

But Singer-Composer's Cult Growing

Townes Van Zandt: Success Second

By **FRAN WEIL**

His associates say it's only a matter of time until the public starts singing the songs of 27-year-old, ascetic-looking Townes Van Zandt.

The soft-spoken composer-singer, whose four albums, "Our Mother the Mountain," "Townes Van Zandt," "Delta Momma Blues" and "High, Low and In Between" are available if you dig for them, doesn't concern himself much with overt success. He's just happy if people listen to his songs and enjoy them.

"It's not that I'm not interested in my career," he said Monday, sipping hot tea at the the Passim Coffee House in Cambridge, where he's appearing through Saturday. "I am interested. But I'm more interested in my set; what I do in front of the people who come to see and hear."

"I was doing music long before I thought about being successful. And everybody always says once you really make it they clap for all the wrong reasons.

"I don't have a big following. I have what they call a cult." And at this point, it seems to suit Townes Van Zandt just fine, thank you.

Townes (named after a



Townes Van Zandt

maternal grandfather — "I like the sound of it") was born in Forth Worth, Tex. and raised in Houston. He likes to remind you that Houston "is the second blues capital of the world."

Some of his songs have strains of Houston and strains of Nashville. "I guess you'd say my lyrics are blues, my music is folk and my voice is probably country."

He got into music after watching Elvis Presley gyrate

on television's "Ed Sullivan show."

He taught himself to play the guitar — a Christmas present — and combined \$10-a-night gigs with school.

The two didn't mesh. Townes dropped out and became a traveling folk singer.

"My family at first was mystified. Then they got worried." But Townes made out all right.

He started writing his own songs. People started listening, and better yet, other singers started singing his stuff. His song "Two Hands" was recently recorded by—of all people—Elvis Presley.

And "Rollin Stone" wrote him up. It said that "Townes' quiet unassuming voice and guitar come across like a fresh prairie breeze."

So Townes is now ambling along, enjoying the quiet recognition he's experienced so far. But he's uncertain about the success that inevitably awaits him.

MOTION PICTURE RATINGS

G All ages (General Audiences); PG All ages (Parental Guidance Suggested); R Restricted (Under 18 requires accompanying parent or guardian); X No one under 18 admitted (Age limit may vary in certain areas) All G, PG and R films receive the seal of the Motion Picture Code of self-regulation.

Nicholas & Alexandra' in 5th Week

"Nicholas and Alexandra," the dramatic and colorful account of the last ruling family of Imperial Russia, continues in its fifth week at the Circle Theater on a reserved seat basis.

Four years in preparation, it has been nominated for six Academy Awards, including "Best Picture" and "Best Actress" for Janet Suzman. The Sam Spiegel-Franklin J. Schaffner production also stars Michael Jayston, Harry Andrews, Tom Baker, Jack Hawkins.

Brian Cox plays Trotsky. He claims to be the only actor in the world to have played both Stalin and Trotsky. While "Nicholas and Alexandra" is the Scottish actor's film debut, he played Stalin in the TV production of "These Men Are Dangerous."

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