

Musical and Culinary Therapy January 2013

For a couple of hot-pickin' amigos with heads full of hangover and bellies full of Red Iguana, David Hidalgo of Los Lobos and Alejandro Escovedo had little trouble holding a packed house totally spellbound down at The Stateroom in Salt Lake last Friday night.

Actually, Escovedo characterized their post-meal mindset as a "mole coma," a medical syndrome quite familiar to Red Iguana Restaurant aficionados everywhere. The hangover part came from the collective and reflective liquid debriefing they held following the only other stop on their very-special two-show tour the previous night in Santa Fe.

Using Smokey Meehan's birthday as an excuse, a gaggle of us holy goofs made an evening of it, including a pre-concert refueling stop at "Red Iguana 2" to see if we could get our own heads and bellies in proper synch for the show. Arriving at our proposed goals in an efficient manner, we headed out for the venue at about the same time the two musical icons in question walked in for a culinary therapy session of their own.

The concept for the gig infatuated most of our music tribe as soon as we got wind of it. Having not missed an Alejandro show in Utah since he first played at Pat's Barbeque in South Salt Lake in 2006 and having caught most every Los Lobos show since their first Utah outing at the State Fairgrounds around 1990, we saw the intimate pairing of just the two of them swapping songs and stories onstage as a no brainer.

Although catching either of them with their bands in tow is as good as it gets, seeing them pared down to just themselves with only enough instrumentation to reflect their collective bodies of work proved to be a superb notion on their parts -- especially within the living room style setting provided by Chris and Darin for this special night in their already-cozy Stateroom concert venue.

It was one of those singular evenings when it was apparent to all that everyone was hip to why they were there. Shows like this are few and far between. From the very beginning of their respective recording careers, Escovedo and Hidalgo have demonstrated nothing short of high art in their compositional, instrumental, and vocal virtuosity.

Both are also quite comfortable crossing genres from *norteno* to *tejano* to blues and rock but at the core of everything they do are deeply personal songs that, seemingly, flow from their respective muses on command. It's great North American literature; what can I say?

It's said that nothing beats the olfactory sense when it comes to jerking you back to a specific space-time but, if that be the case, I must find music exquisitely aromatic. Oftentimes, I get instantaneous whiplash when I hear a familiar song and such was the case again Friday night.

Like when Hidalgo broke into "One Time, One Night" from the Los Lobos "By the Light of the Moon" album and I was immediately transported back to the dingy confines of the State Fairground's "Dirt Palace" on North Temple where I first heard it live.

Although I had been totally enamored with the David Hidalgo and Louis Perez classic “Will the Wolf Survive” upon first hearing, with the coming of “One Time, One Night” I felt their songwriting bar had truly been raised. So when, as headliners, Los Lobos chose to open their set with it back on that night, I thought it was a perfect segue from Warren Zevon’s final opening act encore of “Poor Poor Pitiful Me.”

The same goes for when Alejandro began strumming the opening chords to his beautifully poignant “Rosalie.” In a heartbeat I once again found myself standing in front of the stage at the base of Snowbird’s Peruvian Express lift as Escovedo and his full band, the Sensitive Boys, turned Little Cottonwood Canyon into a cathedral.

From now on, however, there’s little doubt that it will be this past Friday night that will be channeled whenever there occurs a subsequent encounter with the music of these brilliant, quintessentially American, songwriters.

It could even be something as seemingly inconsequential as just the sound of either of their voices in harmony triggering the flashback. You want to talk olfactory? It’s the “butterfly effect” of chaos theory! Just one note and you’re smothered in Red Iguana Enchilada sauce.

Speaking of which, as they most always do when visiting Salt Lake City, both Alejandro and David offered heartfelt tributes to the late Ramon Cardenas, his sister Lucy, and their longtime Red Iguana home away from home.

At Smokey’s suggestion, we took in “Red Iguana 1” the next morning for breakfast and, to no surprise, found Alejandro, being an ahead of the curve kind of guy, already digging in to his morning sacrament. We had all found ourselves blessed by the events of the previous evening, both performers and fans alike.