

Einstein's Boogie

by John Farrow

It was a dreary, wet day in the Big Apple, chilly and with light rain all around. Not the ideal weather for a 10-miler in Central Park, but I figured that if things didn't work out, there were several places along the route to bag it and grab a cappuccino.

The Tavern on the Green was one such place. It was in what turned out to be the fourth mile of the race, and by then I was seriously considering all options. But off to the right was Lincoln Center. Just that little realization was enough to bring a smile to my face recalling the previous evening. Immediately, my load was lightened. Perhaps even the sky lightened ever so slightly, too.

It had been the last night of the summer Mozart Series in Philharmonic Hall, but that was not where I had been. While walking past on my way to the nearby bandshell and the Roots of American Music Festival, I did a double-take as the spitting image of Albert Einstein ambled up to the box office to check the evening's Mozart offerings.

The dress was right: ruffled tweed jacket with red slacks, tie askew and blown back over his left shoulder, and frizzed hair as if his finger were permanently in an electric socket. Fitting, I thought. The real Albert Einstein loved classical music and played Mozart pieces on the violin.

But I hurried on past to catch the soothing harmonies of Dar Williams and Cry, Cry, Cry with their beautiful renditions of classic bluegrass tunes. The name of the group had come from an old song by the same name written by Johnny Cash. Towards the end of the set, however, who should come shuffling down the aisle but Einstein. He took a seat a few rows away and remained motionless for the duration of the set, even though all around people were swaying with the soothing harmonies and easy rhythms.

After the break, the evening's headliner, the Rock & Roll Trio was introduced. Einstein was nowhere to be seen. It figured.

The original Rock & Roll Trio included brothers Johnny and Dorsey Burnette along with guitarist Paul Burlison. They had such early hits as "You're Sixteen," "Honey Hush" and "Train Kept a'Comin'," the latter two covered by the Beatles and Yardbirds in the 1960s. The Burnettes have since been replaced in the band by their sons, but Burlison is still playing.

They were all originally from Memphis, where Dorsey Burnette had been an electrician at Crown Electric Company. In 1953, Crown Electric also employed a young truck driver by the name of Elvis Presley. In the early years, the Burnettes, Burlison and Presley would all jam together in local night spots.

Their set probably has not changed a bit since 1956 when Burlison created the fuzz-tone for his guitar after he inadvertently dropped his amplifier while setting up before a gig. The impact had loosened a

tube, causing the output to be distorted. Ever since, guitarists from Chuck Berry to Keith Richards to Bruce Springsteen have had a new sound distinctive to rock and roll.

Towards the end of the set, they launched into where their signature "Rockabilly Boogie," the song that secured a place for Johnny Burnette and his band in the history of popular music. It was impossible to keep still as perhaps the purest form of early rock and roll surged forth. All around, there was some of the most spontaneous and uninhibited dancing I had seen since the Grateful Dead in 1969. And right up front, there was Einstein, boogieing with the best of them, electric hair bobbing frantically this way and that. Man, that cat could flat get down and dance.

Just recalling the scene was enough of a lift to send me on down the course and past several groups of runners, eliciting a few sideways glances and no doubt thoughts of *Why is that guy smiling in the middle of a chilly, rainy 10-miler?* There will always be Einstein. □

ARR News October 1999

Albuquerque Road Runners Club