

Review: *Music*

Townes Van Zandt and his Texas tunes, at Tin Angel

By Dan DeLuca
INQUIRER STAFF WRITER

Townes Van Zandt is a pretty funny guy, but you wouldn't know it from listening to the mournful, eerily beautiful songs he writes.

The storied Texas troubadour made an extremely rare appearance at the Tin Angel on Saturday night, and his hourlong first set was a patently odd mix of shaggy-dog stories and disturbingly spooky tunes with a deathly cloud hanging over them.

"I try to not be too funny," he said backstage between sets. "But with my songs, if I didn't tell any jokes people would start taking out their razor blades.")

And sure enough, in between tales of three penguins in sunglasses in the back seat and Lenny Bruce sniffing glue, Van Zandt strummed and finger-picked his acoustic guitar and sang a batch of carefully detailed tunes as black as the middle of the night.

There were a few lighter numbers: A ragged version of his mentor Lightnin' Hopkins' "Short Haired Woman Blues," and the Woody Guthrie-esque goof "Talkin' Thunderbird Wine" had Van Zandt and the packed house dissolving into giggles, though the crowd wasn't quite so amused as he.

But Van Zandt made the strongest impression when he closed his eyes, his shoulder length gray hair framing his long weathered face, and sang tunes from his new album, *No*



The somber Townes Van Zandt doesn't write happy endings.

Deeper Blue (Sugar Hill), that didn't allow for happy endings. "Blazes Blue," a blues for his murdered friend and fellow Texas songwriter Blaze Foley, was introduced with a story about exhuming Foley's body to retrieve a ticket for a pawned guitar. And after the much-covered "Poncho and Lefty," "Marie," the tale of a homeless man who finds his pregnant wife dead but holds out hope she'll "meet me by and by," left the room in a chilled silence.

Local country diva Patsy Foster, who's seemingly everywhere these days, opened with songs from her self-released CD *Long Cold War* (Human Muse), plus a few promising new tunes, and a spirited cover of Merle Haggard's "Swinging Doors." Foster has a powerfully dusky voice with a touch of Loretta Lynn rumble, and she was most effective on her leaner, uptempo tunes such as the snappy "Little Too Little."