

12C—ARGUS-COURIER, Petaluma, Calif.

Friday, June 2, 1978



Playback **Joel McNally**
Townes & Billy Joe

Dawn was breaking outside and it wasn't the only one. Townes Van Zandt, the legendary semifamous self-destructive songwriter, had been up all night rolling dice and drinking straight vodka with a Diet Dr. Pepper chaser.

In keeping with his image as a celebrated loser, Townes had succeeded in redistributing all of his income.

Now he was demanding that he be allowed to bet the bottle of vodka against a book of Dylan Thomas poetry. Since both the vodka and the book belonged to me, there seemed to be something not quite right about that. I just couldn't quite put my finger on it.

Earlier in the evening (morning)?, Townes' fiddle player had talked about how much better it was to play for someone as stable as Townes. He had previously played for Billy Joe Shaver.

An experience with Billy Joe. This one involved one of my more discriminating and intelligent correspondents. (Meaning she doesn't write me hate notes on the back of Sugar Daddy wrappers.)

Barbara, of Muskego, Wis., had written Billy Joe a fan letter. In return she received air mail special delivery a package of six 8 by 10s of Billy Joe. Two were standard publicity photos. Others showed him with assorted friends like Kris Kristofferson, Willie Nelson and Bobby Bare. And one showed him staring down a hippie at Willie's 4th of July picnic.

All the photographs were autographed ("Everyone said Hi!") and several had writing all over the front and back. They were signed with profuse endearments like "Your friend always," "Love you forever" and "God Bless."

"He somehow managed to misspell God — and every third or fourth word," Barbara wrote. "He invited my husband (the hard-core John Denver fan) and I to visit him in Nashville and also wrote 'I'll be seeing bought (sic) of you REAL SOON.' That sort of worries us. Should we move? Not answer the door?"

Townes and Billy Joe have more in common than just a fiddle player and a certain irrepressible flair for excess. Both have underground reputations for writing brilliant songs that belong above ground.

And both have new albums and reissues of

old albums out showing what kind of music creative — if vulnerable — genius is capable of producing. Townes Van Zandt's new album is "Flyin' Shoes" (Tomato) and Billy Joe Shaver's is "Gypsy Boy" (Capricorn).

When Townes sings a song about puttin' on his flyin' shoes, don't expect some happy little Leo Sayers ditty.

On "Flyin' Shoes," "fall is a feelin' that I just can't lose." On another song, "Pueblo Waltz," "Sunrise comes and I don't know why."

This is the same guy who once described life as waiting around to die. Some of the songs are bleak and cold. One, "Snake Song," is ominous and threatening. The snake hisses about the venom he is carrying and the dead skins he has shed.

The hard, cutting songs are broken occasionally by numbers like the rock classic, "Who Do You Love." Who indeed? The closest he gets to a love song is "Loretta," a song he wrote about a girl named Margaret at a time when he was going with Cindy.

Billy Joe Shaver shares some dark visions, too, as he sings "I'm Going Crazy in Three Quarter Time" or wishes self-destruction upon all his friends in "The Believer."

The dusky life portrayed in the eerie "Gypsy Boy" ballad and the tearing down of the carnival in "We Stayed Too Long at the Fair" fit the bleak theme. In between he does the defiant "Billy B. Damned" and nostalgia for that old time religion in appropriate revival rhythm, "Chicken on the Ground."

Another thing Townes and Billy Joe share is a tuneless singing style. That fits, too. But they also get help from some fine musicians including Gary and Randy Scruggs on Townes' album and Willie Nelson and Emmylou Harris and Randy Scruggs again behind Shaver.

They may not be average but then nobody is. Popular songs always feign feelings. Townes Van Zandt and Billy Joe Shaver have them.

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Townes Van Zandt will perform tonight and Saturday at the Inn of the Beginning in Cotati and Monday night at the Great American Music Hall in San Francisco.



SCOTT & NINA
... at The Eggerly June 11

Scott & Nina Perform At The Eggerly

Scott and Nina, an acoustic musical duo from Sebastopol, will return to the Eggerly for their first performance this year Sunday, June 11 at 8 p.m.

The brother-and-sister team has been appearing in various cities throughout California and recently were featured in a half-hour television special on Channel 9. Their record album, "Branching Out," will be available at the Eggerly concert.

Scott Gerber is a songwriter, singer and guitarist, while Nina plays the mandolin and a variety of other instruments. The Eggerly will accept reservations at \$2.50. Tickets will be available at the door for \$3. Phone 762-7228.

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