

Tina Turner Is Having the Time of Her Life

She was the symbol of rock 'n' roll stamina for 50 years. Her "Proud Mary" was 175 percent longer than the original, and John Fogerty didn't even dance. She became a star with Ike Turner in her 20s, escaped his abuse in her 30s, fought her way up the pop charts in her 40s, toured the world through her 60s, and now she would like to sleep in.

So I arrived at 2. Erwin Bach, Turner's lovely German husband, fetched me in his SUV and delivered me to the house, which is named — did you think Tina Turner's house would not have a name? — the Chateau Algonquin. It has cartoon palace energy: ivy snaking up the walls, gardeners manicuring the shrubs, a life-size two-legged horse sculpture suspended from a domed ceiling, a framed rendering of Turner as an Egyptian queen, a room stuffed with gilded Louis XIV style sofas and, sprawled on one of them, Tina Turner herself.

Turner is 79 years old. She has been retired for 10 years, and she is still basking in all of the nothing she has to do. "I don't sing. I don't dance. I don't dress up," she told me. Even her wig — "a critical part of the Tina Turner look," as she wrote in her recent memoir — has relaxed from its formerly perpendicular posture into a saucy shag. Her voice is as beguiling as ever, though it is now employed for different means. She slips into a rich continental accent when she calls for her husband, and she dives into her low, trembling rasp — "not the voice of a woman," as she has put it — when she teases him.

She does not miss performing.

[...]

Once in a while, though, she will be in the car. The radio will come on, and with Bach humming respectfully beside her, she will give the song the full Tina Turner treatment, bouncing in her seat and purring for an audience of one. There is a song that she can't resist. "Oh, what's his name?" she called to her husband, who was puttering around in the next room. "Darling? What's his name?" And then she did sing: "I want something just liiiiike this!"

Bach called: "The song is by Coldplay!"

"Coldplay," Turner repeated. "You know what I like?" She began to rhapsodize on the counterintuitive appeal of Chris Martin's voice. "He doesn't have that really good black voice, like Motown —"

" — The song is called 'Coldplay with the Chainsmokers!'" Bach called.

"It doesn't maaatter!" she called back, as if she had summoned her full vocal powers to banish the very idea of whatever a Chainsmoker is from the face of the Earth. She shot me a sly look. "It's Coldplay," she said.

[...]

The couple moved to Switzerland in 1995. After a chaotic life, Turner likes the Swiss zeal for order. Everything here runs according to the rules. She does not speak German, which, actually, she prefers; it means she's not expected to say much. If someone says something amusing, she can just ask her husband what it was.

On a typical day, she gets up. Her major-domo, Didier, an enormously tall Swiss man with a bright polo shirt buttoned all the way to his shy face, makes her some oatmeal. She shops.

The Algonquin is overflowing with beautiful things: a pair of novelty castle keys (“I really wanted a castle until I saw how big castles were,” she said); pieces of an enormous shattered amethyst arranged by the in-ground swimming pool (“It was a gift”); framed photographs of the sarcophagi of old Egyptian royalty (she senses she was one of them in a past life; Didier was there too); a sword-wielding pre-Columbian idol she picked up just as she was leaving America for good (“I liked him, at the time”). Nothing is in storage: Now that she can afford it, “I want to see it,” she said.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/09/theater/tina-turner-musical.html>