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FREQUENT FLIER

When Music Takes Flight, Over and Over Again

By JON REGEN; as Told to JOAN RAYMOND

EVER since I was a kid, I wanted to be a traveling musician. I can be in Washington, D.C., one week and Istanbul the next. But unlike many frequent fliers, I love traveling.

Even when I'm halfway around the world, I often run into friends, mostly fellow musicians, from back home. We laugh like kids, while trying to identify the meat products in our airport meals.

Last Thanksgiving was an exception.

I had an eight-week gig in Spain. In Madrid, I ran into a friend I hadn't seen in about seven years. Although we couldn't find a turkey dinner, we had some ham. Meeting friends and sharing experiences help me stay sane.

As does coffee. You can always find an amazing cup of coffee anyplace in the world. If anyone cares, Autogrill in Italy is pulling a pretty good espresso these days.

My career as a singer and songwriter began because of a flight delay. I was returning home from a European tour with the legendary jazz singer Jimmy Scott. We had a flight delay in Vienna, and I had a lot of time to kill and too many sheets of [music](#) paper in front of me.

I decided to try writing lyrics. By the time we landed in Newark, I decided to break out of the confines of jazz piano and start singing my own stories.

In fact, one song, "Only My Credit Card Remembers Where I've Been," is an ode to the frequent flier. It was written after a backbreaking 16-day tour of Japan. I was so confused as to my whereabouts, I wrote that phrase after my girlfriend called to ask me where I was. I said, "Hang on, I have no idea." I had to look at the hotel credit card receipt to get my bearings. I was in Osaka, by the way.

Some songs on my new record, "Let It Go," are the product of heartbreak and air travel combined. A girlfriend and I broke up in London, right as I was getting on a plane back to the States. I spent the eight-hour flight reliving the love affair. When I got back to New York, I wrote an entire album of material in less than a week.

In all the years I've been touring, I've only had my bags lost once. Unfortunately, it was on opening night of a five-night sold-out run in London, and the band's music and my performance attire were M.I.A. The airline agreed to pick up the cost of a new wardrobe. And

after a few trips to Hugo Boss, and six hours of recopying music, everything was as good as new. Since then, I never check anything. I have become a carry-on kind of guy.

Considering that I have been waiting all of my life for someone to call me to play the piano and sing, losing my bags is no big deal. Neither are the inevitable flight delays or hassles with security.

Music cuts through differences in language and time zones. It's amazing that a song written in New York City has the same effect on someone a world away. That's what makes the rigors of the road worth tackling. Wherever the next tour may take me, with a little luck, a good cup of coffee, and, of course, a credit card receipt, everything will be just fine.

By Jon Regen, as told to Joan Raymond; e-mail: joan.raymond@nytimes.com.

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