

# *Raphael Mendez*

*Rafael began playing the cornet five years old in order to perform with the family orchestra led by his father, Maximino.*

*When Rafael was ten years old, the Mendez Orchestra played for the Mexican revolutionist, General Pancho Villa and was subsequently "invited" to travel with the bandit. Later, Mendez performed in circus bands, dance bands, and various concert groups. During his teens, he began serious development of his technique. He acquired an old copy of Arban's Complete Conservatory Method for the Cornet and began hundreds of hours of practice on what later was to become his trademark his double tonguing.*

*At the age of 20 (June 26, 1926), Méndez moved to Michigan, USA to find work in an automobile factory while seeking employment as a trumpeter.*

*One day when Rafael was trying a trumpet in a music store in Detroit, Russ Morgan, the band leader of the Capitol Theater happened to be outside. When he heard the fine player, he entered the store. Right there Morgan offered him a job and paid for the trumpet. Soon Rafael was playing with professional bands and theater orchestras in the Detroit area at such venues as the Capitol and Fox Theaters.*

*During this time, he also met Amor Rodriguez Fernandez, and they were married in 1930.*

*In 1932, at the Fox Theater, Mendez was accidentally struck in the mouth by a swinging door, the result of which was that he was unable to make a single sound on the trumpet. After going to numerous teachers such as Herbert L. Clarke, Max Schlossberg, and Walter Smith to no avail, he returned to Mexico to seek advice and instruction from his father. After a while (too soon), Rafael returned to Detroit and began playing in the Michigan Theater, but he was still having problems. He went to the master teacher Louis Maggio, but Maggio asked him to return to Mexico and continue working with his father. Rafael stayed two months now and took his time to analyze all aspect of trumpet playing. This helped him later understand not only his own playing but that of other players as well. The experience made him a better teacher.*

*His career began in Michigan (until 1934), then New York, and finally to Hollywood where he became a well-known radio and television guest performer on such shows as the Ray Noble Show, Bing Crosby Show, Dinah Shore Show, Art Linkletter Show, Ed Sullivan Show, and many others.*

*During his career, Rafael dedicated much of his time to clinics, music camps, and guest solo appearances at schools. He often turned down lucrative playing jobs which he felt did not legitimize the trumpet as a solo instrument, and rather accepted appearances at high schools.*

"The real value of Mr. Méndez to the school groups he appears with is perhaps never apparent to the audience. The time he spends in rehearsal and the inspiration, advice, and encouragement he gives to the groups is worth far more than his performance fee. He is without doubt the best liked and most admired soloist in America who is devoting himself to working with young people." (Norman Smith, Colorado Springs)

Just as Rafael's father, Maximino, imparted musical appreciation and instruction to him, Rafael's own twin sons learned to play the trumpet from their father. Rafael, Jr. and Robert were born in 1937 and became professional level performers by the age of fifteen. They often toured with their father and performed and recorded a number of trios such as Tre-Mendez Polka, Nena, and Polka in the Box, which were composed by Méndez.

In 1964, allergic bronchitis and allergic asthma forced a temporary retirement from concertizing. With great difficulty, Méndez managed to record two more albums for Decca and performed occasional concerts. Rafael performed on a very limited basis from 1968 to 1975, at which time he retired from concertizing. He continued to practice daily and composed music until his death in 1981.