

Regina Spektor, Russian Refugee, and On the Radio, Oh, Oh:

Michael's Rock and Roll Posse

This semester, Tina and I are both on research leaves, hiding in plain sight in Santa Fe, NM. We are both working on book projects—mine is a legal history of the DREAM Act, now playing out in the current administration, while hers is on school zero-tolerance issues—but we took time to drive to Albuquerque and to attend the Thursday, October 26, 2017 Regina Spektor concert with my high school and college seminarian classmate Valentin Varela. We fueled up with great New Mexican food at Frontier Restaurant, across the street from the UNM Popejoy Hall arena where she was to play. The complicated logistics were all the more remarkable, inasmuch as we have sold our Santa Fe 4BR home and are downsizing to a 2BR condo in Santa Fe, and the concert occurred halfway during the move from the house to the condo. All that in, we survived, and I am hopeful our 33 year marriage can survive the usual stress.

Speaking of stress, Regina has been on this tour for a long time, and her run-up to the UNM Popejoy event included this daunting schedule: the night before: Phoenix; the 23rd: San Diego; the 22nd : Anaheim; the 20th: Tucson; etc. Quite understandably, she came into NM wheezing and *mocosa*, drinking gallons of water, popping meds, blowing her nose profusely; and coughing up a lung. She

was a terrific sport about it, but it clearly compromised her performance, however trouper-like and estimable. Stevie Wonder once thanked God on stage, saying that he had never had a cold in all his 50+years of touring and performing. With the vicissitudes of traveling and travel, as well as the sheer virtuosity of staying playworthy, the amazing thing is that these prolific performers can do this at all, much less do so on a pretty hectic itinerary, especially with the vagaries of weather and plane travel. She was exhausted, and I loved her all the more for her carrying on. But it was not a pretty sight or personal sound.

Even so, she performed almost a dozen and a half songs in perfect pitch, and it was the song switchovers that were hard to watch. I can soldier on, but I do not have to be in perfect pitch every night, with thousands of fans who know every word and who start singing along after the first 2 or 3 chords. She also played an electric keyboard and picked up a guitar as big as she is for a couple of songs. By my memory, and not in order, she sang: Folding Chair, The One Who Stayed and the One Who Left, Grand Hotel, Pound of Flesh, Prisoners, Left Hand Song, Bobbing for Apples, Better, That Time, Poor Little Rich Boy, Ballad of a Politician, Don't Leave Me (Ne Me Quitte Pas), and Hotel Song. Her encore included Eeet, Fidelity, and On the Radio, three of her best songs. Notwithstanding the medicinal ministrations, she was actually in fine voice, and all alone on stage, all 110 lbs, that night dripping wet. She appeared alone, and moved easily among

the instruments. The evening was about 1 hour and 45 minutes, without an intermission. If I had one suggestion, she encourages people to yell out song titles and engage her. At 66, I find this annoying.

She also did have two accompanists: sign language interpreters who both signed and swayed, especially the older of the pair. I am used to seeing hurricane preparedness public messages where a mayor or FEMA official speaks with a sign language interpreter, but this was, I believe, the first time I had seen it in a musical performance. Done well, it seemed rhythmic and quite natural.

I have now seen her three times: once in Houston, once where we drove to Austin and where she opened for Tom Petty, and this event at the lovely Popejoy, where I have attended concerts and performances and lectures since I was a young boy. We had great seats, and it was a spirit-enhancing evening. Since she began in 2001, she sings almost entirely her own personal work, which can be very personal (I almost cringed at the delight she took in singing “Bobbing for Apples”:

“Lovely people, lovely places,
I can't remember names and I can't remember faces,
Someone next door's fucking to one of my songs.

Hey, light fixture, you are much too bright,

Oh, won't you stay with me through the night,
Just grab a pillow tight,
And wait for the dizziness to pass.”}

As Posse readers know, my tastes are wide-ranging, and I admire talent across almost all genres, except hard country music or bluegrass. She came to our country as a young refugee for Russia (which she noted with a few curses about the current immigration fiascos.) In a short time, Spektor has amassed a remarkable repertoire of wonderful and original songs, sung in her glottal style, with affecting joy and grace. Add to that, with determination and grit, and *mocos*. I hope there will be more events where I can enjoy her singular style and presence.

This was likely the last concert of the year, but I will be back as icons die, cases are tried, and new music emerges. Best wishes to all of you, from my hometown of Santa Fe, NM. I will not be commenting upon the death of New Mexican singer Al Hurricane, and whose passing was noticed by the NY Times: <https://nyti.ms/2zBsne0> His music was widely popular, and he was in constant play at my NPR home, KANW 89.1 on the FM dial.

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