

FINAL CHOICE—USE THIS ONE FOR THE CD

### **Damien Rice's Roundelay and RIP, Rick Rosas: Michael's Rock and Roll Posse**

Last night, Tina and I attended a Master Class by Damien Rice, entitled “how to perform in a concert,” at the Revention Center (f/k/a Aerial Theater, Verizon Wireless Theater, Bayou Music Center), with our great friends and concert buddies Rueben Casarez and Nicole Casarez, after feasting on lobster sushi at Blue Fin. (By the way, WTF is it with all these name changes and sponsorships? The worst example: the UNM basketball Pit, a great name and valley of death venue for visiting teams, is now named WisePies Arena, after a paltry \$5 million-over-10-years gift by the local chain, WisePies Pizza & Salad. And I read that the firm missed a scheduled payment. Go figure.)

As many Posse members know, I have come to think of the Irish-born Damien Rice as the best young talent since Yusuf Islam (f/k/a, Cat Stevens, as long as we are on the topic of re-naming), even with only 4 studio albums (one of them an EP, “B Sides,”) and 2 live-concert CDs. I first heard him when his song “The Blower’s Daughter” played over the movie credits in Mike Nichols’ 2004 “The Closer.” (Snippets from “Cold Water” also threaded throughout the movie, but I did not recognize them as Rice’s work until I knew more about him, and saw the movie a second time.) When I saw him in Denver about 5 years ago, my esteem for him grew, as he is an electric performer, accompanied by one of the best “back up” singers in the business, the incandescent Lisa Hannigan. I have considered that concert to be among the 4 or 5 most memorable of the hundreds of concerts I have attended. That list would include ones by Van, James Brown, Steely Dan, The Who, Cat Stevens, Springsteen, Aretha, Lou Rawls/Nancy Wilson, Frankie Valli, The Righteous Brothers/The Association, The Beach Boys, CSN, The Zombies, Roy Orbison, The Moody Blues, and Simon and Garfunkel. I have seen some of these performers many times, but in each case, I can point to a single event that was a transcendent concert. The year 1962 was my first and still my best concert, a spectacular and life changing event, when I was 11, made more wonderful by my having lied to my parents that I was going to spend the night at Ricky Dodson’s house, and sneaking out to see Little Richard.

Last night’s event was a Master Class due to Rice’s sheer virtuosity, his song choices, and the unexpected pleasure of his performing alone on the stage, with no musical or vocal accompaniment. I could not remember the last time I saw a single performer on stage.\* Even solo acts such as Dionne Warwick and Judy Collins, both of whom I saw in the last few years at The Lensic, my favorite childhood movie theater—now a comprehensive performing arts venue—in Santa Fe, NM, had pianists. His first 5 or 6 songs were performed acoustically, when he switched guitars and sang all the next ones plugged in. Indeed, in Denver he sang into some form of vibe cone device on the floor, to add reverb. Now he has some other form of recorded or

digital replay mechanisms, where he keeps layering vocal track onto guitar track onto percussion track in roundelay fashion, making it sound as if there are back up musicians, when he is alone on stage. This was not only a stunning display of versatility, but an extremely effective staging device. It also keeps ticket prices down, as he does not need a U2 caravan and spectacle, just to contrast another Irish performing act.

Even with such a small and slow recording output, his actual song catalog is quite extensive, and he sang almost all his great hits, and he worked in several new-ish songs from "My Favourite Faded Fantasy," his album from 2014. While he did not play several of my own favorites (such as "My Favourite Faded Fantasy"—my personal favourite), he covered a lot of ground in the 11 concert songs and 5 (!!!) encore songs. Indeed, those who left before his encore missed three of his best songs, including "Volcano," "9 Crimes"—also a favourite, and the song that started it all for me, "The Blower's Daughter." His voice is better than even I recall in both the high and low registers, and his guitar work is quite extraordinary—both in the acoustic features and in the full-bore rock and roll songs.

One thing that kept it from being a perfect concert was his distracted patter between songs—I do not expect singers to be like Van or Dylan, who move through their songs in workmanlike fashion, but he sort of meandered a bit, and sounded almost Trump-like at one point when he attributed relations between men and women as varying "according to women's cycles," although he mentioned men's mood swings and sperm counts as contributing to discord—which I took to be a more nuanced view of the world than is The Donald's *weltanschauung*. One of the additional downsides of such patter is that it encourages drunken fans to shout out song titles and yelp, and he mistakenly engaged several of them. One guy behind us kept yelling at him to sing a song, but he kept shouting the wrong song title.

Secondly, he has always had very strong singers on his recordings, such as Christy Moore and particularly Lisa Hannigan (who featured prominently in his early songs, and who has begun a solo career of her own). But the unannounced appearance of Gyda Valtýsdóttir and Shahzad Ismaily was not equal to the task. (A rule of thumb should be that any opening act is at least as good as your own collaborators.) Valtýsdóttir has a thin and Bjork-like voice, and sang her own compositions, while playing her cello and then Rice's guitar. He is extremely generous and unique in allowing her to do so. Mercifully, it was only half an hour, but the concert began at 9:00 p.m., and after her appearance, Damien did not appear for another half an hour, even though all his stage gear was set up. In my experience, only in Latin American and South America do concerts start so late. One time in Belém, Brazil, I attended a smoky café solo show by Astrud Gilberto, who did not arrive until about 11:30 p.m., and no one thought anything of it. Valtýsdóttir and her accompanist Shahzad Ismaily appeared with Rice during the 5 songs in the encore, when she sang behind him on several—reprising the Lisa Hannigan role.

But I quibble. Last night's concert was among the best musical performances I have ever experienced, and I am grateful once again for the opportunities I have to luxuriate in such spectacular talent. As it turns out, this was his final stop on his U.S. tour, and he used the occasion to drink several glasses of wine on stage, although he kidded, I think, that as an Irishman, he needed no such excuse. (The one exception to his inane stage patter was his hilarious imitation of a drunken fan accosting him to announce that he had lived next door to the young Bono, in Dublin.) I cannot imagine a better way to start the school year than listening to a wonderful concert by such an accomplished artist. I look forward to his future work, including songs he wrote for "The Prophet," a forthcoming animated film about Kahlil Gibran's book, which happened to be among my Father's favorite books. One of the voices in the film is that of Salma Hayek. I would listen to Salma read the Belém telephone book, so I am there.

**RIP, Rick Rosas:** in the recent Meryl Streep movie "Ricki and the Flash," her bass player looked familiar. Tina leaned over and asked if the *mestizo* bass player was Rodriguez, the main attraction in "Searching for Sugarman." I said no, I thought he was Neil Young's bandmate Rick Rosas, whom I knew had just died. It was he, and his passing should be mourned. The director Jonathan Demme, who made the Talking Heads concert film "Stop Making Sense," "Neil Young: Heart of Gold," and "Neil Young's Trunk Show," included Rick Springfield and real session musicians in the ersatz Flash (Joe Vitale, Bernie Worrell, and Rosas (who died just after the film was finished). The members have played with the reunited Buffalo Springfield, The Eagles, CSN, Etta James, and Parliament/Funkadelic, just to name a few:  
<http://www.latimes.com/local/obituaries/la-me-rick-rosas-20141108-story.html> .

To all the academics in my Posse, enjoy the shrinking summer, and have a good school year. And Happy Birthday to my beloved Augustina, who makes all these possible, even after 33 years.

Michael  
Houston, August 15, 2015

\* I realized after I wrote this that the last solo artist we saw was Tish Hinojosa.