

Leisure

Even happy songs sad — Van Zandt



Texas songwriter-singer Townes Van Zandt
... appears at City Media Club Saturday and Sunday

**By HELEN METELLA
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Some friends were excitedly looking forward to this weekend's Townes Van Zandt shows (at the City Media Club Saturday and Sunday) when suddenly they froze in mid-accolade.

One of us had wondered aloud if the Texas songwriter would be playing "all his really suicidal" songs.

When the question was later repeated to the creator of some of American folk music's finest dark verse, he gave a knowing chuckle.

"I've had a lot of good reviews lately, but they kind of always have the tone that if you're in the mood for a happy, light-hearted show, don't come to this one. I worry about that and try to throw in happier ones but even my happy songs are sad. I even have a comedy talking blues song that's sad. Sometimes I get through two thirds of a set and everybody is groaning..."

In fact Van Zandt, who's been called "the best writer in the country genre" for penning the hits Pancho and Lefty and If I Needed You, says part of the reason he hasn't released an album since 1979's *Flyin' Shoes*, is because "there's enough blues in the world."

"I've been on a writing spurge lately but a lot of those songs, I got through two or three verses, just stopped and said to myself, 'You're going to sing that for mothers and their children and their husbands!' I gave them to Janine (his wife) to stow in a drawer until I got into a different frame of mind, and she lost them, so now I have to start over."

Van Zandt also found recording new material impossible during the two years he spent untangling his publishing interests.

"Sometimes I look at people talking about business and I don't know what they're talking about," says the eccentric writer who receives most of his fan mail from mental hospital patients.

The legality of who owns his songs was finally set right last spring and a 10-cut LP is to be released in February.

Since moving back to Austin, Tex., from a primitive cabin in the hills of Tennessee a few years back, Van Zandt has been on the road at least half of each year.

The recurrent success of Pancho and Lefty (it's been made a hit by each of Hoyt Axton, Emmylou Harris and the duo of Merle Haggard and Willie Nelson) has made finding work much easier lately.

"I don't expect to be no Elvis, but I can play and I get encores," he reports happily.

Van Zandt's Saturday night performance will begin at 9 p.m. with Vancouver country-rock singer Danny Mack (of The Cement City Cowboys) opening the show. Sunday's date starts at 8 p.m. and San Francisco singer-songwriter Carl Brouse, currently a guitarist with Ian Tyson's band, is the supporting act. The City Media Club is in the basement of 8906 99th Street.

Nelson joins long list of plane crash victims

Rick Nelson, who died in a New Year's Eve plane crash near De Kalb, Tex., is the latest in a long list of musicians who have met early deaths in aviation accidents.

Nelson, 45, achieved rock 'n' roll stardom in the 1950s and early 60s with hits like "Garden of Earthly Delights" and "I'm a Believer." He was on his way to a show in Fargo, N.D., on the night of the crash.

The Big Bopper, whose big hit was Chantilly Lace in 1958, was 29 Holly, whose hits included Peggy Sue, was 22. And Valens, famous for songs like La Bamba and Donna, was only 19.