but it's bad here because of the West Coast." You know what I mean?

ISOARDI: Did he move, then?

LOPEZ: Yeah, he moved to Chicago. I bumped into him in Chicago when I was with a band that went out on some one-nighters. I bumped into him there. He was a complete

devotee of the new music, of the bebop music, which took its birth around '47, right?

ISOARDI: Well, earlier.

LOPEZ: Earlier. Then with Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie.

ISOARDI: Maybe you can talk a little bit about-- Why don't you describe what the music program was like at Roosevelt.

LOPEZ: Okay. I just wanted to get into one little thing here to explain this little Japanese drummer. You know, like when Dizzy Gillespie came on the scene, everybody was wearing a goatee and a beret, right? He was one of those type of people, a follower. And he wouldn't settle for any other kind of music or study or anything else. So consequently he was left out. [shuffles through photographs] Look at him there.

ISOARDI: Oh, you've got a picture of him?

LOPEZ: Yeah. That's what I've been looking for. Look at the drummer.

ISOARDI: I'll be darned. What big band is this?

LOPEZ: That's Sal Cervantes, one of the neighborhood bands I worked with in the late thirties. Is there a date on the back of that?

ISOARDI: Yeah, Sal Cervantes--like the poet--orchestra, 1941, the Royal Palms Hotel, Westlake Park.

LOPEZ: [laughs] So anyway, we can get back to him, but I did want to talk about--You asked me about the music at Roosevelt, right?

ISOARDI: Yeah. What was the curriculum like at Roosevelt, the music curriculum? What was the training like?

LOPEZ: We had good music teachers there. I do remember they had Harmony I, Harmony II, Harmony III, and Harmony IV.

ISOARDI: Four years' worth?

LOPEZ: Yeah. I guess it was four years, yeah. And from there, if you wanted to go further, you'd have to go to a university to take counterpoint and symphonic composition and other things that required a little more mature teachers that knew how to teach that. And another thing--

ISOARDI: Oh, yeah.

LOPEZ: Another thing I remembered--this was very pertinent--when I used to go to that music store where the bands rehearsed on First Street as a kid, you know, at ten or eleven or twelve, when I got my cornet, around thirteen, fourteen or fifteen, in those years you'd walk into the music store, I'd look into the display there, and there was score paper--you know, score paper like that [points to some score paper nearby], pencils, erasers, books on arranging. In fact, I've still got a book there that I bought on arranging by Frank Skinner. And it's music all around, and instruments, all kinds of instruments, mouthpieces. What I'm trying to say is that many years later, when I went back to the music store, when they moved over to Brooklyn Avenue, all I saw was electric guitars all over the place. I said, "Well, what happened to the score paper?" Well, nobody learns how to arrange anymore. "Where are the pencils, the ink?" Does that tell you something?

ISOARDI: Yeah, quite a bit. Quite a bit. Do you remember

what the name of the store was?

LOPEZ: Phillips Music Store.

ISOARDI: And the guy who ran it was Mr. Phillips?

LOPEZ: Mr. Phillips, yeah. But he moved a couple of places. From First Street, when I first met him, then he moved over to Brooklyn Avenue. And little by little the books started to disappear--the arranging books, the composition books--replaced with amplifiers and guitars and junk stuff like that. I could have gotten rich if I sold guitars. In fact, that's saying something--the decline of music in a sense. In those days listening to the radio and listening to Benny Goodman, listening to Tommy Dorsey, Erskine Hawkins, Chick Webb-- That's one I remember very well, the Chick Webb "A-Tisket A-Tasket" with Ella Fitzgerald. We'd be singing it around the house. Even my grandmother sang it. She probably missed Mexican music very much. They used to listen to a Spanish program at night, but I don't think they played much ranch music down there. What I'm trying to say is, the beginning--People understood that music had to be written on paper more so than today. In those days you'd say you're an arranger, "Oh, yeah? Who do you arrange for?" Today you say you're an arranger, "Oh, what's that?" You arrange the kitchen floor or something or the tables.

ISOARDI: You rent the hall. [laughs]

LOPEZ: People were more inclined to learn more about music in those days.

ISOARDI: So you have four years' worth of harmony; you took about four years at Roosevelt. Were there any other classes, music classes?

LOPEZ: Well, there were singing classes, and there was the symphony orchestra. I didn't play in that. I was a little snooty about that.

ISOARDI: Why didn't you want to play in that?

LOPEZ: Because I just wanted to play in the dance band.

ISOARDI: You just wanted to play swing. [laughs]

LOPEZ: Yeah. And that's what I did. I played in the dance band.

ISOARDI: So you had a symphony orchestra, and you also had a dance band? Anything else?

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. Pretty good dance band.

ISOARDI: Was it like a swing band? Was it a regular swing band?

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. We had all these arrangements, these stock arrangements. As soon as a record got popular, zoom, the stock arrangement would come out of that. Tommy Dorsey's "Song of India," Glenn Miller's arrangements--

ISOARDI: Anyone you remember you especially enjoyed playing in the band?

LOPEZ: Well, I liked them all. The Glenn Miller arrangements were very good, the one that Bill Finegan used to write for Glenn Miller. Those arrangements would come out. And I wish-- I don't know. Those things are valuable. I don't know who has those old stock arrangements in their garage somewhere, "As recorded by such and such, arranged by such and such," those old arrangements. And the Count Basie arrangements, too. The things just disappeared. But somebody's got a whole bunch of them in the garage somewhere. I'm just trying to see if I can find a book there that--

ISOARDI: Oh, that's all right.

LOPEZ: Okay. There was a book there that showed--the Frank Skinner arranging book, the first one I bought there--how everybody looked in those days with their hair plastered down and parted in the middle. That's just how he looks there. Yeah, let me show you something. Right in back of you, right there where the manilla envelope-- Let me point.

ISOARDI: This?

LOPEZ: No, no, no. Right there, the little one, that one there. Yeah, yeah. It's funny, we still got-- This thing is falling apart, man.

ISOARDI: Frank Skinner's New Method for Orchestra Scoring. Yeah, he looks dashing.

LOPEZ: Okay. Well, it will give us a perspective of the date

1935.

ISOARDI: Copyright was 1935.

LOPEZ: So I bought it probably in '36 or '37.

ISOARDI: So you were still pretty young, then. I mean, when you were thinking of arranging--

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. Yeah, sure. Because that was it. You know, like, "Who did that arrangement?" It's not only the people performing it, you know, they had to be put down; somebody's responsible for it.

ISOARDI: So almost even before Roosevelt you were thinking of arranging.

LOPEZ: Yeah.

ISOARDI: So when you got to Roosevelt, was there any opportunity to arrange for the band?

LOPEZ: Well, I was too busy having a good time playing the trumpet for the dances. [Isoardi laughs] I did dabble a little bit in the writing, but not that much, because I didn't know that much. I didn't know enough of that. In fact, of all the scores I've got in two trunks back there, I do have one that says 1945, an arrangement of something, one of the first arrangements I did for the band at Los Angeles City College. But, see, I didn't have an arranging teacher in those days.

ISOARDI: Right. So you were taking a harmony class, and then you were in the dance band class, and that was the extent

of the music classes at Roosevelt, right?

LOPEZ: Right, except for the books that I used to read.

ISOARDI: On your own. You never had a private teacher during any of this time?

LOPEZ: Yeah, well, I had my trumpet teacher.

ISOARDI: You did? When did you start with the trumpet?

LOPEZ: With Mr. Bunton, Harry Bunton. He was teaching at the Neighborhood Music School. Oh, yeah. When I got out of the hospital and I started to play the cornet and I met these other people, these other kids in the little band that I played with, that I had joined when I was probably twelve or thirteen years old--

ISOARDI: Just around your neighborhood?

LOPEZ: Yeah. They were taking music classes at the Neighborhood Music School up on Boyle Avenue. And it was run by Miss Pearle Odell. Yeah, Miss Pearle Odell. She passed away many years ago. And the lessons were twenty-five cents a lesson.

ISOARDI: And this was something she organized herself out of her house or something like that?

LOPEZ: Out of her house. But I didn't get the complete story about that either. You'd have to talk to-- The offshoot of that is the Los Angeles Music and Art School.

ISOARDI: Really?

LOPEZ: Over there on Fourth Street.

ISOARDI: That came out of her project?

LOPEZ: Yeah, she was the founder.

ISOARDI: So she was pretty successful.

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. Oh, boy. That was something else, because--Los Angeles Music and Art School, see?

ISOARDI: Do you know when she--? Oh, she started that then, early forties?

LOPEZ: Yeah. In fact, I think it was before the forties. I wish I had more of those facts, because--

ISOARDI: We can get that later.

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LOPEZ: Well, the exact year is kind of rough for me to think of. Let me see. I started that Neighborhood Music School toward the end of the thirties, maybe '37, '38, '39. And we were paying twenty-five cents a lesson to Mr. Bunton.

ISOARDI: So he was the trumpet teacher there, the cornet teacher?

LOPEZ: Yeah, yeah. In fact, Mr. Bunton was a student of Doc Hiner. Doc Hiner was a great concert bandmaster, and he lived here in Eagle Rock. And in fact, later on I studied with Doc Hiner. Lionel and I--the trombone player, "Chico" Sesma--we studied with Doc Hiner. In fact, that's a landmark over there on Figueroa Street.

ISOARDI: In Eagle Rock.

LOPEZ: Yeah, in Eagle Rock. Because he had a studio in the back he called Sousa's Nook. Whenever John Philip Sousa would come to town he would stay there.

ISOARDI: Really?

LOPEZ: Yeah. It's a landmark. And the whole place-- You know how you get those big round cobblestones and you build round, fenced, like that? The whole thing is built like that, with big stones. And that's where Doc Hiner used to live.

ISOARDI: What was Doc Hiner's connection to Sousa? Were they just friends?

LOPEZ: They were concert bandmasters.

ISOARDI: So they probably had known each other for quite a while.

LOPEZ: Yeah. You see, I didn't have any sense in those days to ask that many questions. "Oh, Doc Hiner, yeah. Doc Hiner met four presidents. Doc Hiner did this. Doc Hiner led this orchestra." He was a noted concert conductor and cornetist in those days. People don't remember that, you know.

ISOARDI: When did you study with him?

LOPEZ: Toward '41.

ISOARDI: So just around your last year in Roosevelt?

LOPEZ: Yeah, around that time.

ISOARDI: And up until then you had been studying regularly with Mr. Bunton?

LOPEZ: Mr. Bunton. Mr. Bunton used to play the bugle at Santa Anita [race track].

ISOARDI: Oh, really? [laughs]

LOPEZ: Yeah, 1937, '38, '39. And I'm hooked on Bunny Berrigan and everything, and he doesn't know anything about those things. He was trying to get my chops to play this tone clearer, and I'm trying to play-- It was very difficult, because I was playing things, and my lip wasn't ready for it. I think

I wore out my lip just, you know-- If I had gotten to any other instrument, it would have been a snap, but you're supposed to develop your lip slowly, the muscles and everything, and I was really tearing them down with hearing Ziggy Elman playing those high notes and Bunny Berrigan ending on a high E-flat and stuff like that. I used to play up there too not knowing it was high, you know. So, yeah, that was--

But what I'm getting at is how the decline of the interest was more-- How will I say? People were more aware of people behind the music in those days. And it got less and less. People don't know who's behind anything. They put on the TV; it's a visual thing, "Wow, wow, wow." They don't know somebody that put it together or wrote the music. They're not interested in that anymore. But it was a craft, you know, composition and arranging.

ISOARDI: You mentioned that when you were twelve, thirteen--I guess not long after you had gotten your cornet--you were in a local neighborhood band. What was that? Was that your first band?

LOPEZ: The Valle Valdez band.

ISOARDI: That's what it was called?

LOPEZ: Yeah, that was his name, Valle Valdez.

ISOARDI: Who was he? A kid in the neighborhood?

LOPEZ: I don't know, somebody that-- You know, in those days,

no telephone. Somebody knocks on the door and they say, "You play trumpet?" "Yeah." "You want to play in our band?" "Yeah." "Well, we'll pick you up tonight, seven o'clock." Bam.

ISOARDI: And that was it? [laughs]

LOPEZ: And from there you met other people that-- I met Chico Sesma. Then he introduced me to Miss Odell. I keep saying Mrs. Odell; I don't think she ever got married. It was Miss Odell, Miss Pearle Odell, yeah. And then I'd meet people there. And what was good about that school is that they had classical musicians studying violin, and I'd hear all this stuff. I wish I'd paid more attention to the classical, because I'm into the classics now. And you keep networking in different bands and things like that. But it was easier to play an instrument than to sit down and sit still, you know. To sit still for two or three hours and write an arrangement, you know, it's like ants in your pants. I have to get up. I have to get up. It's easier to play the trumpet and move around, but to write an arrangement requires you to sit down and shut everything out. I didn't want to shut everything out; I wanted to take everything in. In fact, like, I hadn't written for-- Let me see, all that was taking place during the early part of the forties. Toward the latter part of the forties, when I had gone to New York, I remember I needed some money, and

Miguelito Valdes wanted an arrangement, so I just knocked it out. He gave me $100 to do an arrangement for strings. So I'd get back to the trumpet, because I didn't like being confined sitting down in one spot too much. But as the years went by, the interest of composition and arranging grabbed me more so I could focus more on that. I was too dispersed in those days. You know, I'd be talking three things at the same time.

ISOARDI: How long did you play with this first band, Valle Valdez?

LOPEZ: Well, not long. Not long, because right after that I had joined this other neighborhood band. I don't know. Maybe a year--six months, a year. And then I joined the Sal Cervantes orchestra, you know.

ISOARDI: Which was a full big band?

LOPEZ: Was a full big band. It was not that big, but it was--

ISOARDI: So you were with them for a while, then?

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah.

ISOARDI: Through high school?

LOPEZ: Through high school, right. And it just-- I wish that I had the awareness that I had later so I could tell the man thank you for instilling all those good musical qualities that he knew about.

ISOARDI: Who was Sal Cervantes?

LOPEZ: Well, he was just another bandleader in town.

ISOARDI: You know anything about his background or who he was?

LOPEZ: No, I didn't know too much about him.

ISOARDI: But he was good? I mean, you learned a lot from him?

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. Sure.

ISOARDI: Where were your gigs at? Where would you play?

LOPEZ: Royal Palms Hotel, weddings all over the place. But it was all American music. You know what I mean?

ISOARDI: Pretty much all the big band stuff?

LOPEZ: Yeah, get the latest stock arrangements-- Every now and then somebody in the band-- I remember one person, a saxophone player, he brought in a couple of special arrangements. And that really intrigued me, because nobody else had those arrangements. They weren't stock arrangements, see? And I don't know whatever happened to those people. But I wanted to do that, too. [shows photograph to Isoardi] In fact, this is me, Chico Sesma, and the Japanese drummer.

ISOARDI: It looks like in this photo you're maybe sixteen, seventeen?

LOPEZ: Yeah, something like that.

ISOARDI: And I notice somebody in the back seat is reading the latest issue of Down Beat magazine next to the Japanese

drummer.

LOPEZ: Yeah, that's the piano player [Bobby Gil].

ISOARDI: You're in a car going somewhere?

LOPEZ: In those old station wagons. Going to a gig somewhere. Isn't that interesting?

ISOARDI: So the band was mostly Latino?

LOPEZ: We had some Jewish people in the band.

ISOARDI: Really? Any other names in the band that we should know about?

LOPEZ: Well, no, not many pursued it after that. Just Chico Sesma and I.

ISOARDI: How often did you guys work?

LOPEZ: Every weekend.

ISOARDI: No kidding?

LOPEZ: Yeah, every weekend. And we used to rehearse in the basement of his house over there. In fact, do you know where Daly Street is? Yeah, we're over here by Lincoln Park toward north and Broadway, in that area. He dug out the cellar, and we used to rehearse down there.

ISOARDI: How old was Cervantes? How much older than you?

LOPEZ: Let me see. He was already in his thirties at that time.

ISOARDI: Oh, so he was quite a bit older than you.

LOPEZ: Yeah.

ISOARDI: Did you guys ever--? I mean, everybody, I suppose-- So many bands relied on the stocks for things. Did you play around with the stocks at all, change them a little bit to suit you guys? Did you do that? Did you rewrite the things?

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. Sure. You could alter the stocks. But they always put more into the stock than you needed, you know. It was always an introduction, and then a whole first chorus. Then you repeat the whole first chorus again; this time maybe the saxist took the melody and you played the bridge. The first time you took the melody and the saxist played the bridge. Then there was a short modulation into another key. Then there's a whole chorus in another key, and then back to half the tune to go out. So stock arrangements are very interesting. I wish I had kept those. But, you know, when you're young you say, "Oh, this is--" You want to keep discarding things, grabbing for the new.

But I wish I could talk to Mr. Cervantes now and tell him-- You know, I was an animal when I got out of the hospital. I didn't know how to conduct myself. Everything was new to me. Things that were funny to me were not funny to other people. He used to say, "Full value. Full value." That was a good habit. "Full value," play the notes full value. And dynamics and everything, he was very good at that.

But what I'm trying to say-- It was all centered around

American music. Nothing about this Latin music bit.

ISOARDI: And I guess to you guys it was corny then? It was "Mario's mariachi music" essentially?

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. Well, that kind of music. But on the other side of the scale, [Xavier] Cugat was just beginning to get around. It was bands like Carmen Cavallero--

ISOARDI: Oh, right. Of course, of course.

LOPEZ: Carlos Molina, a rhumba band they called them, see. And that was a bit in New York that had caught on here probably-- In all the clubs in New York you'd have the regular band and the rhumba band, two bands in every club. The Latin Quarter, the Havana-Madrid, the China Doll, anywhere, there were always two bands working. So that took over here in the forties with the Ciro's and the Mocambo and the Trocadero. Did you ever hear of those names?

ISOARDI: Sure.

LOPEZ: Well, there were always two bands there, too. They either had the society band [sings melody to a waltz], and then you had your rhumba band. And then there were swing bands; that's all I played with.

ISOARDI: Was the swing band?

LOPEZ: Yeah. I didn't want to play with the-- They called them Mickey Mouse bands. I didn't want to play with the Mickey Mouse band, the society band. I didn't want to play with

the rhumba band. It didn't do anything for me until I heard Machito. [laughs]

ISOARDI: Well, truly. Were those bands becoming popular then in East L.A., the rhumba bands?

LOPEZ: Oh, no.

ISOARDI: Really? No kidding?

LOPEZ: No. No, not at all. They were only popular with the Beverly Hills crowd, you know [sings rhumba melody], exotic rhumba music there.

ISOARDI: So over here it was still sort of swing? Or it was very traditional?

LOPEZ: Swing, anything that was on the radio. That's what it was. You did not hear those rhumba bands on the radio. Not on KFWB--"Oh, the latest hit, Benny Goodman--" At KFI it would be-- You know, NBC [National Broadcasting Company] would be playing Benny Goodman.

ISOARDI: So the audience for bands like Cugat's, then, was a more affluent Anglo audience?

LOPEZ: Was very society. Oh, yeah. Right. The Waldorf-Astoria [Hotel] , New York. Sure. Those things were going on with Cugat. All the while, uptown in New York, 125th [Street], those kids were playing their conga drums, and they were playing their Latin music, the mambo music with these different instruments and more emphasis on rhythmic structure.

Cugat [put] more emphasis on visual and melodic structure. Stand up there with a couple of dogs, his two little chihuahuas, on the thing and a real shapely woman up there and be swinging her head and everybody playing in unison. Don't harmonize, just play the music. You know what I'm saying?

ISOARDI: Yeah, really. Well, I mean, it must have been almost like a bolt of lightening when someone like Chano Pozo arrived on the scene, though. That must have just turned everybody's head.

LOPEZ: Oh yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah, all these revelations were going on around me. But you must remember, half of my mind was hell-bent on living it up instead of like, "Hey, I should be really digging everything here, because it should be documented one day." You didn't think of that.

ISOARDI: I mean, it just seems to me it's an under-standable reaction, isn't it? You've been in the hospital for so long and then finally get out. You just want to-- Is your mind-set sort of that you want to grab everything you can?

LOPEZ: My trumpet was my passport to everywhere.

ISOARDI: Well, that must have fitted your emotional needs, then. You were able to travel every weekend. You were playing in different places. I mean, that must have been pretty exciting then.

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. It was very exciting, sure. That in itself,

that evolution of the Latin music, is something else, too. Because-- Did you ever see the video The Mario Bauza Story?

ISOARDI: No.

LOPEZ: Damn. I gave it to-- Excuse me. I gave one copy to a friend of mine and he lost it. But I've got one more copy here. It takes you back to the beginnings of those days in New York. In fact, I'm going to try and see if I can make a dub for you.

ISOARDI: Oh, that would be fabulous. Or I'll try and track it down.

LOPEZ: It would really fill you in on that time in the forties when Machito's band was being formed. In fact, it is a story about Machito's band being formed and the places they were playing and the music taking over. While Machito was working down on Park Plaza, 125th and Tenth Avenue, down in the barrio--Spanish Harlem they called it--Cugat was up there in the Waldorf playing the other type, the watered-down music. But it's strange, because before I went to New York in 1946, '45, I was listening to the radio one time, and I hear this swinging, sounded something like jazz music but with Latin rhythms. They had brought Machito's band for a couple of weeks at the Club Brazil here.

ISOARDI: Where was that?

LOPEZ: Let me see. Where the hell was that? You know at

the end of Sunset Boulevard when it hits Broadway?

ISOARDI: Yeah.

LOPEZ: That's Chinatown, huh?

ISOARDI: Was it around there, then?

LOPEZ: Right around there.

ISOARDI: What kind of a place was it?

LOPEZ: It was a nightclub. But you've got to remember, in those days the streets spoked off into different directions, and then as the years went by they'd seal off the streets and pave them over. You can't recognize it anymore, but it was in that area. It was at the bottom of Sunset Boulevard just before you got to Olvera Street. It was the Club Brazil. They mentioned it there.

ISOARDI: So he appeared in town to play. Did you catch this?

LOPEZ: No, no, no. I didn't. I didn't even know. But in those days they used to play from remote broadcast, right?

ISOARDI: And they did Machito's--

LOPEZ: And they did from the Club Brazil. I said, "What is that?" I listened to that. It sounded good. And then I remember getting a gig with-- I got my first gig with one of those Latin bands, with Bobby Ramos.

ISOARDI: When was this now? Was this when you first got out of high school?

LOPEZ: No, I graduated in '42, I worked around town with

all these little bands, and at that time too, I remember, in '45 or-- I have to try to piece these things together. I had to work with Johnny Otis at the Club Alabam on Central Avenue.

ISOARDI: Well, we want to get up to that. Actually, before we get up to that, let me ask you another thing or two about Roosevelt. Some of the teachers there, what were they like? Were they any good? Is there anyone who you thought was especially helpful?

LOPEZ: Yes. Yes, yes. From what I can recollect now-- And it was popular to hate your teachers. You know, it was popular then--

ISOARDI: It still is. [laughs]

LOPEZ: But there was a lady called Miss Sweet. She was a good music teacher.

ISOARDI: What was she teaching?

LOPEZ: Harmony. Harmony I, II, III, and IV. And Mr. [Harry] Grapengetter was the conductor of the symphony orchestra.

ISOARDI: Grapengetter. That's all one word? [laughs]

LOPEZ: Grapengetter. You know, the kids would twist that word around.

ISOARDI: Oh, God, yes. [laughs]

LOPEZ: But I had my fill with-- I was having my kicks with the dance band, you know, because I could get around my horn

a little better. But had I known-- I wish I'd have joined that symphony band, because it would have even given me experience in playing with the symphony orchestra. Because that's what I'm studying right now is writing for strings, you know, and it would get me a first-class--

ISOARDI: Who was in charge of the dance band?

LOPEZ: But I was too hippy. I was too hip, too hip to do that.

ISOARDI: You're allowed as a teenager. [laughs]

LOPEZ: And a desperate teenager, you know.

ISOARDI: Who taught the dance band? Or did you have a faculty?

LOPEZ: Miss Sweet would appoint one of the musicians every semester to lead it.

ISOARDI: Oh, I see. I see.

LOPEZ: So one time it was Bernie Menaker, trumpet player kid who also was in Sal Cervantes's band. See, the name Sal Cervantes is a Spanish name, but we had Al Rosen on saxophone, Bernie Menaker on trumpet, and Hideo Kawano on drums. I mean, it was a-- Everybody got along.

ISOARDI: A multiracial band, yeah.

LOPEZ: You know, there's no polarity in those days like "Hooray for my side," you know. We had a common interest. We all were pulled together by a common interest. That's what we need today, to be pulled together by a common interest. Instead,

"No, my way's better than you. My tacos taste better than your knishes." That's not the way to go. So one time she'd appoint Lionel, "Chico," Sesma, the leader-- She didn't appoint me because I was too--

ISOARDI: That was Chico Sesma's first name, Lionel?

LOPEZ: Lionel, yeah.

ISOARDI: It was Lionel "Chico" Sesma.

LOPEZ: Yeah. He had a very big program here. I'm surprised you didn't know about it.

ISOARDI: No, I didn't. Well, I'm not from L.A., that's probably why. I grew up in the San Francisco area.

LOPEZ: Oh, I see. If you want I can give you Chico's phone number a little later if you want it. Because he lives right around here. And he is "Mr. History" here, you know, of introducing the new sound of Latin music to California. He is it.

So in those days, around the time that I had worked with Johnny Otis--but we'll get back to that--I worked with Bobby Ramos. I wanted to explain something to you. Let me see here. There was a club on Silver Lake Boulevard called El Zarape--Zarape club. Well, later it was changed to the Continental. And later it was changed to the Havana Club or something. But the first time it was El Zarape. And I went in there with the Bobby Ramos band, because Bobby said--

Bobby used to work at Ciro's. He was the rhumba band.

ISOARDI: He was the leader of the rhumba band at Ciro's?

LOPEZ: Yeah, or any other places around. You know, society people loved him because he played the Latin music. So then he got this job at the Zarape, and he called me, and I said, "Yeah, I'll join the band." It's a small group, just two saxophones, one trumpet, and three rhythm. That was it.

But he had this fellow come in from the East Coast that was writing-- I don't know if-- He didn't invent the mambo, but he had written some arrangements he called "The Mambo." This was 1947. So we played them. I'll mention his name, Moncho Usera, who later wound up with Cugat and then later was to become an important person in the music in Puerto Rico. But at that time he had-- The guys in the band used to call me "Vout." "Hey, Vout!" Because Slim Gaillard used to say, "Hey McScutie voutie." Remember Slim Gaillard?

ISOARDI: Oh, yes. Yes.

LOPEZ: "Oh, hey, Vout, what's happening there?" So if you're playing jazz music, you're a "Vout," see. He'd say, "Hey, Vout, come play with us, because we got some new kind of arrangements." "Really?" You could play cucaracha music, you know. "No, this mambo music this guy's bringing in from New York." So I went there, and that's the first introduction I heard to ostinato bass patterns that were a departure from

just [mimics walking bass]. They were kind of rhythmical, and melodic lines on top. There was a lot of singing. It was in its infancy, the mambo music. But before it was called something else. To me it was in its infancy, because I wasn't familiar with it, see. And then when I heard Machito's band--

So that's how I kind of got started with Latin music. Oh, let me see here. Subsequently, when I had gone to New York, I worked with Boyd Raeburn at the Commodore Hotel. I worked with Elliot Lawrence, a couple of gigs with him. I also worked a lot of gigs in the barrio with little Latin bands, small bands around. And that's a whole big history there chronologically. But the reason I got those was because I was a jazz player, a Latin jazz player.

ISOARDI: So as Latin music became more sophisticated they were--

LOPEZ: Yeah. There wasn't anybody playing jazz in the Latin bands in New York; there were just the mambo bands. But I could take a course on jazz on top of what they were doing way back then, and that's why I got both sides of the fence, see? Also, too, I wanted to get away from some of these jazz musicians, because they were getting into trouble, and if I'm hanging around them I'd be in trouble, too.

ISOARDI: Oh, the drug scene and all that, late forties and early fifties?

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. Oh, God. It started here, you know, with the pot scene.

ISOARDI: Well, people had been smoking pot for a while, hadn't they, out here?

LOPEZ: Oh, people were smoking pot in the thirties here.

ISOARDI: Yeah, well, it was legal, wasn't it?

LOPEZ: It was legal in the early thirties or something, but after a while-- These musicians that were following Charlie "Bird" Parker were becoming aware of altered states of consciousness, right? So the pot scene-- You know the words "gauge," "charge," "boo"--What else? "You got any boo, charge, gauge"--I forget the other names--"mary jane?" Well, everybody was into that, but I didn't mind that too much. But then some of the-- In '47--man, this is already '47--'43, '44, '45, '46, just about a few years after I graduated from high school, I was with these-- I'd hang around Billy Berg's and play Sunday jam sessions at Billy Berg's.

ISOARDI: When?

LOPEZ: 'Forty-six, '45, '46, those days. And those guys were beginning to get into some hard stuff.

ISOARDI: That was about the time that Bird came out here for the first time, wasn't it?

LOPEZ: Yeah, yeah. That's for the first time. And actually, when I got to New York I said, "I don't want to know these

guys, man." So I went to play with the Latin guys. They weren't into hard stuff. Latins were just into pot and booze.

ISOARDI: Was that one of the main reasons?

LOPEZ: Yeah. Well, it was convenient. I could still play with a Latin band and play jazz, but, "Man, I don't want to hang around you--" And I could give you some very prominent names, and every one of them has been busted.

ISOARDI: Well, a lot of them died, too.

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. In fact, there was a little clique here-- As I had graduated from Roosevelt High School and played with the different bands around town, then Hideo Kawano had lined himself up with two real Charlie Parker devotees, Dean Benedetti and-- Boy, your memory? How about that? The trombone player--

ISOARDI: Out here in L.A.?

LOPEZ: Yeah. And they were getting pretty far out. So that's what kind of deterred me from-- You ever heard of the Dean Benedetti tapes?

ISOARDI: Oh, yeah.

LOPEZ: Well, that was Dean.

ISOARDI: I know that story about-- So you knew him?

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. Very closely. And Jimmy Knepper, the trombone player.

ISOARDI: Oh, yeah, who hooked up with [Charles] Mingus.

LOPEZ: That was the four of us, Dean Benedetti, Jimmy Knepper,

Hideo--Joe Young, he changed his name to Joe Young--and me. And I'd always be hanging around them, because I was still playing both sides of the fence, playing with the commercial little bands and playing with this and that. And those guys got too far out, just--

ISOARDI: Jimmy Knepper was from L.A.?

LOPEZ: Yeah.

ISOARDI: Where did he grow up?

LOPEZ: Here. He grew up-- Where the hell did he grow up? I forget. Somewhere in the Manchester [Avenue] area.

ISOARDI: Oh, out there, out west a bit?

LOPEZ: Yeah, somewhere around there. I'm not sure. Maybe not. I'm glad I got away from those guys, boy.

ISOARDI: After you leave Roosevelt High, I guess the war's just started for the United States. It's early 1942, and you graduate. What do you do then? Do you look for a regular gig somewhere? Are you looking to get on with a--?

LOPEZ: Well, by that time I was a--

ISOARDI: You'd been with Sal Cervantes for a number of years, but now you're moving out. You had to make a decision about where you were going to go from here.

LOPEZ: Well, but that was weekend gigs.

ISOARDI: Right, right. Now you're looking, I guess, for full-time work? Or did you think about going on to college?

LOPEZ: No, I hadn't--

ISOARDI: You wanted to get out there and play.

LOPEZ: Yeah. In fact, my last years at Roosevelt High School-- Yeah. In the last years of Roosevelt High School I took a gig downtown on Main Street in a place called the Hole.

ISOARDI: The Hole? [laughs]

LOPEZ: Yeah. El Hoyo. I mention that in my autobiography. The place reeked of urine, man.

ISOARDI: This is a little hole in the wall, I guess.

LOPEZ: Right, downstairs, you know. And since I knew all the tunes-- I was playing with the group down there, and I was going to high school at the same time. I'd come home at one thirty in the morning. I'd have to get up at seven [o'clock] and go to school. I barely made it through, but it was a steady gig.

ISOARDI: Every night?

LOPEZ: Every night. Every night, yeah. You see? That's what I was interested-- There were a lot of steady gigs. Musicians worked steady every night in those days. So that was the beginning for me to start working every night. And then as a full-time musician I'd be looking out for gigs.

ISOARDI: Right, from that point on.

LOPEZ: From that point on, sure.

ISOARDI: Let me ask you, I guess if you're becoming a full-time

musician, at some point don't you have to join the union [American Federation of Musicians]?

LOPEZ: Uh-huh.

ISOARDI: When did you join?

LOPEZ: I joined in 1944, I think.

ISOARDI: So it's a few years, then, after you graduate.

LOPEZ: 'Forty-two was when I graduated.

ISOARDI: Right. So it's not until '44 that you joined the union.

LOPEZ: Yeah.

ISOARDI: Why did you wait until '44? Why not join it before that?

LOPEZ: Well, because I wasn't working union gigs.

ISOARDI: [laughs] So it's when you got a chance to work in a union gig, that's when you joined--

LOPEZ: Yeah, when you got more important. And then I kept meeting more people. Then I joined the union, because it's part of growing up. "Yeah, I'm going to join the union." And at that time-- Oh, there was another band around town too called Phil Carréon. A lot of good musicians came out of that band.

ISOARDI: Such as?

LOPEZ: Lennie Niehaus; Russ Freeman, the piano player; Kenny [Kendall] Bright, he died.

ISOARDI: Trumpet player, right?

LOPEZ: Yeah. A bunch of people came out of that band. In other words, maybe I'd work like six months with one little band and then join another and stay for a year and then just work around. But I remember the guy saying, "Hey, man, when will you want to join the union?" That's a sign of being an adult. You know, you got a union card, right? You don't need the union card, because you're working--

ISOARDI: At the Hole. [laughs]

LOPEZ: At the Hole and these places, weddings and marches and things like that in Pacoima or who knows. The union has no jurisdiction over those places, you know? So ask me about that.

ISOARDI: How did you--? So when do you join?

LOPEZ: 'Forty-three, I think.

ISOARDI: Oh, it's '43.

LOPEZ: Wait. Let me see something here. Just take a second and let me see what time it is. I'm going to call the union right now and find out when I joined.

ISOARDI: All right. Let me turn this off. [tape recorder off]

LOPEZ: All right. So that means at that time, while I was going to school and playing with some of these bands, the Phil Carréon band all decided to join the union. There were

two unions, the colored local--

ISOARDI: Yeah, Local 767.

LOPEZ: I don't know. Anything that had to do with the black was more hip. So they went down and joined the 767. But I didn't join it. I already had joined the Local 47--not where it is now. It was down on Georgia Street, way down there somewhere.

ISOARDI: So you joined in November '42.

LOPEZ: Yeah. So that's funny. The majority of the guys, of the Latin musicians, in Phil Carréon's band went and joined 767. I don't know why. Because it swings more, maybe.

ISOARDI: Maybe. Who's Phil Carréon?

LOPEZ: He was a local bandleader around town. You must remember, these were not name bands. They didn't record. They were just territory bands around town. Sal Cervantes, De la Torre, Don Ramón, Phil Carréon, Valle Valdez, these bands, they worked around town. There seemed to be a lot of dances. Dances was the bit. A lot of dances. There were a lot of social clubs in town too among the Mexican people. They had different social clubs. And they used to have their affairs, and they'd have-- But everything, if you were to close your eyes and listen, everything's American. It's all American music. And everybody dressed nice in those days. It's just sharp, you know, "dap." Girls dressed nice. Social

events--They looked pretty nice. There were a few gang problems around town, but nobody ever thought of carrying a gun in those days, I don't think. It's ridiculous. It's just insanity what's going on today.

But anyway, getting back to the locals, I had joined the Local 47. Because at one time, either at '45 or '46, I studied with another teacher because, listening to other people, "Hey, well, you ought to study with this guy," you know. "Okay." So I went to study with Louis Maggio. He was the teacher of Raphael Mendez and a few other very prominent students around, very, very prominent. And it was through Raphael Mendez I got a studio call to do a recording at MGM studios, and I had my union card. That's what we were referring to, right? If you got the union card, then you could work the gigs.

ISOARDI: Raphael Mendez was a pretty important player.

LOPEZ: Yeah, virtuoso.

ISOARDI: Can you tell us about him? Was he from L.A.?

LOPEZ: No, he's from Mexico. I don't know too much about him, but there's a lot of information written about him, a biography about when he lived in Mexico. And he was a virtuoso on the trumpet when he had come here. I think he had worked in Detroit before he came to Los Angeles. And that's how I met him. Oh, he had worked with Johnny Richards's band.

This is all around '43, '44, '42, around there. At the time that Andy Russell was a drummer-- You ever heard of Andy Russell? The singer?

ISOARDI: Yeah, the name I have.

LOPEZ: He was quite big in the forties. He took [Frank] Sinatra's place on the NBC singers. But he was a drummer. And like I said, you got around because you got connections here and there, and then somebody would refer you to this other person. The names would go around, and you'd get phone calls. It just kept building like that.

ISOARDI: Let me ask you, Paul, throughout these years,

what about your going out and listening to music? I mean, you're busy. You're playing a lot. From early on you're playing, and you've got a lot of gigs going, but are there places you'd go to hear music, to hear the bands, to hear groups? Did you ever go downtown to the theaters or down Central Avenue to the clubs or anything like this to hear the--?

LOPEZ: Well, before I got busy I used to go to the theaters all the time.

ISOARDI: Well, such as--?

LOPEZ: The Paramount Theatre downtown, the Orpheum Theatre downtown. In fact, I worked at the Orpheum Theatre in the

pit band.

ISOARDI: When was that?

LOPEZ: 'Forty-six, '47. I was in the pit band orchestra there. It was very good because you learned to read everything.

ISOARDI: So you're playing for the acts. It's almost like being in the studio, I guess, then, isn't it? You've got a different short piece of music for the different acts.

LOPEZ: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Somebody would come out with a tap dance routine and you play "Honeysuckle Rose," and next time a dog act will come up you play Puccini's overture. You know, you had a lot of on-the-spot training there.

ISOARDI: What about the clubs? Were you aware of Central Avenue at all then? What's going on there?

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. Like I said, I don't know how Johnny got ahold of me, but I went over to go work there with Johnny Otis's band. Johnny Otis was in the Local 767.

ISOARDI: But up until this call to go with Otis, had you ever been down there to listen to music, hang out in the clubs, anything like that?

LOPEZ: No, I hadn't until I got that gig. But as you became more aware of musicians, you were more curious as to where they were appearing. And I became very conscious of Howard McGhee, the trumpet player. A lot of these musicians in this town of the new school of bebop actually came here with orchestras,

and they quit here and stayed here. Like Howard McGhee came here with Earl Hines's orchestra, and he stayed here. He was one of the newer trumpet players of the new style. He stayed here. So I used to, "Let's go hear Howard McGhee." I know they used to work down on Central Avenue at the Downbeat [Club]. I think it was called the Downbeat room. Or they managed to work downtown. And also they were recording musicians, too. Because he had come from a big band. In fact, Miles Davis came here with Benny Carter's band.

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ISOARDI: Paul, I guess before we continue on from last time, you've got some more background information on your family that you've found since we last met.

LOPEZ: Yeah. I found out that my father [Timothy Lopez] was a drummer in a little band. He was born in Douglas, Arizona. And my mother [Adele Ramos Lopez] was born in Hermosillo, Sonora, north part of Mexico. But she was brought over at just a few months old. So she was raised in Bisbee [Arizona], and that's where she's from. But most of her life was in the United States.

ISOARDI: Right. Your dad was a drummer.

LOPEZ: Yeah.

ISOARDI: What kind of music?

LOPEZ: Marching band, probably. In the park, you know. Concerts in the park. They used to have those things, something like that.

ISOARDI: Okay. Carrying on from last time, I think we had just gotten up to the point where you end up working with Johnny Otis on Central Avenue. Maybe you can talk about how that happens. Because I think you said up until this time you'd never really had much contact with Central Avenue.

LOPEZ: No, I hadn't worked like a steady gig or a steady job.

Incidentally, that word "gig" sure has gotten around. [tape recorder off] Okay, I'm getting back to the word "gig," the fact that I hadn't had any steady job, or steady gig, on Central Avenue. But I want to detour from there for a second to give my opinion about the word gig, which everybody uses today and doesn't know where it came from. But to me, we used to say that in the forties. But I think as words get changed around, I think the word gig came first from if you wanted to play a dance you would call it an Irish jig. That's a dance, the Irish jig, right? So the guys started changing-- Like they used to say-- They changed it from jig to gig. And everybody would say, "Yeah, I got a gig. I got a dance I'm going to go play. I got another gig Saturday night. I got a gig Sunday." And it's a job. It's a dance. So like, they change the words today. They used to say, "I was hep when it was hip to be hep." Right? They used to say "hep," you know. Now everybody says "hip." [mutual laughter] Okay, let's get back to the other--

ISOARDI: Okay.

LOPEZ: Didn't nobody mention that to you?

ISOARDI: No, no one's-- We haven't gone into the etymology of "hip" before.

LOPEZ: That's a real surprise. I hear surgeons on "Every Day of Your Life," or something like that, or a lawyer says, "I got a gig." What the hell's he talking--? He doesn't even know where the word came from. You know? Guys get tired of saying simple words like, "I'm playing a wedding dance Saturday night." No, "I got a gig." It's the Irish jig. People dance there. It's the dance, the Irish jig.

ISOARDI: Johnny Otis, Central Avenue.

LOPEZ: I had gone down there because there were a lot of after-hour places to play down there.

ISOARDI: And this was around '45, '46, the end of the [Second World] War?

LOPEZ: 'Forty-five, '46, '47, '44, probably before that. Yeah, even during the time of the-- Well, we must have gone during when we were fighting with the Japanese, right?

ISOARDI: Oh, yeah. But I mean in terms of your going down there.

LOPEZ: Yeah, well, I'm just saying that when I got there it was already roaring. Because there just happened to be a lot of-- The Lincoln Theatre was very popular. You ever heard about the Lincoln Theatre?

ISOARDI: Yeah. Did you go there?

LOPEZ: Oh, I played there. I played there when there wasn't like a big band coming in--Jimmie Lunceford or Benny Carter.

In fact, I saw Benny Carter there once, and Jimmie Lunceford. And then I was playing with a bandleader that came from New York and put in his residence here and became kind of prominent on Central Avenue. Later he became a business associate of Johnny Otis. His name was--

ISOARDI: Bardu Ali?

LOPEZ: Bardu, yeah. Bardu Ali. He had a band.

ISOARDI: At the Lincoln?

LOPEZ: Yeah.

ISOARDI: And you were playing trumpet with him?

LOPEZ: I played with Bardu.

ISOARDI: Was that your first job on Central?

LOPEZ: I don't know if it was or not. I can't tell, because in those days I was pretty busy.

ISOARDI: How did you hook up with Bardu Ali and that band?

LOPEZ: I don't know. I don't know how. You just got around a lot and your name got passed around and your phone number.

ISOARDI: So you just got a call one day.

LOPEZ: Yeah, I got a call one day, and that was it. But I just don't remember-- But I remember rehearsing with his band. You know, he'd call up a few people, say, "I'm going to put a band-- We're going to open at the Lincoln Theatre. You want to rehearse for that?" "Yeah, okay. Great."

ISOARDI: Do you remember who else was in the band?

LOPEZ: I think Chico Sesma--Lionel "Chico" Sesma--played trombone, but I don't remember the other people too well.

ISOARDI: Do you remember the year? Was the war going on?

LOPEZ: I'm trying to remember. The war was over. About 1946, I think, around that time, '46 or '47 or '45. You know, the more people you talk about, you can find out more about Bardu. He was a very nice gentleman.

ISOARDI: Yeah, what was he like?

LOPEZ: He was a good master of ceremonies, and he knew his music. I guess he didn't know how to arrange or didn't know too much about chordal construction. But he knew how to look good in front of a band and beat off the tempos. A lot like Lucky Millinder or, you know-- You've heard of Lucky Millinder?

ISOARDI: Yes.

LOPEZ: Or Jay McShann and those bands. Everybody wanted a band. They wanted to be a bandleader, you know. There were tons of bandleaders in those days. [laughs] Oh, well--

ISOARDI: How long did you stay with Bardu?

LOPEZ: I don't know. I don't know. I do remember working at the Lincoln with him, and then another time-- Sometimes musicians that you work for recommend you. You know, like if I was to go to get a band tomorrow night or something I'd call up some of my friends and say, "Who's available?" or "Give me some names." And then you get on the horn. You know,

you give me six lead alto men, I'm bound to get one that's going to be free. So there was a lot of action, oh, a lot of action in those days.

ISOARDI: Do you remember what the audience was like at the Lincoln?

LOPEZ: Very receptive.

ISOARDI: Was it mostly a black audience or--?

LOPEZ: At the Lincoln, yes, mostly black, mostly black. Because it was like the Apollo Theatre of the West Coast, right? And let me see. The Elks club. Did anybody mention the Elks club?

ISOARDI: The Elks auditorium, yeah.

LOPEZ: You know, the big bands would come in there. I remember going to see Lionel Hampton, because, oh, man, the band was burning then. I had a picture of that band, the band that he'd just formed, the one that had Ernie Royal, Marshal Royal, Dexter Gordon, Illinois Jacquet, Joe Newman, all these guys. I gave the picture to Lionel Hampton to make a copy and send it back. He never sent it back. I should have thought, you know. But that was the band.

ISOARDI: That was a great band. That was around 1941, '42.

LOPEZ: That's the best band he ever had. That's the best band he ever had.

ISOARDI: Yeah, the musicianship.

LOPEZ: You've got the musicianship.

ISOARDI: I think he even had a young Dexter Gordon on that band.

LOPEZ: Yeah, Dexter was in the band, so was Illinois Jacquet. I can see the sax section.

ISOARDI: That's when they did "Flying Home."

LOPEZ: It was Marshal Royal, Dexter Gordon, Illinois Jacquet, Jack McVea. Yeah, that was four. I don't remember who was on baritone, though.

ISOARDI: Jack McVea, wasn't it?

LOPEZ: He was on alto. It could have been alto, could have been baritone. But let me see. What did I say? Without the picture I can't tell you. The musicianship was exceptional. Ernie Royal on trumpet and Karl George on first trumpet, and Joe Newman, who also played drums.

ISOARDI: Really? I didn't know that. [laughs]

LOPEZ: Yeah.

ISOARDI: So, well, if you saw that band at the Elks hall, I mean, that must have been around '42. Was that around the time they did "Flying Home"?

LOPEZ: Everything happened after I graduated from high school. I graduated winter '42. So it was during '44, 45, '46 that all of those things were happening.

This is not to distract anything-- I happen to be in

possession of some prize magazines that are collector's items, Metronome and Down Beat [magazines] from the late thirties and forties.

ISOARDI: Definitely, definitely.

LOPEZ: I know you were mentioning Mario Bauza. There's tons of writing about him. And that video I got. But I also have a picture here that I'm trying to get xeroxed that shows Mario, when he first came to this country, playing with Chick Webb. He must have been a kid. Let me just take a second here. Yeah, here it is.

So I did get a call from Johnny Otis and come down to play.

ISOARDI: So this was when you were playing with Bardu? Or afterwards?

LOPEZ: Well, it was during the time I was playing with Bardu. On Sundays I'd be over at Billy Berg's playing jam sessions. Remember that picture with [radio station] KFWB?

ISOARDI: Right.

LOPEZ: Maybe Saturday night I'd be working with Phil Carréon's band. I mean, [I was] trying to keep busy. I didn't make much money, but you sure can-- [mutual laughter] In those days-- But you can't complain.

[refers to photograph] This is July 1941. Look at the trumpet section. It says "Bauza." You know, that's '41.

You know, we're talking about Mario Bauza that had passed away a couple of years ago. He was already in his-- You know, he wrote-- He was a very important person in Machito's orchestra, see. That picture I want to xerox and mail to Max Salazar so he can put that picture into Latin Beat magazine.

But I'm showing you, see, that things were-- Look at that [shows photograph to Isoardi]. Everyone had uniforms that looked nice. Oh, you had to look nice. Presentation was very important. You didn't look like a bum. You had better cut your hair, shine your shoes, and stuff. Most of the time.

But I got a call to work with Johnny Otis. It was the Club Alabam. I had this funny little car that I used to scoot around town all over. I was terrible, the way I used to drive. I remember the club. You want me to tell you about the club?

ISOARDI: Yeah, definitely.

LOPEZ: Okay. What Johnny had was a band that took after the Count Basie style, sounded like Basie, you know. In fact, Count Basie was very popular. In fact, during those times there used to be stock arrangements published of a lot of the Basie arrangements. I wonder whatever happened to them. "Big John Special"--I'm not sure, something like that--or "Clap Hands, Here Comes Charlie" and [hums part of melody]. I forget what that was. [Lyle] "Spud" Murphy did that. But it was very popular.

But I'm thinking like right now that I've been living in a separate world from the normal people. It just dawned on me. I was living in a separate world then, too. But I thought everybody liked Count Basie, you know, or everybody liked music. Now today you'd say, "Count who?" You know. They want to go with the Who and the Doors and the Eyeballs and whatever these funny people that-- I don't know what's going on. I'm like on another planet. But it was very popular in those days. You didn't play cowboy music. Oh, you were on the outs if you played cowboy music or played an accordion. You'd never get a gig anywhere. [laughs]

But the band was very good. He had a regular big-size band, and it was the house band at the Club Alabam, right.

ISOARDI: You remember some of the people in it?

LOPEZ: Some of the people? Well, he had René Bloch on lead alto at one time, and then another time-- Yeah, because René Bloch did a hit record for him, "Harlem Nocturne." But when I worked with him there he had an alto man that had I think come to town with Boyd Raeburn's band. His name was Hal McKusick. And he played very good, beautiful. And then he had Allen Eager on tenor, another devotee of Lester Young on tenor, and me on trumpet. We were the only non-blacks on the band. So the rest of the band was-- I think he had a trumpet player named Jones, Reunald Jones, a very good trumpet player who

had played a lot with Count Basie. You know, it seems to me a lot of the big band musicians in those days were always looking for a place to settle down to see if they could settle down and get off the road, you know, if they could get enough work to stay there. So I was wondering, well, how did Jonesie play with Johnny Otis when he was with Count Basie? Because later on I heard he was back with Count Basie. It's very difficult to make a living sometimes, to get enough work to stay put. But in that

time who was staying put was Jonesie. There was, I think-- I don't remember the other musicians too well. There was James von Streeter, the trombone players. God, I wish-- I don't even recognize myself sometimes.

ISOARDI: Johnny played drums, I guess.

LOPEZ: Johnny played drums. I don't remember any--

ISOARDI: What was he like as a bandleader?

LOPEZ: Very good. Very conscientious. But he made a big switch-around, right? He dropped the swing music and went into rhythm and blues or something like that. Because I had left for New York in '47, and when I came back there was no more-- Johnny was not into having a swinging Basie band. He had a TV show or something, and he was doing [mimics a rhythm and blues guitar part] you know, electric guitars and things like that, which is all right. But I was fortunate

enough to play in the swing band that he had. And I remember-- I think we used to rehearse at the black union [American Federation of Musicians], the Negro union.

ISOARDI: Oh, Local 767?

LOPEZ: Local 767. We used to have a rehearsal room there. Yeah, we used to rehearse there. That was a pleasant surprise, when I came back from New York in 1950 to find out that-- I don't remember what day the two unions got together.

ISOARDI: Oh, it was '53.

LOPEZ: In '53?

ISOARDI: Well, they started fighting in about '49.

LOPEZ: I was still in New York in '52. What's the matter with me? Then I had gone to [Las] Vegas-- Like I said, you were always looking for a place to settle down, to get steady employment. I wound up in Las Vegas. [mutual laughter]

ISOARDI: A lot of people do.

LOPEZ: Oh, God, I worked my-- I had to wear a big thick belt because the shows were pounding-pounding-pounding shows. You'd just hold the horn and turn pages, and the leader's going, "Louder! Louder!" The little show over there, while I worked there in Las Vegas, I couldn't get off the stand after we played the show, I was just so wiped out. Like running a marathon or something. But that was then.

ISOARDI: Yeah. In Johnny's band, did you do any writing at

this time?

LOPEZ: No, just playing. I didn't know I could write. [mutual laughter] I had done some arrangements before that for Phil Carréon's band. That was another neighborhood band of '45, '46, '43, the Phil Carréon band. A lot of good musicians came out of that band: Jack Montrose, Lennie Niehaus, a few other people I don't remember. It was like a stopping-through band, you know. That band and the Valle Valdez band were bands where you stopped through on your way up to better employment, to permanent employment. [laughs]

ISOARDI: What was it like playing at the Alabam?

LOPEZ: Oh, it was great. It was two shows a night. I think it was two shows a night. And they had a line of girls, too. I remember--

ISOARDI: Oh, chorus girls?

LOPEZ: Yeah. They would come out. And they had a master of ceremonies. I don't know who the master-- It's like I could just dimly see all that action going on in there and just me right in the middle of it. If it was '44 or '45, that's over fifty years ago! [laughs] And the girls, we had show numbers for the girls, you know, a revue. And they'd come right by me to run up the stairs to go up to their dressing rooms, and I'd reach my hand out and pat one on the rear or something as they go by just jokingly, you know. I remember

that. There was a singer there--I don't know if I told you--a girl singer named Estelle Edson. She was very good. God, she was nice. And I remember her singing standards like "More Than You Know," things like that, you know, of that era. And they'd put on a little-- They would put on a theme, like a little show, a theme. Every month they would change. I remember one was "The Americas," or something like that, and everybody was dressed in different costumes of like North America, South America, and things like that.

ISOARDI: Jeez. It was a big production.

LOPEZ: It was like a production in a small way--house band, chorus girls, singers, and master of ceremonies. [laughs]

ISOARDI: But, I mean, you must have had some choreographers, some seamstresses. There must have been a staff there.

LOPEZ: That would have been behind the scenes. I didn't know anything about that. Because I would just come through the front door, get on the stand, play the gig, and say, "See you later"--out through the front and that was it. You know, "How long is this gig going to last?" "We'll be here three more weeks." "Well, okay, I'd better start calling up some other guys, see what else is going on."

ISOARDI: Do you know who was running the Alabam then?

LOPEZ: I don't know. Can you mention some names?

ISOARDI: What about Mosby? Was Curtis Mosby around?

LOPEZ: Curtis Mosby. That rings a big bell.

ISOARDI: He might have had it then?

LOPEZ: Yeah, he might have had it then.

ISOARDI: Did you ever have any dealings with this guy?

LOPEZ: No. If musicians just kept their nose clean, you never even knew who was running the place. You never knew, you know?

ISOARDI: So you got your paycheck?

LOPEZ: You got your paycheck. Your dealing was with the leader of the band.

ISOARDI: You remember what you got paid for that gig?

LOPEZ: I don't know. It wasn't much. [laughs] Oh, I don't know.

ISOARDI: Whatever the scale was at the time?

LOPEZ: Whatever the scale was, the union scale. I just don't know. Maybe fifty bucks a week or something like that. That's a lot of money, too, you know. I could fill up the tank with two bucks, a big tank. [laughs] Gas tanks, twenty cents a gallon, something like that.

ISOARDI: Yeah. How long did you stay there?

LOPEZ: Just for the duration of that one show. Johnny could tell you better than I could. I don't know. He went out, and then they would bring another traveling band in with another show. But there was a lot of action there. And up and down

the street there were like these other clubs, too. I think that the Downbeat [Club] was right down the block.

ISOARDI: Did you ever go in there?

LOPEZ: Yeah. Oh, yeah, even when I wasn't working there. I went to see Howard McGhee.

ISOARDI: Oh, when he was there with Teddy Edwards?

LOPEZ: Yeah.

ISOARDI: How did that strike you?

LOPEZ: Oh, I was very much impressed with Howard McGhee's getting around the horn like that. I said, "Holy mackerel!" I was copying him before I even heard Dizzy, when Howard was imitating Dizzy, I think.

ISOARDI: So this was before Charlie Parker and Dizzy Gillespie had come out here?

LOPEZ: Yeah.

ISOARDI: You had heard about Howard McGhee and you went to check him out?

LOPEZ: Right, right.

ISOARDI: Was that the first time--? I guess it must have been the first time you really saw and listened to somebody play bebop live?

LOPEZ: Yeah, yeah. But I saw him play with Andy Kirk's band at the Orpheum Theatre, Howard McGhee. So, like I say, he probably quit the band and stayed in town. Because I was

playing in the pit band at the Orpheum Theatre. And whenever they would bring-- I was in the house band at the Orpheum Theatre, downtown Los Angeles, on Broadway, Ninth [Street] and Broadway. But whenever a traveling band would come in with a show--Ina Ray Hutton, Jimmie Lunceford, whoever, Andy Kirk, Earl Hines-- Let me see. It must have been-- No, Billy Eckstine was with Earl Hines. It must have been Andy Kirk, or maybe-- When they brought in the big bands, the union had a regulation here that you had to keep a minimum of musicians in the pit--not the full-size orchestra. That was to ensure that they would keep working, too. So we were like standby. We played one number, just two trumpets, two saxes, and a rhythm. We played one number to close the curtain, and then we'd get off. Then the big band would come on the stage. Then when they'd finish, we'd come up and play a closer, and they'd close the curtain. [laughs] The union had us pretty well sewed up, you know. But nobody really wanted that stupid little gig hanging around playing two minutes. But I did it. And I'd stay in the pit, just watched the show. And there I saw-- "Who's that trumpet player?" "Howard McGhee." "Wow!" He did his own arrangements of some tune, and I heard him play it. Then his name came up six months later, or four months later: "Let's go hear Howard McGhee. He's got a combo down somewhere around here."

And that's about the time too that Miles [Davis] came out here with Benny Carter's band. And he stayed with Lucky Thompson. He lived at Lucky Thompson's house until he went back to New York.

ISOARDI: God, for a young trumpeter then, you really went to school with all these cats around.

LOPEZ: Yeah. But little would I know forty, fifty years later Miles would be who he was, you know.

ISOARDI: What did you think of this new music? What did you think of bebop when you first heard it?

LOPEZ: Well, I liked it, sure. I really liked it, and I tried to play it. I tried to be on top of everything in those days. I wasn't in the position to make any profound statements about it. I didn't know anything about anything. I was just looking-- "I'm free. I'm not in that hospital. I'm not in that bed. I've got a horn in my hand. I'm going to run here and there and--whew!" "Let's go play bebop!" "Yeah, let's go!" The only thing I didn't do is to play cowboy music. That's what they called it, you know.

ISOARDI: So you were just soaking everything up.

LOPEZ: I was soaking everything up. And I didn't want to "stick to the melody." [laughs] You know, that's the old saying: "Stick to the melody so people can understand what you're--" Well, I don't care whether people-- But to me there

was a lot of people digging what I was doing and what Charlie Parker was doing and all of these people. There was a big audience. I thought the whole world was like that, but it wasn't.

ISOARDI: You leave Johnny's band then, when the gig at the Alabam ends?

LOPEZ: I'm not quite sure what year that was.

ISOARDI: Well, not long after that don't you leave L.A.?

LOPEZ: It's been-- Yeah. I left Los Angeles in 1947, in the winter of 1947. Like I say, I had this little car, and I got in an accident with it. Somebody that was drinking ran the signal and caught me. I was going down--I was going pretty fast, too--Soto Street, and he came out of a side street. He didn't stop first. He thought he could make it across. And when he hit me, man, I heard those bottles flying out of his car and everything. So I didn't have a car. "Oh, man, what am I going to do? I can't get around." You had to have a car to get around in L.A. even in those days, of course. So I got a call from Freddie Slack's manager. Did I mention that?

ISOARDI: No.

LOPEZ: I got a call from Freddie Slack's manager. He said, "You want to go to Chicago?"

You know, I didn't want to go out of town. "Well, for

how long?"

"For six weeks."

I said, "How much?"

"A hundred and a quarter a week," something like that.

I said "Man, if I hold onto [inaudible], when I get back I can get another car."

And I remember rehearsing with that little group, that little Freddie Slack group. And Benny Carter did the arrangements.

ISOARDI: Really? All the arrangements for that band?

LOPEZ: Most of the small band arrangements for that band. And not only that-- Just take a second here and [I'll] give you some facts. I went out of town with him--Hotel Sherman, the Panther Room at the Hotel Sherman in Chicago--and I didn't come back for four years. [mutual laughter] Yeah.

ISOARDI: Actually, before we leave L.A., Paul, I wanted to ask you-- There was one other thing that came up last time that we were going to get into, and I guess it's happening just before you leave L.A., and that's the beginning of the "four brothers" band.

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. If anybody has some statistics-- Well, it was a time when-- I just can't pinpoint the year, but it has to be between '44 and '47. The story is Woody Herman came to town--and that was the Woody Herman's Herd band. You know

what I mean?

ISOARDI: Yeah, the first Herd.

LOPEZ: The first Herd. In fact, as I say, I was gigging everywhere. You know, if it was a steady gig, whatever it lasted-- But it was one of those times when I was free, too. And I got a call from somebody, I don't know-- Because I had a telephone put in my house where I lived. Somebody called me and said, "Can you make it tomorrow at the Million Dollar Theatre? Woody Herman's trumpet player got a pimple on his lip. He can't play."

I said, "Yeah, sure!"

"I mean, I'm here four shows."

I said, "I don't care. I'll be--"

I didn't sleep that night, you know. And I went down to the Million Dollar Theatre and played four shows with the Herd band.

ISOARDI: The "Thundering Herd."

LOPEZ: "Thundering Herd" with Bill Harris and Flip Phillips and, I'll tell you, Joe Mondragon, bass; Jimmy Rowles, piano; the trumpet section was Conrad Gozzo, Pete Condoli, Shorty Rogers, and Cappy Lewis. And the guy I was replacing was Sonny Berman, because he had a sore on his lip. But boy, I never heard such playing in my life! God. And I got up-- On one tune everybody stands up and plays a solo on the trumpet

section, "Apple Honey" or something. I got up with my crutches. I could get up and down fast. I played and everybody clapped, because here's this little dark-skinned Mexican kid in the band. And there were a lot of Mexicans in the audience. But they dug swing music, the Mexican people here, so I remember.

So then what happened was that that whole trumpet section plus Jimmy Rowles and Joe Mondragon and a few other guys, they all put in their card here. I mean, they were going to settle here. They quit the band. So Woody broke up the band, see. He was going to reorganize.

And meanwhile, before he actually organized the band, I got another call to work from-- I used to live on Second [Street] and Chicago [Street] in Boyle Heights. And over on State Street, First [Street] and State, there was a ballroom called Pontrelli's Ballroom. Yeah. And that was the first place I had worked when I was learning to play the trumpet. I played with a little bandleader who had a band in those days. The bandleaders were Mexican, but they played the stock arrangements, American music, see. His name was Tillie Lopez. And I was just learning to play; maybe I was twelve or thirteen or fourteen. I'd go over there, and I'd sit in with the band and play. Now, this is Pontrelli's Ballroom in Boyle Heights.

Now, I got a call one time in around 1946, yeah, sometime, or '47, just right after Woody had disbanded the "Thundering

Herd," and Pontrelli says, "Hey, come down to play, come down to play. The trumpet player's crazy here." Some trumpet player came to town, and these Italian guys-- I think I can mention his name, what the heck; he might not be around. It's only the truth. It's Tommy di Carlo. And, you know, if you're a good hustler you can talk your way into a lot of ballrooms and clubs by talking, "Hey, I got six pieces here, and I got this and I got that." He landed the job. I don't know how he landed the gig there for a weekend or maybe two weekends. I don't know. But he OD'd [overdosed] on some bennies or something, so he couldn't play. So old man Pontrelli knew I lived three blocks down the street. He called me--he had my phone number--and I came down and I played. And I looked at the band, and the saxes, they were all tenors there. I said I couldn't understand-- Stocks are written first alto, second alto, you know, tenor, the old stock arrangements--you know, Glenn Miller's "In the Mood," whatever. So what I could figure out was that Jimmy Giuffre probably got the call, "Hey, get me four saxes." He says, "Well, hell, I won't get two altos. I've got to get four guys. Let them transpose the parts. More work!" And that's where the "four brothers" sound came from. There was Stan Getz, Zoot Sims, Herbie Steward, and Jimmy Giuffre.

ISOARDI: Wow.

LOPEZ: Yeah. But, see, Stan Getz mentions this in his book, but he gave the wrong Pontrelli. It wasn't Pete Pontrelli downtown; that was at the Figueroa Ballroom. It was Mr. Pontrelli from Boyle Heights.

ISOARDI: Pentrelli?

LOPEZ: Pontrelli, the same-- They were brothers, I think. From what I can get from Vince de Barry--he used to be a trumpet player in this town, and he was an official for the musicians union for a hundred years there--what I get from him is that the Pontrellis, they were brothers. And Pete Pontrelli had the ballroom, the Figueroa Ballroom, Pete Pontrelli or something, wherever that was. I never worked there. But this other Pontrelli had the Pontrelli's Ballroom in Boyle Heights. He called it Pontrelli's.

Now, the trombone player was--he played valve trombone--Gene Roland. He was a prominent arranger for Stan Kenton, prominent arranger in those days, too.

ISOARDI: So those guys just went into Woody Herman's saxophone section.

LOPEZ: Yeah, they just picked up their cases and walked in, because Jimmy Giuffre was writing for-- He says, "Well, I might as well--" You know, he had four tenors--He wrote four-part harmony "for four brothers." And the next thing I know, I'm hearing [sings to demonstrate]. I said, "It's that tenor

sound." Yeah. It's the same guys, the same guys. So that's how the "four brothers" were born, in Boyle Heights at Pontrelli's Ballroom. And who can corroborate that is-- Well, Zoot passed away, and so has Stan. But Herbie Steward is still around somewhere. He lives in California somewhere. And Jimmy Giuffre is still around. Because Gene Roland has passed away since then. I don't remember who the rhythm section was. Because you get on the bends, "Hey, how are you doing, man?" And then two days later, the same guy, you see him in another gig, you know.

ISOARDI: You were just there that one night?

LOPEZ: Maybe the weekend--Friday, Saturday, Sunday. I don't remember. But that's how it started.

ISOARDI: Okay. Then you're out of town for--what?--four years or so? You play with Freddie Slack in Chicago, and then you move on to New York?

LOPEZ: Yeah, okay. This is what happened. Oh, Jimmy Knepper was in that little [inaudible] small band, too.

ISOARDI: Oh, here in L.A. at Pontrelli's?

LOPEZ: No, no, in Chicago, at Freddie Slack's place. The Panther Room of the Hotel Sherman, the College Inn. The Panther Room of the College Inn of Hotel Sherman. They had some big long name, you know. They probably had more than one room, see. The Panther Room. The six weeks came and went, and I

had spent all my money just-- [tape recorder off] We'll get back to that. Well, the actual date was in November of 1947. I got a call from Freddie Slack to join the small group that he was forming to go to Chicago at the Panther Room at the College Inn at the Hotel Sherman. And the guys in the band, some of the people in that little small group-- One trumpet, one alto, Henry Horn on baritone, and Jimmy Knepper on trombone, Daryl Homer on guitar, Freddie Slack on piano, Paul Morrissey on bass, and drums is Maynard Sloate. I don't know if you ever heard of Maynard Sloate.

ISOARDI: Yeah, I know who he is.

LOPEZ: Yeah, let me just interject here. Just before that, when I had mentioned that the whole trumpet section of Woody Herman's just stayed here--Conrad Gozzo, Pete Condoli, Shorty Rogers, and Cappy Lewis-- I think it was Sonny Berman who split back to New York. In the rhythm section, the guys who stayed were Joe Mondragon--became very prominent in the studios there for many years--and Jimmy Rowles. I don't remember who else stayed, but Woody reorganized the "brothers" band then, right after that.

Anyway, getting back to Chicago, the six weeks came and went. Well, that was it. And the bass player says, "Well, I'm driving to New York." He was married. He had a wife. And like hit-or-miss, "Does anybody want to go to New York?"

And I said, "Well, shoot, I might as well. If I get home, I don't have enough money to buy that car." So when I went to New York, the first thing he did was to drive up to Charlie's Tavern. I don't know if it was during the morning or the afternoon. I just don't remember. Or whether we got there and we all checked into the hotel across the street from Charlie's Tavern, which is Fifty-first [Street] and Seventh Avenue, a very busy little corner there. There was a cafeteria right on the corner there, the La Salle Cafeteria. Between the La Salle Cafeteria and Charlie's Tavern, which was next door, everybody in New York City would know that you were there, because that was the network. You know, you hung around the street, and "Here's my phone number" and this and that. And old man Charlie was a nice gentleman, and Joe, the bartender. When I got in there, I remember him saying, "Did you eat today?" I said, "No." So he gave me a bowl of beef stew. Behind the counter they used to make little bowls of beef stew or something. And he fed me there a couple of times. And it was from hanging out-- I think I got a little room somewhere. But you got to hang out at Charlie's to get gigs. And that's where I met Frank Rosolino, the trombone player. Did I tell you about him?

ISOARDI: No.

LOPEZ: Well, you know, everybody introduces each other. "You

just got into town--" And "I'm looking for a place." And Frank says, "Well, you can stay with me. I've got a little room at Claremont House." Claremont House was next door to Juilliard [School]. And Claremont House was for students that went to Juilliard, you know, real cheap rent, like six bucks a week or something like that. You know, one bed--

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LOPEZ: Well, like he told me, he said, "I pay six bucks a week there. Give me three bucks, you can stay the whole week with me." So I remember staying there. It was just a place to be-- All you had to do in New York was find a place to sleep and hang out at Charlie's. You were bound to get some work, which I did. I got this gig and that gig. And you know, sometimes a bus would roll up to the front, and a guy would come out with a little piece of paper: "Any trombone players want to go out for three nights?" And somebody would pick up their hat and their 'bone and just hop on the bus and do it for three one-nighters. You know, you'd do that. That could never happen here. I don't know if it did happen here, just local.

But I went down and stayed with Frank Rosolino. In the meantime, I had gotten word that Boyd Raeburn was organizing the band to go into the Commodore Hotel, and he was having auditions at Nola's Studios. There's another word that's out of the past. Nola's Studios was a rehearsal room for rehearsal bands on Broadway. I think it was in--I'm not sure--the vicinity of Fifty-first [Street], between Fifty-first and Fifty-second [Street], or Fifty-second and

Fifty-third [Street], on Broadway. Oh, I had worked with Boyd here too at the Morocco Club. The Morocco Club was on Vine Street. What is the first street over from Sunset [Boulevard]? Yucca [Street]?

ISOARDI: On the other side of Sunset?

LOPEZ: Yeah.

ISOARDI: I don't remember.

LOPEZ: Well, it was on that block north of Sunset Boulevard. There was a club there called the Morocco, which was next door to the Key Club, where musicians used to come from NBC [National Broadcasting Company] studios, which were across the street. You know where the Home Savings [of America] bank is now? That was NBC. And musicians would go into-- That little hub. There was kind of a lot of activity going on there. Up the street was the theater where they'd put on stage shows. You know, just before you get to Hollywood Boulevard, that theater? They had things going on there.

So I had worked at the Morocco with Boyd Raeburn. I think one of the reasons why you did get gigs in those days was if you made all the rehearsals. Some of those leaders-- There were the guys that did all the studio work. You'd never see them around. And if you wanted to get a gig, well, at least you had to make all these rehearsals if you wanted to make the gig.

I had rehearsed a lot with Boyd, so when I was in New York, then I went up there, and I sat down, and we played one tune, and he said, "You're in." He told me I was in. So that was four weeks or six weeks, I don't remember. But that was at the Hotel Sherman. And who would be following us but the new "brothers" band [Woody Herman's Second Herd]. So they would come down sometimes just to hear our band, hanging out. That new "brothers" band was--Boy, he had Ernie Royal in the trumpet section, Marshal's brother, and they had all those four "brothers." I don't remember if Herbie Steward went along with that. But those were hot and heavy days. Because the hit of the day was "Nature Boy" by Nat King Cole. So people could piece that together. I remember it was a big hit. You walked down Broadway, they'd be blasting it out from every record store.

So I was sharing this little room with Frank Rosolino, small little room, but it was nice. It wasn't expensive. And they had places to eat for students too, and I'd go there, and Frank would go there. [mutual laughter] If you were near Columbia University you could do that too, walk in with the students at the cafeteria. And I remember for a nickel down at the Turf [Club] on Forty-seventh Street and Broadway, at the Turf you could get a cup of broth for a nickel. Man, it sure was good, tasted good

in those days. Also that still was the time where you could go into a bar and order a beer and go to the buffet and make yourself a sandwich. I remember doing that a lot. You'd buy a beer, you'd get two pieces of bread, mayonnaise, a slice of ham, and pickles, and everything.

ISOARDI: Jeez. Now you get carrot sticks and cauliflower.

LOPEZ: You do?

ISOARDI: Yeah, you don't get anything like that.

LOPEZ: At a bar? Yeah, well, that was different then. You still want me to go on about myself?

ISOARDI: Well, why don't we get to the point in New York where you start moving away from bands like that and you start hooking up with the new Latin sounds that are coming out?

LOPEZ: Right. That's very important. Now, what switched me over were a couple of things. I was working with Boyd Raeburn, and maybe Elliot Lawrence. I remember working with him. I remember working-- And Art Mooney. You remember Art Mooney?

ISOARDI: No.

LOPEZ: [sings] "I'm looking over a four leaf clover." Remember that? That was the hit. That was Art Mooney. He hit it big with that tune. And I went out on the road with him for thirty one-nighters, but I didn't stay the thirty; I got tired of that. And if you were to get with the real

heavy cats over there at the Royal Roost or Birdland-- And I don't know if it was called Birdland-- But the Royal Roost, that was on-- Well, let me see. It was near the Latin Quarter, which maybe should be around Forty-eighth [Street] or Forty-seventh Street, that little section between-- Let me see. From Forty-fourth Street right up to Fifty-second Street was a lot of music. In fact, I had gotten to New York at that time when Fifty-second Street had all those jazz clubs. And I remember going-- A friend of mine that I talked to recently said, "Don't you remember we went into one place and you wanted to go jam with Miles [Davis] over there at the Onyx Club, and I wanted to hear Sarah Vaughan over here at the Three Deuces? And you went over there. You had to stick your nose in there, wanted to play with Miles." So I was busy. I was there when the clubs were still there. They hadn't shut them down.

ISOARDI: So did you jam with Miles?

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. I jammed with Miles, sure. He remembered me. Many years later he remembered me. And I didn't want to remind him about the time when I met him when he was with Benny Carter's band, because he was just a very young kid, about fifteen or sixteen years old. I was eighteen; I was older than him. So getting back to-- You know, I wanted to hang out with the big boys, the ones that really played bebop

a lot. But a lot of them were getting into trouble.

ISOARDI: Yeah, you mentioned last time that it was off-putting when the drugs were coming in big and there was a lot of heavy police activity.

LOPEZ: Yeah. It was almost like stylish to get hooked or use high-powered drugs other than pot, you know. Pot was all over the place, and that was nothing. You'd be careful who you'd shake hands with. You walk down Broadway and shake hands, and when you walk away you'd find yourself with twenty rolls of joints in your hand--"Hey, have a good day." Twenty joints in your hand. That I could tolerate, but those other guys were beginning to stretch out into hard drugs. And I could just see that Woody band-- I mean, I'm not saying the whole Woody band was like that. Maybe for a few individuals--I could see the FBI agent running after them with a suitcase, trying to catch up on the one-nighters, chasing after the band, you know. "Wait for me! Wait for me!" And the guys in the back, "Come on. Hurry up, man!" They knew he was following them. [mutual laughter] That was comedy-like.

So I met my friend that I had worked with here in L.A. in the La Salle Cafeteria. His name was Charlie Mota, a godsend, my dear friend. I saw him Sunday. And he said, "I can get you a gig with Miguelito Valdes's band." "Yeah," I said, "great man." Because I wasn't working at that time. I did

a couple of gigs with Miguelito Valdes. And "Do an arrangement for him." "Oh, okay." So I wrote up an arrangement to make a quick fifty bucks or something like that. And it was for strings. "How High the Moon" I think it was. And he liked it. I noticed I hadn't played too many Latin bands because I didn't like it too much, you know, but then I started hearing all these Americanized voices and harmonies on top of this. I said, "Boy, this is something new. I like it."

ISOARDI: And this was bands like Machito?

LOPEZ: Machito, yeah. Tito Rodriguez, Tito Puente. "Gee, they're using structured music," you know. You just have to study that. Just like you write an arrangement for a big jazz band, you write it for a Latin band, too. Well, a little Latin rhythm section took it over and made it sound that way.

Now, I remember playing at the Triboro Theatre in the Bronx with Miguelito Valdes. Those neighbors had neighborhood theatres. Like there was a Puerto Rico Theatre, the Triboro Theatre. What's the one where everybody--? The famous one?

ISOARDI: Apollo [Theatre]?

LOPEZ: No, the theater where all the stars came out of. Oh, boy. I can't even think of them. Apollo. Yeah, the Apollo Theatre. Okay. Now, I went into that Triboro Theatre with Miguelito Valdes. He took in a show. They put together a show. And I remember there were three conga drums in the

band, three of them, Miguelito Valdes, his brother, and this guy Chano Pozo, who had just come over from Cuba. I remember playing one show, and I'm looking up at the audience, and I see three people come down the aisle and right up the front row and sit down. It was Dizzy Gillespie and two other people. Man, they were like big guys, and they came out to check out Chano Pozo. As soon as we were through with that gig, I hear that Chano Pozo's playing with Dizzy Gillespie. Then together they wrote "Manteca." So then the Latin jazz things started to bloom then. Charlie Parker was there, and he made some records with Machito's band, "Okiedoke" and a few other things, and, God, it sounded nice. And those Latin musicians, they weren't that far out as the jazz players, you know, a little more tame. They liked booze a lot, you know, booze and girls, and that was it. But I didn't know any that were messing around with hard drugs. So I said, "This is a pretty safe environment." So I stayed there. [mutual laughter]

ISOARDI: How long were you with Valdes?

LOPEZ: Oh, off and on. When he'd go into the theater he'd use three trumpets. When he'd go out of town they'd use two, and I was just the third added at the time. Then he caught me one time when I was between jobs in New York on the street. He said, "We're going to Puerto Rico to open the hotel--" What was the famous hotel? The old man--

Hilton, right? He was going to open the Hilton Hotel.

Oh, before that I was on the scene--you know, Charlie's and everything--and downstairs from Charlie's Tavern was the China Doll. You either went in through the entrance through Fifty-first or you could go through the side of the building where the elevator goes down there. There were two bands down there at the China Doll; there was Noro Morales and José Curvelo. So I remember they used to come up at their intermission. One band would relieve the other. That was the thing about New York, there were always two bands in every club, two bands. Oh, yeah. They swung it. But the Latin Quarter had two bands. The Havana-Madrid had two bands. The Roseland Ballroom had three bands up there. The China Doll had two bands. Up the street the Arcadia had revolving bandstands. One block away, two bands. The Palladium across the street was where mambo was born, on Saturday they'd start at one o'clock in the afternoon and go to four the next morning, maybe four or five bands.

So that's when I was introduced to Umberto Morales, the timbale player for Noro, his brother. And, I don't know--He wanted me to get in Noro's band because I could play jazz. At that time there were no jazz trumpet players taking jazz solos in Latin music. And I started it, more or less, see. And one of the tunes that I co-wrote with Noro and we recorded,

I took the jazz trumpet solo on there.

ISOARDI: So there were a lot of Latin bands that were moving in the jazz direction then?

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. They were moving in more modern chordal construction, melodic lines. Latin bands still had a lot of singing, thematic singing and chorus. But if somebody would sing a phrase and then the band would answer [sings example of background horn riff], you turned around, because those things were voiced in a different way, you know. They were like, maybe, you know [demonstrates riff chord voicings on piano keyboard], not the typical [demonstrates]. See what I'm saying? Really perfect fourths and harmonizations and polytonal things, and you know. So Latin music via Juilliard was born, see. That's what you'd call it.

ISOARDI: Why via Juilliard? Because of the way the music was starting to be voiced then?

LOPEZ: Yeah. Because the arrangers were really getting down to writing hip chords and everything, and you could apply them to Latin bands. You know, like-- Did you hear--? I just want to show you. Have you heard this CD at all?

ISOARDI: No, not at all.

LOPEZ: I did all the writing on that except for two tunes.

ISOARDI: No kidding. This is a CD called California Salsa II.

LOPEZ: Two. And this is California Salsa I.

ISOARDI: Wow. They're by the Hispanic Musicians Association, or they present the Hispanic Musicians--

LOPEZ: Yeah. Well, we were-- I was the vice president, Bobby Rodriguez was president, and we had a membership.

ISOARDI: Oh, I see. It's the HMA Salsa Jazz Orchestra.

LOPEZ: Yeah, see there--

ISOARDI: "All selections orchestrated by Paul Lopez." Oh, fabulous.

LOPEZ: The thing is that it was beginning to get-- I'm not going to play you the whole thing. I just want to give you a little idea of the harmonic structures.

ISOARDI: Wow, that's great.

LOPEZ: If I had the extra ones I'd give them to you, but I have to buy them all myself. [laughs]

ISOARDI: No, I'll look for them. I'll look for them.

LOPEZ: I'll make a point of trying to get a CD player. I don't even have a CD player. [laughs] I don't! See, if you can just hear a few phrases of this-- [tape recorder off] Latin music hadn't evolved to where it is today, like that arrangement that I just played for you.

ISOARDI: Yeah. But you saw the beginning of that, moving towards that. You were part of that.

LOPEZ: Oh, yeah. I was part of that.

ISOARDI: Did it make you want to write? Because you hadn't done much writing yet. You had done that thing for Valdez.

LOPEZ: Yeah. I did more writing while I was here like for Phil Carréon's band and a few other people, you know, just learning to write. And as I went on through the years I kept buying more and more arranging books and developing technique. But it's strange. I didn't want to sit still. You know, I wanted to walk around and move around. Because writing--

ISOARDI: It's a pretty solitary, sedentary kind of thing.

LOPEZ: I did seven years in a bed, flat on my back, you know. I don't want to-- That's with polio-- But I eventually went into it for full-- It was something that I could do, but it could be developed better, which I developed more in the later years. And I was having too much fun with my horn. [mutual laughter] Yeah. So I was there from the beginning when the Latin jazz started in, Charlie Parker and Dizzy. But I was one of the first jazz trumpet players to play on top of a Latin setting, a progression of Latin music. That's why Umberto wanted me in the band. And it was a good experience.

ISOARDI: And you stayed there for a few years doing that. You played with a number of bands?

LOPEZ: Well, I stayed with Noro for maybe six months. It was a long time. Then we went to Puerto Rico--this is before I had gone with Miguelito--for a week to one of the hotels

there. And then I remember coming back to New York, and the band took a hiatus, a couple of weeks or whatever it was. Then Noro went back into the China Doll.

Meanwhile, we had recorded "110th and 5th Avenue," which became a hit for Noro, but it was a head arrangement. Noro did [demonstrates] four-bar, repeated bass line. He said, "Do something." So I added the top lines and a little melodic line and trumpet solo and the background for a saxophone solo. And when we recorded it Noro didn't put my name on the record, you know. And he must have made some-- You know, I didn't-- What the hell did I know about business? I'm a young kid, I come home-- I've got to get home, back to the apartment. The guy's having a ball or something, you know. So I didn't realize the importance of business then. It's only been recently, through Max Salazar's efforts, that they put my name on the copyright of that "110th and 5th Avenue." So that was the beginning of the Latin jazz.

ISOARDI: Yeah. How long were you in New York, then?

LOPEZ: Right after that--this is funny-- While I was working at the China Doll with Noro I was staying over near Madison Square Garden, at Lansear Apartments. And a couple of other bands were staying there. In those days there was a band called Sam Donahue. They would make New York their central point of staying there, but they would go out on weekends

and play one-nighters in the other states. You could drive to Philly [Philadelphia] in an hour or something. You could drive to different cities in a matter of two or three hours, you know, because they were that close together. Yeah. So Doc Severinsen was with that band. Noro didn't hire me when he went back, because I must have given him a rough time about something, either about the-- I don't know what it was.

See, the reason I think that Noro didn't make it as big as Tito Puente, Tito Rodriguez, is that he was not adding to the library. He was sitting down on his laurels on four arrangements.

ISOARDI: Oh, whereas Tito was writing all the time.

LOPEZ: They were just knocking them out. "New material, new material." I told him "You've got to have some new material." And sometimes there was an opening for a tenor, and I would have been happy if he had gotten one of those young, hot tenor players, the young kids around. But the lead alto man got his buddy, and he was already gray haired, and it was just another gig to him. But to me it was an exciting time. Things were happening. Plus, Noro not adding any material through the book-- I mean, you know. In fact, one night we played--on Saturday night, when I was with Noro Morales--a gig in the Menorah Temple in Brooklyn, and the band boy didn't pick up my book. I played the whole night by memory. Noro didn't

know! I played the whole book by memory! [laughs] You know, "When are you going to add a new tune to the book?"

ISOARDI: Really. [laughs]

LOPEZ: And I did "Stardust" for him. [laughs] I sounded like Billy Butterfield. I've got a tape of it over there. If you have a chance, maybe I'll get it and just let you hear a few bars. And I did my own arrangement of "Stardust" so I could play it. And then Noro says, "Why don't you make me a bebop arrangement?" You know, I'm working with the guy. I felt like saying, "Well, why don't you pay me for the arrangement?" You know, just because I'm on salary doesn't mean that I have to-- So I went ahead. I did "Billie's Bounce" for him, a bebop arrangement. He liked it, the Charlie Parker thing. So he kept that, and he kept "Stardust."

And "110th and 5th Avenue" had made a hit for him. In fact, Max Salazar called me from New York and said, "Gee, you must be living in a mansion now. There's all the money Noro made--" "What money are you talking about?" Because he found out through somebody else that I was the cowriter of that. It's very important, that "110th and 5th Avenue," very, very important. In fact, this will take a second. [shuffles through pages] Oh, my God. This is wild. This kind of piece-- Just glance through this and look where it's highlighted. Then look at the dates. Then you can see

something here.

ISOARDI: This is for a recording session? April 17, 1950, in New York, Miguelito Valdes and his orchestra. And you're his trumpet?

LOPEZ: Yeah. He tracked me down. I don't know where he got those things, but, you know, you made a recording. They keep track of it at the union or something. Let me see something here.

ISOARDI: So it shows you with writer's credit on one of the pieces.

LOPEZ: Yeah, sure.

ISOARDI: "Hilton Caribe."

LOPEZ: Uh-huh. That was a good tune. I wrote the bridge to that. And Chico O'Farrill did the arrangement, right? That's interesting, isn't it? That's interesting, isn't it? [tape recorder off]

ISOARDI: So you left Noro after how long? Six months, you think? Longer?

LOPEZ: Maybe six months.

ISOARDI: And Doc Severinsen took your place?

LOPEZ: Yeah. Because he needed the work, you know.

ISOARDI: Then when did you come back to Los Angeles?

LOPEZ: Let me see. In 1950 I came back with Miguelito Valdes's band. Because after Noro didn't hire me there, I went with

Miguelito Valdes to Puerto Rico to open the Hilton Hotel, a four-month gig.

ISOARDI: Really?

LOPEZ: Sixteen weeks. Is that right? Yeah, sixteen weeks in the sunshine, and being paid for it and everything. So he had a string of-- You know, he had location jobs, Miguelito. We were at the Ambassador here. You know the Ambassador Hotel?

ISOARDI: Yeah, yeah. Down on Wilshire Boulevard.

LOPEZ: Six weeks. Everybody would come down and hear this New York Latin band, you know. All the musicians would come down. Then we were at the Fairmont [Hotel] for sixteen weeks.

ISOARDI: San Francisco?

LOPEZ: San Francisco. Four months. Boy, it was nice.

ISOARDI: So is that when you kind of settled, then, back in L.A.?

LOPEZ: No. I went back to New York in '52 and-- Oh, boy. Let me see. Then I worked around town, because Miguel had to cut down the band and used a smaller band. I worked around town. Then Miguel in 1951 went back to Puerto Rico. It wasn't as much fun then, because the first time around is pretty nice. We were there for another sixteen weeks. That's nice gigs, you know. And then when he came back here to play up and down the coast to do some one-nighters, I decided to stay. That was '52. So the only time I went back to New York was--

I went back in '54, came back. I went back in '57, and then I came back. And then I didn't go back for a long time. Things were beginning to change a little bit. What was happening is the TV came in in 1949, and things were beginning to change, believe me.

ISOARDI: Yeah, people not going out as much.

LOPEZ: People weren't going out as much, no.

ISOARDI: If you came back here in '52, that was just about the time that they were voting on the amalgamation of the two unions [Local 767 and Local 47]. Were you part of that or aware of that? Or did you have any strong feelings one way or the other?

LOPEZ: The two unions, no. No, I didn't have any strong feelings one way or the other. You know, I liked it that they put it together. It's nice. But I didn't have any say about it. You go down and vote. So the vote was unanimous. I guess there are some people that could tell you more about that.

ISOARDI: There's somebody else you mentioned when we were talking earlier I wanted to ask you about. I know by this time, by the fifties, I know he's back in L.A., and that's Calvin Jackson.

LOPEZ: Oh. I met him in Canada.

ISOARDI: Did you? In Toronto?

LOPEZ: Yeah, yeah. I'm not sure what the hell went on, because I'm not too clear about politics, but he got in trouble or something or other. I don't know.

ISOARDI: What did you think of Calvin Jackson? Or what can you say about him?

LOPEZ: To me he was a good musician. He did some things at MGM [Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer] studios. But I don't know-- I can't say-- When was that witch hunt for the communists?

ISOARDI: That was the late forties, early fifties.

LOPEZ: Well, a bunch of people split town after that. So I don't know. Somebody mentioned him, and Jerry Fielding was accused of something. And I never saw Calvin again, for a long time, until I went to Canada. But what do I know about it? You know, he told me, "Buy this book and buy that book and you can learn to write good."

This is the Freddy Slack band in Chicago. [shows photographs to Isoardi] This is the Miguelito Valdes band, 1949. Pretty interesting.

ISOARDI: Yeah.

LOPEZ: No, I'm trying to find something, but I'll find that later. What I need is the--

ISOARDI: When you were in New York, did you study at Juilliard at all?

LOPEZ: Yeah. Oh, it was expensive. When I had come back

from Puerto Rico in '52, the second time we went to Puerto Rico with Miguelito Valdes, then he went to St. Louis. But he cut down to two trumpets, from four to two, four to three, three to two, you know, because of budget. But I enrolled at Juilliard the summer of '51 and took a course in composition there. It cost me like $300, man, or, no, maybe $200.

ISOARDI: Expensive.

LOPEZ: It took a chunk out of it. But I studied there, and it was very-- You know, the atmosphere was nice.

ISOARDI: But was that the only class you really had on composition and writing, then?

LOPEZ: Yeah, there.

ISOARDI: Because the rest you were self-taught, weren't you, for the most part?

LOPEZ: The rest was self-taught. But I've had private teachers. Chico O'Farrill gave me a few classes. I asked him a lot of questions. And people here in town. In fact, one guy just died that was very instrumental in my writing. And he only got like a little section in Down Beat [magazine], George Handy. You ever heard of him?

ISOARDI: Yeah.

LOPEZ: He was quite an innovative writer. He wrote some things for the Boyd Raeburn band that were kind of far-out for the time.

ISOARDI: That was a different band. You guys were playing different sounds.

LOPEZ: That's an innovator band. I've worked with three in my life. I've worked with him, Boyd Raeburn, Stan Kenton--I worked a couple of gigs with Stan Kenton, but I played with him--and Don Ellis. Yeah, in fact, that album is right in back of the chair, the first album there. I'm in the trumpet section. Open it up. You can--

ISOARDI: Don Ellis Orchestra Live at Monterey.

LOPEZ: Yeah. I'm in that band.

ISOARDI: What was L.A. like when you came back in '52, Paul? Had you noticed changes?

LOPEZ: Well, they were just getting all excited about Latin music. And this was a good place for-- This disc jockey used to bring bands into the [Hollywood] Palladium here. Chico Sesma used to bring in Tito Puente, Tito Rodriguez, and a bunch of East Coast bands into the Palladium and promote these dances here. The West Coast--I'm talking about the fifties--was just discovering Latin music. Not the mariachi. They'd been listening to Benny Goodman and Glenn Miller for years, but all of a sudden they say, "Here's some swinging things with Latin lyrics to them," you know, cha-chas, whatever. So they were just discovered there, and things were beginning to-- There were a lot of clubs in Hollywood, a lot of Latin

clubs.

ISOARDI: Such as--?

LOPEZ: Well, jeez. You'd have to talk to Johnny Martinez. Johnny Martinez knows about all these clubs. I can't even-- Like I said, there was one up there on Hollywood Boulevard near Fairfax [Avenue], and there was another one over there on Santa Monica Boulevard. You know, I cannot just remember these different places.

ISOARDI: So was this the way your music was starting to go, then? You were playing in a lot of these bands?

LOPEZ: Uh-huh, playing in a lot of the Latin bands in town. Because there isn't-- If you want to play jazz music, you have to go out on the road with a band. You're not going to have a jazz band play a location here. You know what I mean? But the Latin bands, the people went out to dance, the dance craze.

ISOARDI: Did you ever think about trying to get into studio work?

LOPEZ: Well, I'd do a few calls every now and then when they felt they could use me, but I didn't feel I was that competent to play the really legit hard stuff. I didn't have that much training. Because you have to be real good to do that. Just listen to some of that music of-- For instance, what is that "Star something-or-other," the interplanetary shows on channel

13. Do you know what I'm talking about?

ISOARDI: No.

LOPEZ: Star Wars, something like that?

ISOARDI: The movie?

LOPEZ: No, not the movie. Well, anyway, you hear some of that music, you hear some of the best musicians in the world. I couldn't play that. [sings variation on the theme to Star Trek: The Next Generation]. It's very classical. I wasn't classically trained. I'm too jazzy. [mutual laughter] So you've got to be really good to play the studios, but you have to be very gifted in both departments, and I didn't have that much training to be able to cover both of them. But there were always the "lions" here that did all the recordings like for Sinatra and Perry Como and people like that. It was that bunch, a bunch of very, very extremely competent trumpet players. They had everything more or less sewed up. You know, they had their date book-- There were even some musicians, "I don't want to work on Saturdays," and they'd want to take off. Maybe they had two record sessions a day sometimes.

ISOARDI: Any other thoughts on L.A., though, on the music and on the Latin scene and how that was starting to emerge?

LOPEZ: Well, I know it isn't as popular as it used to be here.

ISOARDI: Really?

LOPEZ: Really. Latin music as I know it, Caribbean music, Cuban, Puerto Rican, which is our salsa music. Because L.A.'s a strange town. If you get a big influx of the Chinese people here we'll be playing nothing but Chinese music, you know. Like you've got a big influx of the people across the border. They brought their music. All you hear is them. They even had a thing at the Hollywood Bowl, didn't they? Mariachi festival or something. A hundred mariachi bands. I don't want to hear that. I want to hear some harmony. I want to see people reading paper, reading music, reading notes.

ISOARDI: I wanted to go back a bit and ask you about something that I guess started when you were a youngster, and that's the Los Angeles Music and Art School.

LOPEZ: Oh, that was nice.

ISOARDI: Maybe you could talk a bit about that and its importance.

LOPEZ: Well, let me just give you a real fast, brief thing. I found out how to do something here.

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ISOARDI: I know when we talked last time, you mentioned about the beginnings of the Los Angeles [Music and Art] School. But maybe you could talk a bit about how long it's lasted, what its importance has been, some of the people, maybe, who came out of there.

LOPEZ: Let me see. Well, like I say, the Los Angeles Music and Arts School, they have chosen the date of 1944 as their inception, but before that-- I was going in 1939 or '38, and it was called the Neighborhood Music School. And evidently Miss Pearle Odell was running the school and had a little lack of communication with the board of directors or something. And who knows, maybe they wanted to cut something here, cut something there. She just took all the students and went next door, to the empty building next door, and started the Los Angeles Music and Art School there and was very successful. But it was through her good work that she did encourage everybody to keep going. And it was a good school, because they taught violin and brass instruments and singing. I don't know what else they taught, because I'd just come in through the back door, get my lesson, and then just split out the back door.

ISOARDI: What did the lessons cost?

LOPEZ: Twenty-five cents a lesson. A quarter. [laughs] A quarter for a lesson. That's a long time ago.

ISOARDI: Yeah. Well, that school had its fiftieth anniversary in '94, right? So it's been--

LOPEZ: In '94, yeah.

ISOARDI: 'Forty-four to '94. So it's been a force within the community for many, many years.

LOPEZ: Sure, yeah. They still have classes there. It's expanded a little more. They got a new building over there on--oh, God--Third Street, I think. See, when I don't have all the materials in hand-- But it's in East Los Angeles, Los Angeles Music and Arts School. It's a big, nice building, and they've got classes there. And they teach dance there too, ballet dancing, I think. So it's functioning very well after all these years.

ISOARDI: Can you think of any other musicians we might know of who came out of there?

LOPEZ: No, just my friend [Lionel] "Chico" Sesma, the trombone player. We both went to the music and arts school, the Neighborhood Music School we called it. He wound up playing with a bunch of bands, and, like I said, he eventually became a disc jockey, and then he became a promoter. He brought all these Latin bands from New York into the Hollywood Palladium and brought a bunch of other organizations and got the craze

of Latin music going here.

And there were a lot of dancers here, because a lot of those people-- A lot of the people who would come to the clubs here in the sixties to hear Latin music were people who lived in New York. They moved out here, moved out to the Fairfax [Avenue] district, and they missed their old mambo, you know. The Palladium there, that's what kept music alive here for a while. But, see, now nobody remembers that, because it played itself out. That generation is gone. Good heavens. I've definitely got to get you that cassette so you could see that. It explains all that, too. And it interviews dancers. Some of the dancers from the Palladium, it interviews them there. It tells you, oh, a lot of things. But you don't have the same enthusiasm here today as you did in the sixties here. Those Arthur Murray [dance] studios were burning, boy. They got a lot of pupils, you know. They wanted to learn the mambo and the cha-cha and everything else. What they want to learn is how to take care of themselves, keep from getting killed.

ISOARDI: Well, you know, one of the things that's popular again now is swing dancing.

LOPEZ: Well, that's good. I'm glad, because--

ISOARDI: It's getting more and more popular.

LOPEZ: I bet a lot of those kids don't know what the buck and wing is or the lindy hop or the balboa or the shag.

See, those are all dances--I'd see a chick dancing the balboa down there when I was playing with Paul Martin in the Trianon Ballroom here. In those years of '45, '46, '47, I worked with a lot of bands. There was a ballroom in South Gate called the Trianon Ballroom. All the big bands would come there.

ISOARDI: Who went to the Trianon? Was it mostly a white audience or--?

LOPEZ: White audience, yeah. Sure. Every neighborhood had a big ballroom, and they could afford to bring some of the big bands in because a lot of people attended. You know, you didn't just have to go to the Palladium. There was Casino Gardens down-- Aragon [Ballroom], the Lick Pier, Casino Gardens down at the beach. You remember that?

ISOARDI: No.

LOPEZ: Tommy Dorsey used to own that. And then next to that was the Aragon Ballroom. And if you went to San Bernardino there would be the Rainbow Ballroom over there. I mean, there were a lot of ballrooms. And they'd book big bands in there.

ISOARDI: People were out dancing.

LOPEZ: People were out dancing, dancing fools.

ISOARDI: Gee. Well, on that note, the next question is, well, do you have any final thoughts? I mean, after thinking about what it was like then and the way people were getting out so much, anything you want to add that maybe we haven't covered

yet, that you want to go over?

LOPEZ: As they say, you know, time marches on. I'd like to see people study music a little more so they can evaluate it a little better. You know what I mean? Because if you don't know what to look for in some art, any form of art, you're not going to find anything. You've got to know what to look for, something that appeals to you. And I'm glad to hear you say that some swing bands are coming back. But, you see, that would-- Who knows? I might get a call to do a couple of arrangements. But it seems to be--

What is out there today, the norm if you put TV on is rock and roll, rock and roll and maybe some country-western. But that's all right. But I don't think these young people are studying the fundamentals of music, basic harmony, Harmony I, II, III, and IV. And it doesn't make any difference what show I put, the Jay Leno [the Tonight Show] show or [David] Letterman [the Late Show]. I mean, you've got rock groups on there, two guys with guitars up in front with green hair singing. What the hell is that? I don't hear any section work. I don't hear any perfection of music. And they're getting Grammy [Awards] and Oscars [Academy Awards] and this and that. For what? You couldn't give me the records. I don't know what I'd do with them. [laughs]

But I'd like to see more groups. I'd like to see brass

sections and sax sections and violin sections and things. See what I'm saying? And that's funny when I watch the David Letterman show and he says, "Paul Schaeffer and the CBS Orchestra" and goes like this. This guy's like Toscanini out there, and there's three people back there! He's waving his hands like, you know, he's got a whole symphony orchestra, and there's only one trumpet, one saxophone. You noticed that?

ISOARDI: And a couple of guitars.

LOPEZ: Yeah. What orchestra? We used to call them combos. [mutual laughter]

I'd like to see more educated music come around again. But I just keep going. It will turn around, maybe.

ISOARDI: Well, keep doing it, Paul.

LOPEZ: I don't know if I gave you enough material there to work with.

ISOARDI: No, thanks very much.

LOPEZ: If there's anything you want to expand on, you hear something you want to know a little bit more about, let me know.

ISOARDI: All right, will do. Thank you.

LOPEZ: Thank you.

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