

**Oral History Interview of
George Sulaica**

**Interviewed by: Daniel Sanchez
November 7, 2011
Lubbock, Texas**

**Part of the:
*Hispanic Interview Project***

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Interview Series Background:

The Hispanic Interview Project documents the diverse perspectives of the Hispanic people of Lubbock and the South Plains. These interviews and accompanying manuscript materials cover a myriad of topics including; early Lubbock, discrimination, politics, education, music, art, cultural celebrations, the May 11th 1970 tornado, commerce, and sport.

Transcript Overview:

This interview features George Sulaica, leader of the Chicano band, Los Premiers. George talks about his time with his band, how he sees music has changed, and about the local music scene in Lubbock then and now.

Length of Interview: 00:47:58

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Daniel Sánchez (DS):

My name is Daniel Sánchez and I'm at the home of George Sulaica in Lubbock, Texas at 101 North Avenue N, and George was the group leader of the band Los Premiers and we're going to talk about his music history, but first we're going to start off with a little bit of background on George himself. George, state your complete legal name.

George Sulaica (GS):

My name is George Sulaica, Senior, and yes I started the Premier band back in the sixties.

Daniel Sánchez:

Okay. Can you tell us when and where you were born?

GS:

I was born in Crystal City, Texas, but I was raised here in Lubbock, Texas. I was, I think, probably about five years old when we moved to Lubbock, so the majority of my years were here in Lubbock.

Daniel Sánchez:

And to help people out with genealogy, we like to ask a little bit of background. Now, what were your parents' names and where were they from?

GS:

Okay, my dad was from Eagle Pass, Texas, his name was Paul, "Pablo" Sulaica Senior, and my mom was—I'm not sure what part of Mexico she was from, her name was Maria Perez Sulaica.

DS:

You mentioned you were born in Crystal City—

GS:

Yes.

DS:

What made them move to Crystal City?

GS:

Well, we used to go to the jobs over there in Minnesota. I guess you could call us—just traveling, you know, work. Every year we would go to Minnesota, and then we would stop here in Lubbock for the cotton—pick up cotton, so my dad just decided we'd stay here. We bought a house, and we just stayed here. We were actually migrant workers.

DS:

Where's that first house that they bought here?

GS:

Where that flea market is on Clovis Road.

DS:

Okay, that was called the Hueso back then, right?

GS:

The Hueso, and it was damaged when the tornado hit back in '70? I think it was in '70. So that was when they moved to the Barrio, *acá* [over here] in Second Street by Brook's.

DS:

What do you remember about that neighborhood over there?

GS:

Well, I was a kid; I was young. All I can remember is playing football and baseball in the streets. I mean, there was sandstorms back in those days. One of my neighbors was—I forgot his parents' name, but he was Alvino Lovato, and they had a big old light where they lived, so we used to gather there and play kick-the-bucket or whatever, you know, we were kids.

DS:

I remember Alvino was a big-time baseball player.

GS:

Oh yeah, Alvino? Yeah. Um-hm.

DS:

And did you join any of those sports, also?

GS:

Well, I played in little league with his son. And then after that, you know, we kind of moved on to different things.

DS:

When did you get started in music?

GS:

I think in music I started in the early sixties. And then around the middle of the sixties, I started my own band. I used to play with Joe Sosa and—what was the name of that band? I can't remember the name of the band. Anyway, I started playing with him for about two and a half, three years. And then I just decided to pick up my own band, and from there on—I started talking to Little Joe, and I recorded a tape, you know, and I showed it to him, and I went over there to I think it was Abilene, where I met him. And he liked it, he liked the music and everything, but he said it wasn't recorded right. So he sent one of his music guys—Tony Matamoros—and he sent him over, and I think our first album was recorded here at Sounds Unlimited, here in Lubbock. And then the second album was recorded in San Antonio.

DS:

And where was Sounds Unlimited at?

GS:

Sounds Unlimited was in—I believe it was on 13th or 14th Street. And I'm not sure if it was Avenue L or M, somewhere in there. It was a small building, it was nice. Real nice.

DS:

Do you remember who the owner was?

GS:

No, I sure don't. I can't remember who it was. As a matter of fact, it's still going on, but they moved to a different place. I don't know where they are now, but I heard the name of it watching T.V and the news, so I'm sure they're still recording bands here from Lubbock.

DS:

Were they recording a lot of Mexicano bands, a lot of Chicano bands?

GS:

At that time, it was just us and the Night Walkers. They were only recording because we had already talked to Little Joe and the Latinaires and they—for some reason they decided to stop and we went ahead and kept on, you know. So as soon as we recorded, Little Joe would call all the places where he used to play and he'd recommend us, because we were recording under his label, so that's when we started taking tours, you know. It came out real good until little after the tornado, I mean, we just kind of gave up, broke up because things were—and the majority of the guys were in school, in college, in high school. Billy Aguero [Bidal Aguero] had just finished high school and was into college, you know. Not until after we finished, that's when he started the *Editor*, you know, the newspaper magazine. So it was just fun memories I had.

DS:

Well, talk about that, those first years. Do you remember the first members of the band?

GS:

Yes. The original ones were Bobby Aguilar, Cecil Puentes, Catarino—I can't remember his last name *pero* [but] he was called Cat, we used to call him Cat, Victor Salazar, Bugla, Frank Diaz, his nickname became Crow, of course Bidal Aguero. Bidal Aguero was actually my second hand, I mean, you know, he was kind of like the manager, you know. He would help me with the guys and music and all that. As a matter of fact, he did a lot of arrangement himself and all that. He was pretty good. He played a tenor saxophone. So he was real good. So I paid him a little extra because he was my assistant, you know, because he was real good. And then Cecil Puentes was one of the guys, Julio Llanas—as a matter of fact, he was the drummer, I think he graduated from Tech, and Julian Orta. I can't remember some of those; I bet I've had a good hundred guys playing in the band. I mean, I know I had three or four guitar players, base players, and drummers I had about five, and trumpet players. I had Danny Llanas was also one of the trumpet players and—what's his name? His dad used to be a radio announcer here at KLFB. Reggie—Richard, but we used to call him Reggie. He was the son of I don't know if you remember *el que le decian* [the one they'd call] El Compadre, he used to be a DJ here at KLFB. And, well, a bunch of guys and then since all this time, we've already had about five or six of them that passed away. So it's good memories.

DS:

What was the original sound you all had, and the influences?

GS:

We're trying to get the sound of—kind of like Little Joe. Because of course nowadays, the music, the sounds had to change a lot, some for good, some for—To me, there's a lot of good bands out there now. But we had the sounds kind of like Little Joe, Agustín Ramirez, Sunny and the Sunliners, you know, old bands. And then of course we tried to get our own style, our own thing going, you know. And of course Billy Aguero was the one that was helping me do all that, getting our own sound. Apparently, that's what helped us a lot of times to get the tour, the second tour we got. We had two tours. The second was—they liked the music, so they called us back and we went back. We went all the way to Chicago, Illinois; California, Hollywood, and part of Oklahoma, part of Kansas. And of course we made some tours here with Little Joe and the Latinaires here in Texas; we were kind of like his side band. So we started the show and all that, he came in and all that. But when we started recording, getting more popular, then we went in ourselves.

DS:

You know, you mentioned that you all were trying to get your own sound. What was that like? What differences would you say you had?

GS:

Well, the vocalist, the horns, it was different from what it is now. Nowadays—also the keyboard, I mean, they used keyboards. At that time, we had organ players, and my brother-in-law, Joe Chavez was our organ player. And he bought a—they used to call it a Leslie Amplifier for the organ, and it would give it a different sound compared to nowadays. Of course the horns nowadays—we used to play more [inaudible] and as a matter of fact, we were the only band that played soul music. Because we played at Texas Tech on a dance one time there; we played all kinds of music. We played not only Spanish music, Mexican music. We played soul music, rock and roll and all that, you know. So we accomplished any kind as long as they called us and gave us the right price, we would go and play. And we played at Texas Tech, in English, the whole night. And then we played I think it was in Ralls High School graduation, so we played there also.

DS:

Well that's interesting, you know. Because I know that there's been books written about the soul music that Chicanos played like out in L.A. San Antonio was known for soul. Did you have this type of sound, or did you have something different?

GS:

Yes. We had sounds of soul music, as a matter of fact we also kind of helped guys to record, and we would put the band and the guy would sing, you know, a black-American guy, and he would sing soul music, and the band would back him up, you know. And we did that at Sounds Unlimited also. We never heard from the guy anymore, I don't know if he made it or what.

DS:

What was the guy's name?

GS:

I think it was Charles.

DS:

Charles. Do you remember his last name?

GS:

I don't remember his last name if I'm not mistaken, Dickens. Charles Dickens.

DS:

I seem to remember a book by that name.

GS:

I don't know if he still plays around, or if he passed away, or where's he at or what. I know he was older than I was. I'm sixty-five, so he'd probably be sixty-seven or sixty-eight years old now. As a matter of fact, he wrote the songs and then we'd help him with the music and all that so we recorded it. We recorded a 45, and then after that, I don't know if he ever made a go of it or not. And actually, he was from California, I think he was from California. He came to Texas, trying to find a band to join him or something. I tell him, "Well, we can't join you, but we'll help you if you need the help," so we helped him record.

DS:

So he was the vocalist and you all were the back-up band, basically?

GS:

Right. Well, the guys, I was just watching them. They left me out.

DS:

Because you were the vocalist?

GS:

Yeah. I was the vocalist, and then I also—at first, I was playing the trumpet and vocalist, and then I quit playing the trumpet because I got another trumpet player to replace me, and I was just doing the vocalist, you know. And we were nine players in the band, and then after a while—I had a good buddy of mine, and he'd play soul music real good, so actually we were ten of us. And then we played a lot of battle bands here in Lubbock, with the bands that were playing at that time. The Night Walkers, the Jovenes There was about four bands, and we'd usually come up pretty good. We had three or four trophies that we came out first place. And a lot of times they would tell me—you know how things go—they were great, they were good musicians, all of them. So I never had anything other than telling me, "You know, you need to get out from Lubbock because here, you're not going to make any money."

DS:

Let me ask about that. First, let's talk about the music scene here, and then talk about the road and all the experiences y'all had on the road.

GS:

Well, we used to play, I don't know if you remember when Carlos Perez was here and Willie Acosta? They had the Civic Center, they used to call it the Civic Center, it's now—I don't know

what they call it now. It used to be a bowling alley but they fixed it up real nice, and we used to play there on Wednesday nights for the kids, for teenagers, and we would charge fifty cents. And then we would play, like, when they had big bands coming in, we would start, we opened up for them. And after we started recording, traveling, we stopped doing that, you know. And the traveling to me was the best part, because we got to go to a lot of states we'd never been before. And the music got us through all the way to Illinois, all the way to California. We even stopped at Las Vegas, and El Paso and Juarez, so we had some good times, you know. Of course we missed home because we were gone for about two and a half months at a time and I missed my wife's cooking, and I'm sure the guys missed their moms, or wives or girlfriends. So in a way it was sad, but in a way it was good because we had some good experiences.

DS:

What was it like traveling the countryside back then?

GS:

It was great. I liked it. We all liked it. I mean, we got to see a lot of accidents. I always prayed that we never had one, but we had one going to Kansas City. That's when we had an accident ourselves, we had some blowouts and one of the vans started flipping around, so that was the only time we ever had an accident. Other than that, we were all over and we never had any problems. It was real good, a lot of good memories.

DS:

And you talked about the number of people that came through the band. At what point did you realize that the band was probably coming to an end?

GS:

I think about after the tornado, I had a contract offer from another label. Little Joe recommended me to this, he says, "I don't have time because I'm playing myself." So he recommended me to El Zarape Records and they offered me a contract, he says, "You don't have to worry about bookings, or prices, we'll do all that for you. Of course the only thing we want you to do is sign a contract and record an album every year, every year, every year." And I talked to the guys and I don't blame them, because some of the guys were in college and they said they couldn't make it. I tell them, "Well, the reason I haven't picked up a band was because I wanted to make a go of it." This was my idea, to make a go of it.

So I broke up the band and picked up another band with guys that weren't going to school; they were older guys. And I was asking them if they wanted to play with me, we were going to go professional, but I think we practiced for about three or four months and it didn't work out, so I came back and picked up my own band. And I think after that we only played a few months then we just finally broke up. As a matter of fact, some of the guys that used to play with me, they joined the Night Walkers and they had an accident. And one of my players that used to play with

me—the trumpet—he got killed in that accident. It was here on—Abernathy or Hale Center. And then I had about two other guys that were with them also. They weren't killed, but they were seriously injured, and that was sad. I remember one of the ladies—grandmothers used to tell me, "George, all this time that he was with you, you all never had any problems, any accidents. Now he joins this other band and right here, across Lubbock and he gets killed." Well, that's just part of life, part of the musician's life.

DS:

And it's also—you talked about getting another band. Was there any difference in the sound quality and all that, maybe that's why you didn't quite mesh together?

GS:

Well, no. The sound was a little bit—as a matter of fact, the sound was a little bit better, but the guys were also older, more mature, and they had different styles. One thing when I had my band, I didn't allow nobody drinking during stage, and if I found out somebody was doing drugs, I would kick him out. We didn't go for that. And when I picked up the other band, I mean, they were older guys, some of them were doing drugs, they were drinking, and I didn't feel comfortable. Of course, they were good musicians, I mean, I don't have nothing bad to say about them except that, you know—

DS:

The personalities didn't mesh.

GS:

And the styles they had, you know. But as far as musicians, they were good musicians. So I mean, I didn't feel comfortable, so I just quit the band and came back to my own band, you know. Luckily, they all came back, they wanted to, yeah. So the only thing that held us back was that some of the guys were in college and I told them, "Hey, man, I'm not going to take you guys away from college." Because that was really important, like Julio Llanas, he became a good successor in college, and his kids, his wife, so that's something I would never interfere with the guys. They want to go to school, college, that's fine. I understand.

DS:

In fact, I think they've mentioned that when they were being interviewed that their choice was to go this way. And back then, college was something new for the Mexican-American community in Lubbock.

GS:

Exactly. And it was hard for them. So once they started, you didn't want to take him out, like Bidal Aguero. As a matter of fact, Billy got his master's and all that. And then not until after we

quit, that's when he started his newspaper company *El Editor*, but before that, I mean, he played with us, and then he went to school, and he done real good.

DS:

Yeah I think he got a music degree from Tech, didn't he?

GS:

I'm not sure. I know he went to Tech and he went to another—

DS:

Wisconsin is where he went for his master's.

GS:

Wisconsin—yeah for his master's. As far as music, I don't know if he did or not. He was a good musician. And he was my—helped me out when I was singing, he was the second voice, so he would help me out a lot.

DS:

Well, is there anything you'd like to talk about during those years that happened that you really enjoyed?

GS:

Well, since we started traveling, I enjoyed every time, you know. Of course, we only played Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays. During the week we had nothing to do except mess around. You know—but at that time, I think it was mostly Friday, Saturday and Sundays when everybody played. When we played in Chicago, the guys that made I don't know what they call them—the guys that were in charge of the dances, they made the bookings all over Michigan, and a lot of suburbs in Chicago and all that. So we were lucky. Every time we went over there we went for at least three weeks because they would send us to different places. Then from there, we would go to Arizona, California, you know.

Of course we had a big surprise in California, the first time we went over there, they're a union over there and I didn't know anything about it. And the guy said, "Who's the band leader?" I said, "I am." He says, "I'd like to talk to you." So he charged me fifty dollars for each musician. So I think I played close to—over five hundred dollars. I had to pay you know, because we had to join the band, you know, musician's band. So after that, the second time we went on tour, we had our cards and everything, so it wasn't even a problem. But they look at the bands real close, you know. I don't blame them in a way, because Texas usually had a lot of good bands coming out, and they would travel out, because that's where they made their money—traveling. Because here I've noticed that hardly we ever get bands from out of state, you know. They're always

from South Texas, Houston, Dallas you know. But we hardly ever get any—of course we had big bands coming from Mexico, but as far as real Tex-Mex music, mostly it was from Texas.

DS:

And what year did you get out of music?

GS:

I think it was '71, I believe. Seventy-one? Somewhere there. Close to '72.

DS:

So about forty years ago.

GS:

Yeah. It was a long time ago. And we played in reunions during that time. Billy Agüero would make it—we had a reunion on the twenty-fifth year after we quit the band, and then we had one five years after, and then I think we had one the following year, because they really liked it, you know. The last time we played was Fair Park Coliseum, you know. I mean, it was crowded, people just yelling and everything.

DS:

When was that?

GS:

That was back in—I think it was in the eighties. Somewhere there in the eighties.

DS:

Are there enough of the guys left to do another one?

GS:

I don't think so. I had a call from one of the guys, he says, It'd be great, if you ever need me. But once Billy passed away, you know, Billy was the one who'd done a lot of arrangements, talks and all that 23:29. As a matter of fact, I give Billy credit because he was the one that got us into the Buddy Holly [West Texas Waljk of fame]—inducted, you know. He did all the work. Because he called me and said, "Do you mind if I do it?" I said, "No, you go ahead and do it if you want to." So he was real good. He knew the mayor, the lady mayor—

DS:

Wendy Sitton

GS:

Wendy Sitton. And then T.J. Patterson, and some other people. So he had really good connections and all that. Of course we were the first band, Mexican/Tex-Mex band to be inducted into the Buddy Holly. Then after that, I think there's now about four or five bands.

DS:

So what was it like to know that y'all were the first group to cross that line?

GS:

It felt good, you know. But to me it didn't feel that good because I had to quit the band. I think I could've made it big if I would've kept on. Or, I don't know, there's no telling what could've happened.

DS:

Because you all reached that point where the guys had to decide whether they wanted this career or the other.

GS:

Exactly, right. And my deal was that when I started the band, I said I want to go all the way, see if I can make it, which I had a good chance to make it. But the guys couldn't, and they couldn't support me, and I don't blame them, because like I said, they were in school. So we had to call it quits—I had to call it quits. Of course, some of the guys are still playing around, you know, different bands, but they don't last, they just go to different bands and different places.

DS:

So who that played with you is still playing music right now?

GS:

Who?

DS:

Yeah.

GS:

Well, some of them I heard that they picked up some bands. One of the guys lives in Houston, he picked up a rock and roll band. The other guy who went to Tennessee—he told me the name of the band he was playing, I don't know if he still is or not, it was country and western. You know, just different styles. I've never heard of anybody going to a Tex-Mex band, you know, I mean they just went different ways, but not Tex-Mex.

DS:

Let me ask you then—during the time since when you got out of music until now, what do you think of the local music scene?

GS:

I think part of the local music is it's different from our time. There's too many bands and they're coming out with different styles. Which it's not bad, not bad at all, but of course, some of the styles I like, some of the styles I don't like, I don't agree with them. But I think nowadays there's more bands. And some of the real big bands from South Texas and Austin and Dallas—some of those guys are real good musicians. I hear some records every once in a while, and they're real good. I don't have nothing bad to say about anybody because the competition is always going to be there. Regardless how good you are, how bad, there's always another band that's going to do better, or try to do better, or something.

DS:

How about Lubbock itself as a venue, as a place for the band to be?

GS:

I think Lubbock is one of the places where, if you get a musician, try to stick to him. It's not like San Antonio and Austin, there's a lot of musicians over there. Here it's hard, you know, to replace somebody. I had problems at first replacing some of the guys. I found out that it's real hard, because a lot of times we'd be missing a trumpet player, or guitar, or bass and it'd take us a couple of weeks to get somebody. And we had to train him all over again and start all over the music, but luckily they were good musicians so they picked it up real good, real fast. But to me, it's like a company, like any other company. I mean, the guys are working for you, you're paying them, I mean, I was the band leader, it's just like a company, trying to build it up. But it's hard work. It's very hard work.

And the best part was the traveling to me. Because at first we had to unload and load. And then after we started real good, I hired one guy to help us load and all that, so that helped a lot. I guess that's why I quit playing the trumpet and all that, because I didn't have to carry anything with me, just my voice. Like in Chicago, we played that Sears building—they had a radio station, a Mexican radio station way at the top. It had two elevators, so we had to go up there, take part of the instruments with us, and it was two elevators, and we only played one song. It took us about thirty minutes to set up and tune up and all that, then we only played one song there. So it was part of the music, you know. We had to do it.

DS:

You mentioned you were a vocalist. When did you start singing?

GS:

I used to sing just the second voice. Play the trumpet and sing the second voice. And then I started enjoying it more than playing the trumpet, so I just quit playing. And then I found some guys who were pretty good playing the trumpet, so I got them to take my place and I went into the music. It worked out good, and then Billy was second voice after that, so he was helping me sing. So it turned out pretty good. But now I'm playing at church, playing the trumpet. I went back to the trumpet, so I've been playing I guess for a good fifteen years or so.

DS:

Have you noticed any difference in the way you play music now than back then?

GS:

Oh yes, a lot, because I mean, the music sounds different, you have to play different. Just the music is different by itself. It's not the same. As a matter of fact, it had a faster tune back then than it is now. Now it's more slowly, or I don't know how to explain that, but it's not actually the same it was at first, you know. Because I remember we used to play polkas, especially polkas. We hardly played any cumbias. And nowadays that's the majority they play, cumbias. That's where the difference is, you know. These young kids, they don't care too much about fancy music, or polkas, or anything like that. All they like is cumbias. And I've seen it because we go to weddings or dancing, me and my wife, and I see the kids. I mean we go see bands, that are good bands, I like to go sit down and just listen to them, and hardly any people dance, you know. But when they start playing a cumbia, boy, you can see them kids coming out. To me, that's part of the show nowadays, las cumbias, you know, so.

DS:

You know, you were talking about all those different bands in Lubbock back then. Was there any type of Lubbock sound that you can identify?

GS:

No, because everybody tried—in those years, everybody tried to copy Little Joe, Agustín Ramirez, Sunny and the Sunliners. Everybody wanted to sound like them. I think there were about four or five bands at that time here in Lubbock. We'd done the same too, when we first started, and then I said, Hey, we need to get our own sound. Because all we're doing is making those guys more popular, so we need to get ourselves our own sound. And we started getting our own sound. To me, it was a different sound. I don't know what other people would think about it, but I hear some songs every once in a while, and it sounds different. Of course, we didn't have time—like some of the bands they take months to make an album, and we didn't have time because we were always in a hurry, and kids were in school and all that. So we would go during weekends and record the majority of the songs and then come back. And then the following weekend, we'd go back and finish the album, that's it. And the music and the albums didn't

sound really that good, but when we played in public, a lot of people would say, You guys are great, you guys are good. And that helped us, because when we played in competitions with other bands, we usually came out first place. And there were some good bands that were here in Lubbock, but they were scared to travel or something. They just wanted to stay here, local, you know, here in Lubbock, or close-by places.

DS:

When you were on the road, was there a favorite place you'd like to go play?

GS:

I think our favorite place was in Phoenix, Arizona. El Calderon, they used to call it El Calderon. As a matter of fact, Little Joe recorded an album live there. And we liked it, but the only thing we didn't like was the dances would last till four o'clock in the morning. I mean, at one o'clock, they would stop selling liquor, and after that—but they played real good and it was always crowded. Another place that I enjoyed was—I think it was Wichita Falls, we played there. And we were real excited. I remember Billy was telling me, "Guys, we sound like real big bands." Because the people would gather out in front and they were just watching us. So we started giving records and albums and all that. It made us feel good, real good. Because the people there, instead of dancing, they were just front of the stage watching us. So that helped. That happened also in Illinois—Lansing, Michigan. Lansing, Michigan. We played there. I think it was- they'd call it a *tardeada* [a late-afternoon dance] We played in some park or something, and I mean, it was packed. And then at night we played in a dance hall, and it was packed full because the people had already heard our music and all that. It turned out real good.

But it was great. I had a lot of fun. I enjoyed it. It wasn't a whole bunch of years that we played, but the few years that we traveled and played I really enjoyed it. And like I said, to me, I enjoyed the more the traveling because I saw places, states and cities that I never would have thought I was going to get to see. I never thought I was going to be able to see Hollywood in California, Chicago and a lot of good places. In Texas, I mean, I never thought I was going to—I mean, we played for the opening, in San Antonio with Little Joe, and there was about six bands when they made the HemisFair [the Tower of Americas, San Antonio, Texas.] We played there that day, that night.

DS:

Was that sixty—?

GS:

I think it was sixty—

DS:

Was it '68?

GS:

Sixty-eight? Something like that. I know it was in the sixties, late sixties.

DS:

Yeah because I remember I went out there, like in '72, and it was still fairly new.

GS:

Yeah. So we played in that opening, you know, when they had the HemisFair. We took a tour with Little Joe here in Texas to Corpus Christi, Houston, Dallas and big cities, you know. I think it was for three weeks. But we would come in during the week and back home, and then we would go back, and we'd meet somewhere or something

DS:

What was Little Joe like?

GS:

Little Joe was a good musician and he had a good personality with us. I mean, every time we would go play in south Texas, even if he wasn't there I would go to his house in Temple, Texas. Or if he was there or something, we would always pay for the motel. And his wife was real generous, real nice; everybody was real nice. They treated us real nice. Of course Rocky, he would play sometimes with Little Joe, sometimes he would play. He would go with us and he would sing, because we had a lot of songs that he played, so we would play and he would go with us, travel with us. So that was pretty good. We got to sing with Little Joe, and I got to sing with Little Joe and Johnny a lot of times in different places so that was pretty good.

DS:

So I was just wondering, because you were more like a friend than just a fellow musician.

GS:

Exactly. I mean, because that guy, he was great. And he had a whole bunch of bands and he said we were one of his favorite bands. One year, they had an accident or something happened to the bus and they didn't have—it was just Johnny, Little Joe, when they had those go-go girls, when they used to have go-go girls dancing with them. So we had just started. So we backed him up, him and Johnny. He said, "Can you play for us?" I told him sure. They had a contract. I said, "Well go ahead and play, we'll back you guys up." So all the songs they played, the majority of them, we played in the same key and all that, so they really enjoyed it and they really appreciated that night, because he said, If it hadn't been for you guys, I would have lost—back then it would've been two or three thousand dollars that he would've lost. So we worked with him in a lot of places, in a lot of shows. He was already big. He never treated us like, "I'm better than

you” of course he was. But he never showed it to us. He always appreciated us, and accepted us and everything. He was the kind of person that—I still, and I still see him every once in a while when he plays, he still recognizes me and he hugs me and all that. It feels good.

DS:

I think he gives a lot of recognition also for Lubbock helping to make him who he is.

GS:

Oh yeah, yes. As a matter of fact, I think I was about sixteen years old the first time I heard him come in. Because I think he’s about—he’s getting pretty close to seventy now, so. I know the first time, we weren’t used to fast music, and he’s the one who brought that style over here. And then after that, I mean, everybody started to try to pick up that style, a lot faster. He’d done a lot of good. We also played with Cornelio Reyna, when he was around playing together, him and Ramon Ayala. As a matter of fact, I think I’ve got a picture somewhere, where me and Pepe Villegas used to make the—he was the promoter at Fair Park Coliseum. And we took some pictures, and he was holding the accordion and I was holding the guitar. But we got to know a lot of bands and all that. We played in California with Vicente Fernandez, and the other man that passed away, Tony Aguilar. I mean, those guys of course they’re big stars, big movie stars, but it made us feel good because we were there.

DS:

Did you ever meet the accordion player, Esteban?

GS:

Oh yeah. We played with him in Phoenix. We played together. Esteban Jordan and that girl that sings, that used to sing, she was just a kid like Selena, when I first saw her, you know. They were playing in, I think Riverside, something in Arizona playing in El Calderon, and I think she was the one who came up with the song *Tripolitos Pintos*, something like that. I forgot what her name was. I know it was Escobar, her last name. So now she’s probably a grown up woman, I don’t know if she’s still playing or got married or what. But Esteban Jordan, he passed away, what last year? I think it was last year.

DS:

About this time last year, I think.

GS:

But that guy was great, he was good. He played a lot of instruments.

DS:

Yeah, I missed out on interviewing him, because I don’t know if you know David Davila?

GS:

Yes.

DS:

Because he was always trying to get me down there to interview him. But he got sick, he'd been sick for a while, but he got really sick that week before he passed. So I was just wondering if there's anybody out there who still knows what type of music he played—his impact.

GS:

Well, Esteban, he played—the majority of it was accordion, you know, music. He played a lot of songs. Good songs. You know, rock and roll, whatever, *corridos*, he was good. As a matter of fact, he was a *compadre con* Little Joe. They were *compadres*. That guy was great. I've noticed nowadays a lot of bands, a lot of these guys are making a comeback. Like Carlos Guzman and Johnny Hernandez, and Rocky—I don't know what his last name is, from Houston. Not Rocky Hernandez, Little Joe's brother, Rocky the one from Houston. And Joe Bravo, Augustín Ramirez, those guys are making a comeback. And Augustín Ramirez is good because we saw him in la Jamaica [typically held at Mexican-American serving Catholic Churches these fundraisers include musical entertainment and vendor booths] about three years ago, and of course he's old, but he's still great. He's still good.

DS:

How about you? If you had an opportunity to play again, would you?

GS:

I don't think so. I don't think so. I enjoy playing in church, with the trumpet and all that, because the guys there, the majority of the guys are from Mexico and they play real good, they're real good musicians. I have a good buddy of mine that plays the trumpet also with me in second [playing second trumpet,] and he's great. So I enjoy it. And the people, they like it. Because we try to make it kind of like mariachi style, so it comes out pretty good. I had a lot of offers from mariachis, if I want to join their mariachi bands and I tell them, "Nah," I don't know. And it's funny, none of my kids got into music. I have a grandson, he played the trumpet and he was good, but he just gave it up. And he's over there in Austin, in UT. And me and my wife would tell him, Why don't you keep on playing the trumpet. There's a lot of mariachis over there in Austin. Try to get with those guys, you know. But he didn't want to be missing the fun. So he said no, I said, Well, okay. But he was great. He helped me here in church, a couple of times, and he was real good. He would pick it up real fast. All he had to do was just hear the song, whatever we were playing and he'd pick it up real good.

DS:

Well, you know, that brings an interesting thing, and this is probably more common that is now back then—musicians that played music as opposed to those that played liricos.

GS:

Well, they're starting to do that a lot. They're starting to do that a lot, you know. And liricos and mariachis are, you know—and DJs, oh, DJs right now, I mean they're doing better than bands, actually. Because DJs, they play everything, you know. And bands, they only play their music. So it's changing a lot. It's changing a lot.

DS:

You know, the reason I asked you about the reunion thing, it's because one idea that we're hatching in the back of our minds at the Collection is trying to get somebody together, for like a little reception or something. And maybe have a—

GS:

I remember you mentioned that a while back.

DS:

That's still an idea we're kicking around, because we'd like to try to do something like that. We've got lots of—not just you know, the rock and roll sample. We've got soul sounds, Spanish sound here that we need to try to highlight those guys.

GS:

As a matter of fact, one of the saxophone players—he asked me—he comes to church here in Saint Joseph. He said, “Would you like to do another reunion?” I tell him, “Well, you know, the majority of the guys, they don't live here in Lubbock, and the ones that were, some of the passed away,” so, I think, like Julio Llanas, he doesn't want anything to do with the band anymore. And, of course now Bidal Aguero passed away, so I think there's something about two or three of us that are here in town, you know. So I mean, the ones that I knew, and they're real good musicians, one of them is in Houston, the other one's in Tennessee somewhere over there. I have another one of that's in New York somewhere playing with another band, we used to call him “Pop” and his name was Fernando, he was a drummer, he was real good. Everybody just scattered around. Some of them got married and just settled down and didn't want nothing to do with—

DS:

Did you ever sit down and think about the impact you all had?

GS:

Yes, I do. A lot. Especially when I hear music on the radio, or when I go to a wedding or something, oh man, I just like to stare at them. Some of these bands are great, you know, they're good. And I enjoy that, you know. I really enjoy that. As a matter of fact, from here, from Lubbock, Tudy and Heavy—they call him Heavyweights: Rudy and Tudy [Rudy Tudy and the Heavy Duties.] Well, Tudy used to play with me also, you know. He played with me. And they played in—what was it?—*Diez y Seis de Septiembre*, so they dedicated some songs to me and my wife, they remembered us, The Premiers and all that, it made me feel good. It made me feel good.

DS:

Yeah, in fact, I need to sit down and interview Rudy.

GS:

Really? Oh, he's a good musician. And Tudy and Rudy, at first, I saw them about, I think a little over two years ago, and I said, Well, it's alright, you know. But then the next time that they played over there, and they were playing with, what's his name, Marcos Orozco, and I mean, they were great.

DS:

They got some great vocals.

GS:

Oh, yeah. And the keyboard guy also used to—I can't remember his name, he used to play with me also, you know.

DS:

So there are still remnants of your group.

GS:

Frankie, I think Frankie is his name, but he's a real good organ player, keyboard—well, nowadays it's keyboards, but he's real good.

DS:

Well, I'm going to give you a couple minutes to end this interview the way you'd like to end it.

GS:

Well, I'd just like to end it as I enjoy music, still enjoy hearing the radio and going to weddings, and it makes me feel good because it reminds me of when we used to be playing. We played in a lot of weddings, we played in just about everything, so it feels good, it feels good. And I'd like to

end this saying that I sure appreciate my fans and all that. I know a lot of them passed away, a lot of my musicians passed away, getting older, but I still remember. I still remember, real good.

DS:

Well, thank you George.

GS:

Thank you, appreciate it.

End of Interview



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