

## **Paul Simon—Still Singing After All These Years; Michael’s Rock and Roll Posse**

With prolific entertainers such as Paul Simon, who first surfaced with Art Garfunkel for the short-lived Tom & Jerry in 1956-57, his touring is a tribute to both his longevity and his enormous creativity and hard work, at a level that properly situates him on the top shelf of rock and roll. When he and Garfunkel were high schoolers, they produced the regional hit “Hey Schoolgirl,” (see URL below) and then reached the top of the charts with the slow-released versions of “Sounds of Silence,” as Simon & Garfunkel, in 1964 (acoustic) and 1965 (the electric version we all know.) They have sung and fought in equal measure, and Simon is making what he promises is his “Final Tour: Homeward Bound,” at the age of 76. I first saw Simon & Garfunkel in my freshman year of college, when they played the UNM basketball Pit (in 1968-69). I gathered 50 student ID cards from friends at the College of Santa Fe, took a bus to Albuquerque, 50 miles away, and bought 50 tickets in a bloc, and rented the seminary bus and driver to take all of us to the concert. I did not keep good records, but if I recall, the student tickets were \$6 each, which I fronted out of my financial aid funds. (I can finally tell this story involving wide scale fraud and racketeering because the statute of limitations has passed. But there was no collusion.) I charged \$10 each, which covered the transportation and my bus trip to buy the tickets. I saw him again with Dylan, at Madison Square Garden, one of the half dozen best concerts of my life, and now on June 2, 2018 at Toyota Center. I also saw his very short-lived *The Capeman* musical in Winter, 1998, featuring Ruben Blades and the then-unknown Marc Anthony. I happened to be in NYC when a friend said he could get us tickets, so I went. It was a good thing I happened upon the show, as it closed down months later.

But I listen to Paul Simon in one form or another several times a week, and skip around in his various albums and collected works, which still surprise me after all this time. As Tina and I settled into last week’s concert (after dinner with friends Yocel and Susan Alonso), and he began with his smallish band, I was composing this Posse review in my mind, and tried several different idioms to categorize him. His is such a vast array of styles and influences, and is itself one of the broadest and deepest catalogs in music, I was playing with “a thinking fan’s musician,” inasmuch as he is so complex, nuanced, articulate, and evocative—but then he announced, “I wrote all my music to be danced to, so feel free to get up and dance [although] the guy in the seat behind you may not like it,” and he started dancing and the arena exploded. It was quite full, with the stage backed up all the way to the end of the O-shaped arena, blocking only the seats immediately behind the stage. The last time we saw so much spontaneous dancing at any concert venue, much less the sort of sterile basketball arena, was Marc Anthony, f/k/a *The Capeman*.

The audience, which was very appreciative and engaged in listening and dancing, was rewarded with America; 50 Ways to Leave Your Lover; The Boy in the Bubble; Dazzling Blue; That Was Your Mother; Rewrite; Mother and Child Reunion; Me and Julio Down by the Schoolyard; Rene and Georgette Magritte With Their Dog After the War; Can’t Run But; Wristband; Spirit Voices; The Obvious Child; Questions for the Angels; The Cool, Cool River; Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes; and You Can Call Me Al. There was no intermission, and

then there were 3 encores, which rewarded those who stayed and did not run to their cars: Encore-1: Homeward Bound; Kodachrome; Still Crazy After All These Years; Encore-2: Graceland; The Boxer; Late in the Evening; and Encore-3: American Tune; The Sounds of Silence.

He included S&G songs, but mostly sang from his own enormous outpouring as a solo performer, and I have to confess that on almost all songs, his voice (backed by excellent singer-musicians) carried the day. Some of the songs are, in my memory, Art Garfunkel songs (“Bridge” and “The Sounds of Silence”), but he and the group hit all the high notes properly, and I recalled just how soothing and assured I have always considered his voice to be. These songs also show his constant experimentation, especially after he went to South Africa, staring down boycotts and being punished artistically, until the fresh and exhilarating African singers and players began to travel with him, resulting in the 1986 *Graceland* and its incandescent title song and “Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes,” performed with Ladysmith Black Mambazo and other African entertainers. Many other singers are denizens of “world music,” the comprehensive and comparative musicology of Sade, Peter Gabriel (after Genesis), and other practitioners, but none have championed Black African stylings and musicians as has Simon. I have always considered The Capeman as evidence of this part of his musical DNA, featuring salseros Blades and Anthony, Caribbean influences, and other Latino collaborations, such as with Los Lobos. I was struck in particular with The Obvious Child, where his band morphed into 5 drummers on a variety of percussive instruments.

He did not perform my favorite S&G song, “For Emily, Wherever I May Find Her,” perhaps because it had featured Garfunkel’s soaring voice, and my review of various setlists suggests that he has rarely performed it recently. I have included below their original version and the surprising cover by The Red Hot Chili Peppers. But picking a single favorite Paul Simon song is a fool’s errand, like arranging nieces and nephews in some rank order. No one listening to them in their Buddy Holly-ripped-off “Hey Schoolgirl” would have predicted the latent talent that was there, and how he would have flowed like lava across the musical landscape for over half a century. He has received many recognitions, all well-deserved, but even in crowds, I have always assumed he was singing directly to me. For a man who has focused on failures to communicate (“Sound of Silence,” “The Dangling Conversation,” and “Rewrite,” “50 Ways”), he and I have always been in a conversation. I can say that of very few other entertainers, and almost none for so long.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=brnUBbd-jGk> (Hey Schoolgirl)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WaWrdwP1YH0> (Emily, Simon & Garfunkel)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KD77Q0orPVM> (Emily, Red Hot Chili Peppers)

This delayed review was due to our returning to Santa Fe, but now I am settled back in and this was at the top of my to-do list. We have no concerts scheduled for the time being, but in a few weeks, I will return to my studio to record a dozen more classes for THE LAW OF ROCK AND ROLL. The show has been picked up by several more US stations and a Canadian station,

so life on the high desert is good. Happy Summer to all of you, and a shout out to my classmate Posse members from our high school, exactly 50 years ago.

Michael

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