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Honor Roll

Vincent Lopez (30 December, 1895 - 20 September 1975) was a United States bandleader and pianist.

"LOPEZ SPEAKING "

By Kent Spencer
From June 1936 issue of "Popular Songs"
From the AMICA, May/June 1987

Contributed by Guy Berthiaume, Montreal, Canada

(Vincent Lopez made over 150 reproducing piano rolls for the Ampico, being one of their more prolific artists.) Ed.

No band leader has done more for popular songs than Vincent Lopez. He's the tops in the field of popular songs and it's all the result of a carefully planned and executed childhood, which began with his birth, in Brooklin, New York, 37 years ago.

Vincent's father was a native of the Madeira Islands, of Portuguese descent. He had traveled throughout the world while a naval bandmaster and finally settled in Brooklyn as the owner of a jewelry business. At the age of 51 he married Virginia, Baroness Gonsalves, 35, and of this union Vincent was born.

When Vincent was six years old, this sensitive son of a Spanish aristocrat and Portuguese musician was sent to public school and started on the road to musical mastery. Each day he had to practice playing the piano for three hours; this was increased to six hours daily during summer vacations.

"I always wanted to play and romp like other kids, but my father didn't approve of children `wasting' their time on games," Vincent told me. "I always loved music, but I didn't want to practice continually, yet I had to.



"My parents loved simple music and I took after them in this respect. Even today I still prefer the simple folk songs to the more complicated modern melodies.

"My father taught me to play the mandolin, guitar and piano. I learned melody from the mandolin, harmony from the guitar and combined both upon the piano."

For six years the rigorous training persisted and young Vincent became a promising musician. Also, he had learned during these six years to find an outlet for his pent-up emotions at the keyboard. This set the foundation for his later-day faculty of expressing moods in music.

His father decided that Vincent should begin training for the Catholic priesthood and the boy was sent to Dunkirk, New York, where he entered the monastery of the Passionist Fathers.

From a home of stern discipline and forced training, against which he had always inwardly rebelled, young Lopez now had to contend with an even more rigid code of conduct. Among other rules, students were not permitted to speak without permission.

"For three years I remained at the monastery, rising every morning at half-past five;" Lopez said. "At chapel we used to sing the Gregorian chant every morning. It was very wonderful music that never failed to thrill me. The rest of each day was spent principally in study, though we were allowed to congregate in a recreation room each evening, and it was there that I used to play the simple folk songs while other students sang them, alone or in quartets."

When he was 16, Lopez went to the head director, Father Sebastian, and told him that he would like to leave the Monastery, since he felt that he was not fitted for the priesthood. Within an hour he was on his way back to Brooklyn.

After six months in a business school, Vincent landed a job as secretary to the head of a milk company. In the evenings he played piano in various cafes. Those were probably the hardest days of his life. From nine o'clock in the morning until four o'clock in the afternoon, Lopez worked at the milk company. Each night he played piano from nine o'clock until four the next morning. Realizing he couldn't stand the strain of both jobs, the boy resigned his position with the milk company. That same night he was fired from his piano-playing job for falling asleep. When his father upbraided him, Lopez left home.

Things looked dark, but not for long. He was hired to play piano in a restaurant at Sheepshead Bay, near Coney Island, for \$25 a week. Later he landed the pianist's job with the five-piece orchestra then at the Pekin Restaurant on Broadway. Now he was 19 and the salary was \$35 weekly.

Three months later he was asked to take charge of the orchestra and things began to happen. He augmented the band and several bandsmen who were later to become famous were in his organization at various times.

Just while everything was moving along smoothly a new sensation in music hit New York. It was the Dixieland Jazz Band. It had noise and rhythm. Lopez liked the rhythm and took it with him when his own orchestra moved along from place to place.

Two seasons of vaudeville with Pat Rooney and Marian Bent taught him showmanship. Next, he was engaged to play in the dining room of the Hotel Pennsylvania. Lopez hired an arranger for his band, J. Bodealt Lampe. Lampe was years ahead of his time and his novel orchestrations put the band in the front ranks among its contemporaries. It was there Lopez introduced lighting effects for the first time in New York.

Lopez doubled his boys into the local vaudeville theatres. He had the different instruments in his orchestra "talk" back and forth to each other when the band played "Mr. Gallagher and Mr. Shean." He was booked into the Palace Theatre at \$750 a week. He remained 11 weeks at \$1,500 a week. While there, a back stage curtain puller suggested that he add scenic effects and this was done, for the first time in New York, marking another triumph for showmanship in music.

For three years he remained at the Hotel Pennsylvania and doubled his orchestra into nearby theatres and, later, night clubs. With tireless energy he rehearsed and directed his men. He made phonograph records. One night without warning he was asked to play over the radio.

"Hello, everybody, Lopez speaking!" became a byword overnight and he continued to play for radio by popular demand. In 1925 Lopez gave the first Symphonic Jazz concert at the Metropolitan Opera House and that same year took his orchestra to London, where he was wildly acclaimed.

Lopez has made and lost several fortunes. It doesn't seem to make a great deal of difference to him. He owned and operated two night clubs, both named Casa Lopez. One burned down, the other failed. But he has had so many successes that the occasional setbacks mean little.

At the Ambassador Hotel you will find Vincent Lopez conducting his orchestra with an intriguing surety and suavity. At the dining tables you will find dowagers and debs. There is no age to Lopez or his music. Both have a universal appeal.

"The next year will be notable for many changes in our musical ideas," he remarked. "I don't know yet what these changes will be but I feel them developing. As for myself I am far from my goal and I don't exactly know what it is either except that I must do something to make a great and lasting impression in my chosen field."

Lopez, who signed a contract for \$1,000,000 with the Hotel St. Regis, where he remained for eight years; Lopez, who has done as much as any man to set the styles in popular song and dance music, feels within himself that he has accomplished so little. Perhaps this is the trait which accounts for his greatness, and he is a great musician. Tune in his music tonight and you will agree with me when you hear "Lopez speaking!"

Vincent Lopez was born in Brooklyn, New York and was leading his own dance band in New York City by 1917. In 1921 his band began broadcasting on the new medium of entertainment radio, which boosted the popularity of both himself and of radio. He became one of the USA's most popular band leaders, and would retain that status through the 1940s.

His theme song was "Nola", a novelty ragtime piece from the 1910s. He began his radio programs by announcing "Lopez speaking!".

Noted musicians who played in his band included Artie Shaw, Xavier Cugat, Jimmy Dorsey, Tommy Dorsey, and Glenn Miller. He also featured singers Betty Hutton and Marion Hutton.

Lopez's flamboyant style of piano playing influenced such later musicians Eddy Duchin and Liberace.

In 1941 Lopez's Orchestra began a residency at the Taft Hotel in Manhattan that would last 20 years.

Vincent Lopez died in Miami Beach, Florida.