

Michael's Rock and Roll Posse: The Who's Final, Final, Final Tour, and I (Who Have Nothing)

On Wednesday, Tina and I saw The Who in the Toyota Center, with UHLC grads Justen Barks and his wife, Jennifer Caplan—he co-teaches Entertainment Law for us as an adjunct, and she is one of my former Immigration Law students. This is the third or fourth Who “Final” Tour I have attended, and it is the sixth time I have seen them. In 1969, I ushered at Vet's Memorial Auditorium in Columbus, and saw their Tommy Tour, where they played the album in its entirety. I had heard some of the album's songs on the radio, and knew their pre-“Tommy” work, but hearing “Pinball Wizard”, “I'm Free” and “See Me, Feel Me” was certainly among my best concert memories, ever. In those days, I was a sophomore at the Pontifical College Josephinum, my college Seminary (in Worthington, Ohio), and I was in the 5th of my 8 years studying to become a Catholic priest for the Archdiocese of Santa Fe, NM. (I left because I was so much better at afflicting the comfortable than I ever was at comforting the afflicted.) We had classes every weekday and Saturday mornings, and could go to town in Columbus only once a week, usually in connection with “apostolic work,” which for me was tutoring at a youth center. Ushering at the Vet was one of the exceptions to the town visits, and we were allowed to usher two or three times a month, but it also meant we had to go to Ferrante & Teicher, as well as the various rock concerts. (Having moved from NM to Ohio to go to the Seminary opened up my life to many more concerts, given the bigger venues and geographic economics of rock concerts in those days—even with the limited Seminary social opportunities.) Ushering in those days meant confiscating all the joints being smoked, and making sure people found their seats and did not try and sneak down to better areas. Concert-goers in those days did not get to congregate by the stage the way they do today.

All that said, I have seen The Who with each incarnation: of course, always Roger Daltrey and Pete Townshend, and even Keith Moon and John Entwistle. In December, 1982, just after I moved to UH, I saw their “final” tour in the Astrodome, with The Clash opening, and tickets on the floor of the ‘Dome, my first time there, when it was

still in use for the Astros and the Oilers. By then, Keith Moon had died, and Kenney Jones was their drummer. I saw them several other times in the meantime, in various venues, in Houston and elsewhere, all of them extraordinary concerts, and with and without Entwistle.

Pete will be 70 on his next birthday, and is a step slower on the stage (no more knee slides or jumping-jack jumps), but still is among the best half a dozen guitarists ever. And Shazam has nothing on me for identifying their music by the first 3-4 notes. Indeed, that flush of recognition is the reason for seeing these wonderful old acts—they almost always remind me of some earlier concert, some friend with whom I attended, some event with which I identify the song, and so on. The first three chords of “See Me” never fail to take me back to their appearance in “Woodstock,” in what was among their very best documentary appearances, along with “Monterey Pop.” It is almost inconceivable that their core is still performing after more than 50 years. Today, the core includes Zak Starkey (drums—and son of Richard Starkey, a/k/a Ringo Starr), Pete’s brother Simon (guitarist), and Pino Palladino (bass, on leave from The John Mayer Trio). Roger Daltrey improved as the night wore on (they played two and a half hours), and it is wonderful that he can still do the old works so well, but I still believe that Townshend is as good a singer, and he has improved, if that is possible. There were no false starts, no turning his head away on the high notes, and no voice breaks. Seeing him is a marvel, and when you think of his enormous body of songwriting work, his career and contributions have been breathtaking. And notwithstanding the group’s headbanging, concert venue style and accomplishments, listen to him in this acoustic version of “Pinball Wizard” for the fundraiser The Secret Policeman’s Ball. I actually had this limited-edition vinyl, but lost it in a move:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k8fsAe-htOw> . If they come to town, see them by all means. One of these final tours will be, well, final.

Speaking of final, a number of my Posse shared their sorrow over the passing Ben E. King. Indeed, I first heard on the local radio that B.B. King had died, which will be sad in its own way, but it was Ben E. who had died. Now here is a great one, with great

song choices, a great voice, and a long and fruitful career. When I was in DC during law school days, I lived at 1919-19th St NW, at the corner of Florida and 19th, across from the Washington Hilton. There was a small club about 4-5 blocks away, and one night, some classmates asked if I wanted to go after school to hear Ben E. King. I tagged along, and was rewarded with this great show—Ben E., plus only a (upright-) bass player and pianist, and he was like a human juke box. That night, I learned he had first sung one of my very favorite songs, “I (Who Have Nothing)”. My actual favorite version of this wonderful song is by Terry Knight and the Pack (later of Grand Funk Rail Road), but there are great covers by Joe Cocker, Tom Jones, and the underrated Shirley Bassey. (In the newer one, she says Tom Jones stole it from her, but they all stole it from Ben E. King.) Below, I provide some stories about his death, and YouTube URLs for the various versions of this extraordinary Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller song. Thanks to all of you who write me each time. In truth, I Have Everything.

Passing of Ben E. King:

<http://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-32547474> (BBC new obit)

<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/02/arts/music/ben-e-king-soulful-singer-with-the-drifters-dies-at-76.html?emc=eta1> (NYT obit)

I (Who Have Nothing”):

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1gQY9lt2-zw> (Ben E. King)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pLq763Y1AVw> (Terry Knight and the Pack—and listen especially hard at 1.45-2:12, a glorious voice and inflection)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1fSTFWskdSA> (Joe Cocker)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jmOCDC3xLCs> (early Shirley Bassey)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wc9Q_ncWQfw (later Shirley Bassey, with remarks about Tom Jones)

I will be back in NM for the summer, and will be recording 12 new Law of Rock and Roll classes, including ones on Narco-corridos, the law and business of festivals, and more. For Posse member in the New Orleans area, look in on the CLE on Entertainment Law that Yocel and I will be teaching in June (PDF attached). The *Elonis* rap lyric/criminal law case will be handed down soon by SCOTUS, and I predict they will find for him. You read it here first: Freedom of speech includes rap lyrics, Houston Chronicle, March 13, 2015,

<http://www.chron.com/opinion/outlook/article/Freedom-of-speech-includes-rap-lyrics-6133137.php?cmpid=email-mobile> (the title was changed by the op-ed editor from: Rap Music and Criminal Justice: I Shot the Sheriff, But Not Really).

Happy end of term, and I will look in on you as I can. (Next week: Dylan)

Michael

Michael A. Olivas

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