



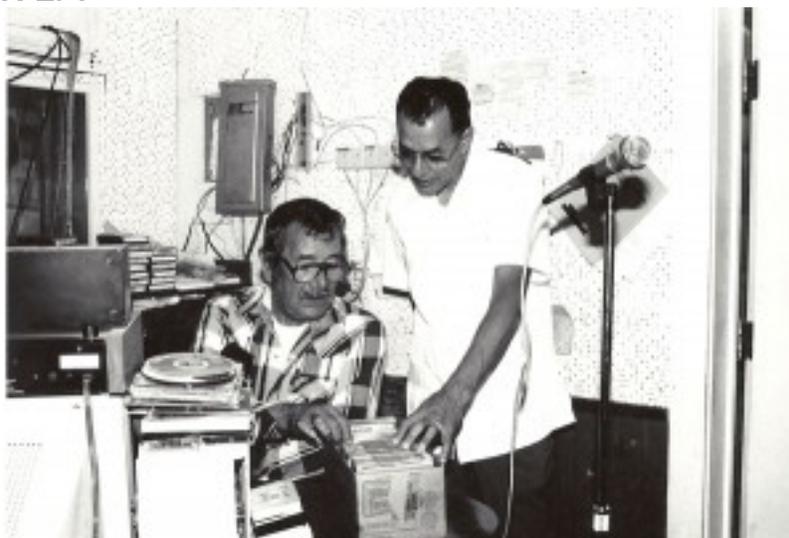
Vic Torres and his Spanish Hour remembered

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By JOHN DANIEL GARCIA

ALPINE – “He was always spreading his love of music to other people,” Sylvia Torres Contreras, daughter of the late Vidal “Vic” Torres said, “and it’s carried on through me and my brothers and through his grandkids, who all love Tejano music.”

Torres, who passed away on May 3 at the age of 77, had plenty of time to spread his love of the art form as the host of “Spanish Hour,” for which he helmed the microphone and selected his favorite Tejano, Norteño, rancheras, and conjunto songs on-and-off for 57 years on Alpine’s AM radio station, KVLf.



(Sentinel file photo by ROBERT HALPERN) Texas accordion legend Santiago Jimenez Jr., right, and KVLf radio announcer Vic Torres look through Vic’s music collection when Jimenez performed on Vic’s Spanish Hour show about

10 years ago during a Marfa residency by Jimenez. Torres broadcast his Spanish-language program on the Alpine radio station for more than 50 years. The 77-year-old Alpine native passed away last week.

Torres began his career in radio in 1955, during the days of segregation. The 9pm spot, which Torres filled, was the final shift at KVLV and garnered a steady and loyal following among the Spanish-speaking listeners, as it was the only source of Spanish language music and news in the area at the time.

"We took pride that it was all in Spanish," said KALP and KVLV owner and manager Ray Hendryx. "There were some Spanish networks for news, but this one originated in Texas. No one would have cared if we brought in [Spanish language news] from Puerto Rico.

"Our generation grew up in an era where Spanish was the primary language spoken in Hispanic households. It also gave people who were advertising another opportunity. People running for office, both Anglo and Hispanic, realized the importance of reaching a Spanish-speaking audience," Hendryx said.

Torres' reading of news and announcements were all translated on the spot without the aid of a pen and paper.

"He was very gifted at being able to translate from English to Spanish without effort," said Alpine resident and personal Torres friend Elidia Polanco; a sentiment shared by Contreras, who recalled Torres' translation abilities as "amazing."

Torres' contributions to the Big Bend region were recognized in 2005 by the Texas House of Representatives in commemoration of his 50th year with the radio station with a House Resolution sponsored by current U.S. Representative Pete P. Gallego, who occasionally filled in for Torres on "Spanish Hour."

The resolution named, among other things, Torres' mentorship to those looking to get on air. Hendryx was one of those who learned the in-and-outs of the business through Torres.

"He taught me the ropes when I first came to KVLf," recalls Hendryx. "He was as familiar with the equipment as anyone on the staff. He had so much patience with the younger people. There was never any attitude coming from him."

His familiarity, however, would remain old school.

"As the technology evolved, he would shy away from that stuff," explains Hendryx. "Whenever we'd get a new piece of equipment, he'd joke, 'It's time for me to retire.'

"We kept some things that Vic was comfortable with. The latest piece of technology he used was a CD player. We wanted him to be in his element.

"It's kind of funny, even though he taught us everything in the beginning, we were teaching him some things near the end."

His knowledge and love of music, however, has been the hallmark of Torres' career. His passion for music expanded beyond the air, as he sang for various local bands and would help friends and family looking for certain songs.

"He had a collection like no one else," Polanco remembers, "and he had it catalogued in his own way. Whatever you wanted, he'd have it."

"All you would have to do is hum a couple of bars or recite some lyrics," said Contreras. "Even if he didn't know what it was, he would find it in his collection by looking through his lists."

Though Torres has left the mortal realm, his life's work and personality will continue through the memories of his friends and family and through the continuation of his beloved show.

"It's a familiar voice that some of us have taken for granted," Hendryx solemnly said. "We lost a dear friend."

On Tuesday, during Torres' funeral, KVLf fell silent for one hour, an unprecedented move by the radio station to pay respects to its longtime radio announcer.

"Listening to music was his passion and he shared it with all of us," remembers Polanco. "We would stay up all night to listen to what he played. I'm sure a lot of people will continue to listen to the show he made great."

"He would always tell us to listen to the words and stories in the songs," his daughter lovingly recalls. "Everyone in this family loves the music he loved. It's something that we will always carry on."

"Spanish Hour" will continue its tradition of bringing the latest music and news in Alpine in the Spanish language. An announcement from the station concerning the show is expected by next week.