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EG

THE AGE ENTERTAINMENT GUIDE

Gamblin', ramblin' and writing gems

Bob Dylan's coffee table bears witness to Country's adoration of Texas ramblin' Townes Van Zandt. **DAVE DAWSON reports.**

"Some times I don't know where this dirty road is taking me, some times I can't even see the reason why, but I guess I'll keep a gambling, lots of booze and lots of ramblin', man, it's easier than waiting around to die." **Townes Van Zandt**

TOWNES VAN ZANDT vividly recalls the first he made — he suffered painful bruising when he fell deep into a large Texas rabbit warren. Armed with a rifle and a bottle of Seagram's whiskey, Townes introduced his dog and his girlfriend, in that order, to the cameras.

The singer was showing the crew of Heartworn Highways just how big the rabbits grew in the Lone Star State. But Townes lost his footing and plunged into a gaping abyss in the arid Texas soil before emerging to perform his song, 'Waiting Around to Die'. Van Zandt, son of a Texas rancher and oil man turned lawyer, also lost his girlfriend before she saw the movie.

"They caught me on a fairly festive morning," thrice-wed Townes told EG on the eve of his first Australian tour.

They were filming me at my Texas home for 'Heartworn Highways'. The sound and film crew were from New York and Sweden and they genuinely thought I had some giant rabbits down there in that big burrow. I realised that so I played it to the hilt.

"They were so impressed with my fall they left it in the movie. I just walked around, ad-libbing. It wasn't like real acting. I didn't have to learn any lines. It was so different from any other part."

Although Townes, 46, has stumbled a few times since from battles with the bottle, he hasn't fallen from grace or success. And like the character he played in 'Heartworn Highways' he has re-



Steve Earle may think he's better than Dylan, but Van Zandt still looks like Col Joye.

gained his footing on the international country, folk and blues music concert circuit.

Townes is best known for the songs 'Poncho and Lefty', 'If I Needed You', 'White Freight Liner Blues' and 'Tennessee Valley', which were hits for Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard, Emmylou Harris and Don Williams, Hoyt Axton, Jimmie Dale Gilmore and Bobby Bare.

But it was 'Heartworn Highways', made in 1976 and released in 1978, that was the catalyst for the singer being known way beyond the music scene. "They had an opening in New York," Townes added, "I saw it with Odetta. A lot of explicit language — especially by David Allan Coe — made it hard for it to be ever seen on American TV."

The obscenities of former convict country star and actor Coe, a Mormon who once boasted seven wives and claimed to have killed a fellow prisoner, earned it an 'R' rating and international infamy. 'Heartworn Highways' also brought together recent tourist

Steve Earle, then a teenager, and his mentors Van Zandt and Guy Clark.

It was the embryo of a relationship that peaked when an Earle quote was used as a marketing ploy for Townes' 10th album, 'At My Window'.

The singer revealed he was embarrassed by Earle who said "Townes Van Zandt is the best songwriter in the whole world and I'll stand on Bob Dylan's coffee table in my cowboy boots and say that."

That was a hard act to follow for the reclusive Texan who met his third wife Jeannene the day after John Lennon was slain in New York.

"I had no idea the quote was on the album cover until I got a few advance copies," recalls Townes. "It was so silly. I got incensed and told the record company to take it off before they pressed any more. But I was too late. I know Bob Dylan and I've seen his bodyguards. If Steve Earle thinks he can stand on Bob Dylan's coffee table in his

cowboy boots and say anything he's mistaken."

Van Zandt was born into a ranching family in Fort Worth — once known as Cow Town — gateway to the wild west and Texas panhandle.

Townes' world is a dark planet populated by gunslingers, ramblers, gamblers, outlaws, foot-loose lovers, hookers and lost souls seeking solace with vast armies of strangers.

In 'Poncho and Lefty', they have "breath as hard as kerosene, wear their skin like iron and guns outside their pants for all the honest world to feel". They drift from oilfields and cattle ranches of Texas to the bluegrass plains of Kentucky, deltas of Mississippi, bayous of Louisiana and concrete jungles of New York.

Even though the geography of the singer's tunes may pertain to the northern hemisphere, the themes and sentiments are universal. Like fellow Texan and close friend, Guy Clark, who toured here last year, Townes has a strong following in the Australia

lian legal profession. His lyrics have been quoted in detail by members of 3AW's Lawyers, Guns and Money radio team in pleas to the bench and also in reply in judgments. But it was Townes' way with words which almost brought a premature end to the life and humor of his mother also a Texan lawyer.

Van Zandt and record-company boss Kevin Eggers decided to call their 1972 album 'The Late Great Townes Van Zandt'.

"He thought it was a great joke," Townes recalled, "I hadn't talked to my late mother at that point for about six months. I lived back then from one suitcase and one guitar case. If she didn't hear from me she would just think I was doing fine. She made a point of buying all my new albums — she wouldn't let me give them to her. She would get all dressed up and go to the store. When she went and bought that one it flipped her out. She thought I had died without telling her. She got phone calls from all over saying how sad they were to hear the news. I'm glad I finally called. If there was a joke it didn't work for her."

That album, produced by Cowboy Jack Clement who first recorded Townes after he was discovered by Mickey Newbury, cost \$55,000. It was a far cry from 'Live At The Old Quarter Houston, Texas', the first of Van Zandt's two live albums.

"It cost about \$160 to record that album," Townes revealed. "It was just me and a guitar. I knew it was being recorded because I was staying with a friend — we were carrying his Teac four-track down each night. It was done as well as any of the studio records."

The singer, whose first album 'For The Sake Of The Song' appeared in 1988 and has never been re-released, also has an unreleased album. "It's probably in a vault somewhere in Nashville," says Townes. "They ran into money problems. But I have re-recorded some of those songs."

"It wasn't just meeting my wife that made me quit drinking. All the craziness got to be too much. Now I've got all these responsibilities. I've got a son Will, seven, and I feel great now playing and singing. I had 20 years of guttaring and self-sufficing with no responsibilities."

► Townes Van Zandt performs at Madigans, 400 Sydney Road, Brunswick, on Saturday, 22 September and 5 pm on Sunday, 23 September.

BRIDGE

MICHAEL COURTNEY

JOHNSON Brockwell, ABF president and captain of the Australian women's team at this year's Far East, spotted Stephen Burgess making the most of an inferior contract in a crucial late match.

Four hearts is the obvious place to play but Marston-Burgess reached 3NT by South on the queen of diamonds lead. Burgess ducked the first diamond and won the second when West continued with the jack. Next he

cashied four heart tricks and even though West had only to find two discards he was under considerable pressure.

He must keep all his diamonds as otherwise declarer will be able to afford to lose a club trick in order to set up one club trick. West discarded two spades and Burgess read the ending perfectly. He cashied the ace of spades, leaving West with only diamonds and clubs. Then he exited with a diamond. West could cash his winning diamonds but then perforce had to lead a club from his queen into the king-jack. Burgess had made four hearts, one diamond, one spade and three clubs for contract and one IMP to China who played 4H in the other room. Burgess is presently competing

in the World Championships in Geneva. He has been given the honor of being one of only 16 players worldwide chosen to play in a computerised Individual Par Contest being held at Geneva. Each player will face 16 play problems. For each problem the participant will be given 1000 points. Points will be lost according to mistakes made in play and how much time is spent solving each problem.

Board 9	A4
D/R N	AJ97
E/W Vul	K96
	A754
Q65	K9732
42	853
AQJ108	J108
Q88	KQ108
	32
	KJ63

CYCLING

GEOFF WINESTOCK

THE recently released Victorian Bicycle Strategy suggests disused railway lines could provide the land for a network of commuter cycle paths in Melbourne. One path that uses this option follows the historic route of the Outer Circle Cycle Path. The route can provide a connection between the Gardiner's and Yarra paths.

The Outer Circle Rail Line was constructed and then abandoned for a short time during the depression of the 1890s. It later provided a passenger service from Ashburton to Deerpence from 1891 to 1927. Freight trains were still using the route in 1944. The route starts near Gardiner railway station. Ride north up Burke Road; just across Gardiner's Creek a path turns east and follows the creek and the arterial to Great Valley Road. Turn left, then right at Dawson Drive and you will find yourself in Nettleton Park at the start of the track. The path is surfaced with loose, uneven gravel, and many gutters need ramps. A short way along, the track incorporates what must be Melbourne's only bicycle overpass. This unusual piece of cycleway provides a glimpse of the sort of road construction that might be possible in some happy future.

day when all able-bodied people use bicycles as their main form of transport.

The track crosses Glen Iris Road, then goes through Ferndale and Hill 'n Dale parks. Across Summerhill Road, the path hits the railway, which it more or less follows north. The gravel track is narrow and passes through leafy old suburbs. Take care crossing Toorak Road — turn right and travel up Tuttle Valley Road, then left back on to the track. Go north, looping through occasional parks. Cross Riversdale Road and then through the park opposite. The Riversdale swimming pool is a good place for a rest.

Continue across Prospect Hill Road, under the railway line near East Camberwell Station and then through Boorondara Park, a pleasant retreat whose name means "place of shade". A tunnel takes you under Canterbury Road and another goes under Knox Grove to Mont Albert Road.

From here the track continues along the land traversed by the now abandoned Outer Ring railway and takes you behind houses and along back streets to the Yarra Path at Fairfield.

The Sunday Age

Sometimes the ordinary is more remarkable than the extraordinary.

PORT FAIRY FOLK FESTIVAL MUSIC



MARCH 8TH TO 11TH - 1991

PERFORMERS are invited to apply to be part of the 1991 Port Fairy Folk Festival, which is again being organised by the Geelong Folk Music Club Inc. Bands, trio's, duo's, soloist, or any other interesting acts are required to make the festival as enjoyable as it has been in the past. If you are interested, please apply in writing to:

Port Fairy Folk Festival, Geelong Folk Music Club, P O Box 269, Geelong, 3220 or Phone/Fax 052-232276. Including a brief biography, demonstration tape and B&W photo, by October 31st, 1990

HELPERS: If you are interested in helping, please contact us at the above address.

TICKETS: are now available from the above address for \$55 (GFMC Members concession \$45)

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