

Andersen, Van Zandt Delight Canton Crowd

By **ROGER CATLIN**
Courant Staff Writer

It was almost appropriate that Eric Andersen and Townes Van Zandt were a couple of hours late for their concert at Roaring Brook Nature Center Friday.

The two were so late pulling into Canton, the first show had to be scrapped altogether and the late show in the cramped classroom was even more packed than usual.

One could easily imagine the well-known folk singers, each with a cult following of his own, whiling the time away trading adventures, jumping boxcars or purposely following a different path in the road.

Any similarly romantic explanation would beat the truth — that they were merely stuck in Friday afternoon traffic out of New York.

Nevertheless, the two were not about to let their vagabond images fade. "We joke around like Jack Kerouac and Neal Cassady," Anderson noted between a couple of songs.

And indeed, even if they are not exactly household names and must endure small but loving audiences instead of fame and its accouterments, they do everything to keep up the notion of the wandering minstrel in the 20th century.

Andersen, who has suffered the indignity of being best known when he first started writing songs 20 years ago, is still the real item.

His newer songs — and he is going through an especially pro-

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lific period at age 43 — are set in exotic locations in Europe.

Andersen was generous with his older material, though — starting with the lyrical explosion of "Violets of Dawn," including his touching "Come to My Bedside" and offering more than one selection from his 1972 "Blue River" album before closing with his classic "Thirsty Boots."

Andersen has a deep voice that can be raspy on the slower material and clear and ringing on the stirring fast numbers.

Van Zandt was a delight in his short set, just as content sitting and joshing through some shaggy dog tale as he was singing his repertoire of traditional country and folk concerns made anew by his slightly warped point of view.

Most famous for writing the "Pancho & Lefty" saga recorded by Merle Haggard and Willie Nelson, Van Zandt has a broad range of material, from sparse ballads as lonely as a train whistle to sharply drawn talking blues and goofy cover songs, such as two of Elvis Presley's weirdest songs — one about a dog he has to kill and another about a shrimp that volunteers.

Van Zandt's voice is a chilling, authentic wail of the American West. As relaxed as he seems spinning yarns, he almost looks in pain when he sings.

He wouldn't be out of place on boxcars with the ghosts of Woody Guthrie and Hank Williams.

I just can't picture him stuck in New York traffic.