

Sunday, September 28, 2014

Michael's Rock and Roll Posse-- Marc Anthony in the House

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ns9YYSqLxyI> (Valio la Pena)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fLVzw9wVd9o> (I Need to Know)

It is hard to believe, but I had another transformative moment while attending the Marc Anthony concert with Tina and my friends Yocel and Susan Alonso on Saturday. I have been auditing Yocel's Entertainment Law class this semester, and learning a great deal for my various rock and roll law endeavors, for which I am very grateful. He also has many contacts for great Toyota Center tickets, especially for Latin music events. As this genre goes, it could hardly have been greater than last night's concert with Marc Anthony. There are a number of great Latin bands, but I put him at the top of the list. He first came on my radar in 1998, when he and Ruben Blades played the leads in Paul Simon's one Broadway score, *The Capeman*, which closed quickly, but became the springboard for Anthony.

He was preceded last night by Joey Vega, a Nuyorican stand up comic who did a 35-40 minute bilingual act that was very funny, if a bit stereotypical Latino humor ("Mexicans are the hardest working people in the world, and my Puerto Ricans are the laziest," with examples, etc). I think about half his jokes were Freddy Prinze vintage, but some were hilarious, and self-deprecating ("I have been married for 23 years, and really believe in marriage" [pause] "Of course, it was to three different women..."). You get the idea.

If you are in my Posse and do not know Marc Anthony, look at him on You Tube, especially the Valio la Pena and I Need to Know ones I have attached above. I Need to Know is his biggest hit, in both Latin markets and as a crossover hit in English. He started out singing this song, and if I am not mistaken, it was the only English language song he sang all night. (He also has a Spanish version.) He was backed by 14 musicians and three singers, essentially a small orchestra dominated by horns and Latin percussion. While there was a full drum set, there was no drummer most of the night—the lead percussionist spent most of the night on congas and other percussion instruments in the next row. The horns were particularly good, and their movement struck me as essentially Mexican, the choreographed way so many Mexican groups move while playing the horns. Unlike the You Tube, where he dances with a number of sultry women, Anthony

was alone on the stage all night. He reminds me of Prince, for many reasons. He is short and very slender, with a great pompadour hair style and very chiseled features. He is extremely photogenic, very Latin-looking, and the lighting and his dance moves showed these off to a high degree. He had one great dance move derived from cumbia style, where he plants his left leg, and pivots in a counterclockwise circle. As he did it repeatedly, it reminded me of the scene in the movie “Selena,” where Jennifer Lopez learns the same “washing-machine” move. I think I would have made the connection even if Marc Anthony had not been married to Lopez, as the moves are very similar. He also spreads his long arms when he dances, which reminded me of a number of Native American dance steps.

But there were several other features that really struck me: first, his voice was extraordinary, and he can both belt out numbers, and also croon them in a more controlled fashion. Very few popular singers can do this in such an accomplished way in both styles. He mixed both last night, with about two-thirds ballads and the rest full-throated salsa and other Latin styles. Every line, every word was echoed by the audience, all night. To me, he actually seemed taken aback once or twice when he would stop singing with the music playing, and the audience overwhelmed him. I know that many popular singers do this, (Yocel he was just being a ham) and I have noted it in Posse reviews of Bruce Springsteen and of Gym Class Heroes, the times I had really seen this phenomenon, where audiences so love the music that they can and do sing along the whole time. But last night was almost unbelievable, in part because it was so powerful and almost orchestrated, and in part because the group was so large. This is my related point. The Toyota Center seats just over 18,000 people, and it was completely sold out and filled—even taking into account that the oval arrangement does not provide a percentage of seats behind the stage to be used, but then were seats on the floor (see the photos I attached, above). There were surely over 16,000 or 17,000 fans last night. I have attended dozens of concerts there over the years, and have never seen every single seat filled, even the nosebleed seats. And, as it happens, I have never seen so many high heels worn, even on the death-defying concrete stairs that are pitched to provide good views even from high up. (Yocel, thanks again for the great seats.)

This part of what I write may seem a bit ethnocentric, so feel free to skip ahead. But I have never felt so Mexican as at this Puerto Rican performer’s concert. There were dozens of Puerto Rican flags in the house, and Anthony’s repertoire is essentially Nuyorican and Caribbean salsa. But listening to an evening of music in Spanish, with stage banter that was mostly Spanish, and where virtually all the crowd language was in Spanish made me feel very Mexican. (Joey Vega asked for

shoutouts from each group, and it was clear that about two-thirds of the audience was Mexican. And over 40% of Houston was Latino, mostly Mexican, in the 2010 data. ) Even going to a Santana concert never makes me feel this way, and he plays several songs in Spanish (Tito Puente's "Oye Como Va" most notably) and he is from Mexico, but when I hear him, I hear wicked, wicked pure rock and roll, with one of the most singular guitar styles in the entire universe. Last night was a powerful racial affirmation, almost entirely in the private mother tongue, accessible in a very public setting. Tina captured it when she leaned over and said, "If only we could get them all to vote." Exactly. And I hope to get MALDEF involved to urge Marc Anthony and these Latin acts to make voter registration part of their ethos and community involvement. But this was a transcendent moment for me, and among the most enjoyable concerts I have ever attended. I have played *Sigo Siendo Yo: Grandes Exitos* many times, his greatest hits album from 2006, and every time I do so from now on, I will recall this great gig that I shared with 18,000 of my closest friends, or so it seemed.