

What's So Funny 'Bout Peace, Love, and Steely Dan—Michael's Rock and Roll Posse

One of the great things—among many—about a very good concert is that it both reassures and surprises. This was surely the case on Wednesday, July 15, when we went to the Isleta Amphitheater in Albuquerque to listen to Elvis Costello and the Imposters and Steely Dan, two very different bands that oddly complement each other. The concert started almost exactly at 7:00 with Elvis and the Imposters, who have backed Costello for many years as a very stable band that morphed from the Attractions. With that stability and Costello's large playlist, it was as remarkable an opening act as I have ever seen. (Dylan and Van come to mind, and only a few others—indeed, we have seen Elvis as a solo act several times.) They played about 15 or 16 songs in just over an hour, with very little stage patter, except to acknowledge they had never played in Albuquerque before.

I recognized virtually all their songs, and they changed the syncopation on several, such as in "Alison" and "Everyday I Write The Book," but the remarkable surprise is how strong Costello's voice has remained. He still enunciates well, and his pitch and timbre actually improved over the course of the performance. He is among the most collaborative singers in the business, appearing on any number of occasions with other performers, from The Roots to Burt Bacharach to La Santa Cecilia; see them at:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOi_ydyGgFY (the lead singer of LSC is the talented Marisol "La Marisoul" Hernandez). Almost no other major artist is so generous and inquisitive with his time and talent, and he keeps up a punishing pace with touring and recording.

It is ironic that Steely Dan did not tour in the early days in the 1970s, as their studio productions were so complex and difficult to reproduce live. They also had a ridiculous number of band members and studio musicians in and out, and even with their success, the band fell apart and did not reunite for a dozen years. They have been together for Round II since 1993. Their current configuration is quite exquisite, with among the best horn section in the business and backup singers (The Danettes are one of the few remaining backup groups who have their own name) who have been together with them for many years. The irony is that today, their songs are as close to studio versions as being on stage will allow, especially when lead singer Donald Fagen is hitting all the notes. He has an instantly recognizable but somewhat reedy voice, and the first few songs were a reach, but he improved quickly and by the shank side of the hour and a half concert, he was in full throat. He has an oddly affecting singing posture, tilting his head back at a

sharp angle and singing in a curled lip staccato with that remarkable voice. He gets up periodically from his keyboard to play the melodica (he is one of the few rock performers to play this instrument, although his jazz roots show). As had Elvis Costello, Steely Dan reeled in the years with their greatest hits, and only a few that everyone in the audience did not know. I wish he had played a few from his most recent solo effort, "Sunken Condos," which has several songs that would fit easily into the full band's repertoire, especially "I'm Not the Same Without You" and "Memorabilia."

It is hard to imagine a better rock and roll concert than one with great seats (see picture above), great outdoor weather, and two such wonderful bands still in their performing prime—and both of them playing their best songs from their deep playlists. Next up—the extraordinary Damien Rice, at the Houston Bayou Music Center, a great venue. I hope his performance is as good as the one in Denver about 6 or 7 years ago, which was a breakthrough experience for me. I play his newest cd "My Favourite Faded Fantasy" almost daily, and cannot wait.

We are all on the shank side of Summer, and I wish you all well.

PS—while we were in Albuquerque for the concert, we stayed over and had breakfast with some UNM friends at The Frontier (red chile cheese enchilada, fried egg over easy, tortilla—all to die for). Then, I went into the LAB Studio and recorded 6 of the 12 new Law and Rock and Roll Classes and some program promos; I will record the other 6 in two weeks, before we return to Houston for the school year. Here are the forthcoming Classes and subject matter, and they will begin in KANW rotation around Labor Day:

Class 21: The Law of Concert Cancellations

Class 22: The Law of Releases

Class 23: Pomplamoose and the Law and Business of Touring

Class 24: The Law and Musical Hate Speech

Class 25: Music South of the Border: Narcocorridos and Drug Lyrics

Class 26: Copyright Infringements and Relief

Class 27: "Rockonomics" and the Business Savvy of Rock and Rollers, Vol. 2

Class 28: Streamin,' On a Sunday Afternoon: The Law of Royalties

Class 29: Trusts and Wills: Heirs' Cut

Class 30: Rock Lyrics and Judicial Opinions

Class 31: Law, Rock and Roll, and the Movies

(The last Class is still TBD)

Michael
Michael A. Olivas
Santa Fe, NM
June 18, 2015