

Contradictions blemish Van Zandt appearance

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The contradictions inherent in the songs of Townes Van Zandt are a natural extension of the contradictions inherent in the personality of Townes Van Zandt.

For instance, Van Zandt, in his performance Tuesday night at Poor David's Pub, sang this song containing three verses and one chorus. One of the verses, sung in the third person, concerned two persons talking about another who was rather dense.

The other two verses were similarly structured. Yet, the chorus, sung in the first person, has Van Zandt saying "I've got two girls, one's in heaven and one's down below." It has absolutely nothing to do with the verse, or any of the verses for that matter.

His most well known song, *Poncho and Lefty*, is, on the face of it, seemingly about an outlaw being tracked by someone out to make a name for himself. Yet the song was inspired by a Billy Graham crusade that took place in Dallas one year at the Cotton Bowl and is actually about the dichotomy of Graham and the Maharishi Whomever.

In a tune about a girl named Loretta, Van Zandt says her eyes are "hazel blue."

Interestingly enough, these contradictions can make these songs strangely compelling if Van Zandt

chooses. That's the rub, however. The contradiction in the personality of Van Zandt is that he is not a good singer — he's not really an interesting sounding singer.

He must put more effort into his performance job than most entertainers to make his songs compelling. A listener will sit up and pay attention to *Poncho and Lefty* when Emmylou Harris sings it; Townes Van Zandt has to wake up the listener and offer him the chair.

He did not do that on Tuesday night. He has done it many times before, however, and one must conclude that we can chalk this one up to road weariness. He seemed tired and he played tired.

He completely jumbled the lyrics to Bruce Springsteen's *Racing in the Streets*, for example, to rob that song of all its impact. And that's not an easy thing to rob from that powerful piece.

It's somewhat of a shame too, because the last time through, Van Zandt appeared as a solo act, accompanying himself on acoustic guitar.

This time around, he brought along one Jimmy Gray on bass and one Mickey White on guitar. It helped to fill Van Zandt's sound immeasurably. But that, in and of itself isn't going to hack it. Anyone who's going to try to make it in this world selling oil to the Arabs is just going to have to work harder at it than most folks.