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& LIVE

ANOTHER SONGWRITER FROM TEXAS

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.

—Steve Earle

Well, most of all let me say that after Steve said that I met Bob Dylan's body guards and if he thinks he's gonna stand on Bob Dylan's coffee table and say anything he's mistaken. Hebet.

—Townes Van Zandt

Townes Van Zandt

By DAN MORRISON

I first heard of Townes Van Zandt about eight years ago when my friend Lenny told me that he was the guy that wrote "Pancho and Lefty" and that it was about Pancho Villa. So what?

A month or so later I found myself in a big-city music store. It was here that I first read that quote by Steve Earle. Wow. I brought a live album of his called Live and Obscure. "Holy shit, this guy's great!"

Never have I heard a bad song by Townes (and my friend Johnny has all his records) but he'd probably tell you they all stunk. The guy doesn't have control over his writing—it pulses through him like lightning. Just have a listen to "Mr. Mudd and Mr. Gold," a song about a sinister king and Queen of clubs who stack the deck and seduce a card game between the title characters. Gold wins heavily but alas.

The diamond queen saw mudd's ordeal
Began to think of her long lost son
Fell to her knees with a mother's mercy
Prayed to the angels every one

Three kings come to club's command
The angels from the sky did ride
Three kings upon the streets of Gold
Three fireballs on the muddy side

Zzooommm straight out his fingers before he even knows it. Not your typical Nashville stuff. "Pancho and Lefty" fit the Nashville formula for Willy Nelson and Merle Haggard, and other songs of Townes' have been recorded by Emmylou Harris and others. Nanci Griffith's newest album features a tragic tale of Townes' called "Tecumseh Valley" about a girl from the country that moves to the city to find work to help out her pa, but ends badly near a bar that she had to whore in. One of my favorites is called "Marie"—a sad song about a sad situation. The homeless of the land.

In this song the narrator tells his story of being laid off from the railroad, running out of unemployment checks and living on the street.

Summer wasn't bad below the bridge
A little short on food that's all

Now I gotta get Marie some kind of coat
We're headed down into fall!

Me and Johnny drove out to see Townes play last year in Portland and got to shoot the breeze with him outside the bar before the show. "No kidding? You guys drove all the way from Montana to see me?" "Yes sir. Sure is nice weather we're havin', ain't it?" "Yep." We went back stage after the show to drop off our demo tape in case he possibly needed it, and Townes invited us to come party at his hotel room and play music. "Uh, let me check my schedule."

Well, we had left our guitars in Montana because we figured, what the heck are the chances of actually getting to sit down in a hotel room and pook with the legend? Besides, the last time I went to a big city, somebody stole my Martin D-28 guitar (serial 4,953; if you happen see it) Well I shoulda chanced it because settin' in that hotel room without my guitar made me chew my fingers clean off and now I can't play at all. Johnny is a fantastic singer so he just sang harmony vocals to all the songs, and he still has his fingers to this day.

But it all seems to be working out, because now Townes is coming to Missoula, and Me and Johnny are going to open the show for him as the Highlanders.

Townes Van Zandt will play in the UC Ballroom at 8 p.m. Saturday Oct. 15. If you're a fan of excellent song writing, you should not miss Townes. If you're a fan of pretty darn good songwriting, you should not miss the Highlanders.

Oh yeah by the way, if you see me and Johnny hitch-hiking on Highway 90 Saturday afternoon, please don't pick us up, we want Townes to do that.

Dan Morrison is the guitar player for Cold Beans and Bacon