

B4

## Entertainment

*People see themselves in Van Zandt's songs*

# Splendid singer bares soul of folk

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There's a dear tradition among my oldest friends, wherein every six months or so, we serenade each other with two or five hours of three-part harmony and smoky guitar, long into the night.

We're a diverse group and life has led us on vastly different paths. One is a corporate lawyer, another an unemployed expert on Canadian Indian mythology, a couple of others are pig farmers.

Yet the songs that have become standards to the gatherings are our touchstones. They remind us of our shared roots and somehow hold at bay the outside forces that try to bury our dreams.

One such tune is Bruce Springsteen's *Racing In The Streets* and another is Townes Van Zandt's *Pancho and Lefty* (which one of our member finds so soothing she requested it be played repeatedly while she delivered her first baby.)

*Townes Van Zandt/Danny Mack*  
*Edmonton Media Club*

So it was a marvelous moment Saturday night when Townes Van Zandt slipped *Racing In The Streets* into his two solo sets of mostly original songs.

For, his zany joking and natural garrulity aside, Van Zandt is a splendid folksinger because he understands that the soul of the form is found in the simple act of people recognizing themselves.

Whether it's the peaceful way he sings about the guy who can't wait to wash up after work and delve into his hobby, or the face-saving he inserts in the plea of *No Place to Fall* ("If I had no place to fall and I needed to, could I count on you?"), Van Zandt finds a way to make a clear connection between the fictional characters immobilized behind the bars of a song, and we who wander through life.

Sometimes it's done with ironic humor, as the hapless used car purchaser finds out in *No Deal*: "You don't need no engine to go downhill, that's the direction you're headed in, I can plainly see."

Sometimes he simply forces out ideas that in our pride and politeness we prefer to censor, (*Close Your Eyes I'll Be Here In The Morning*.)

Sometimes he cruelly zeroes in on our weakest moments, "Just keep your injured looks to you, we'll tell the world that we tried."

In addition, he rarely misses an opportunity, however unlikely, to turn a character's adventure into a wise observation. The naive college kid in the otherwise light-weight *Talkin' Fraternity Blues* shrugs off the steep pledge dues with "I figured that's life, if you want good friends it's gonna cost you."

And the tear-inducing absurdity of a duet between shrimps (a song he found in an old Elvis Pres-

ley movie) can't help but make one regret anew, the scandalous waste of the King's talent.

Sometimes his songs depart for mystic or gloomy territories without leaving a forwarding address (*You Are Not Needed Now*) but then again it's the quirky sensitivity which tells him to walk by a historic river and accept a song "that kinda came gurgling up out of it", or scribble down the chords he wrote within the context of dream, that's given us the shimmering images of *Flyin' Shoes* and the spellbinding emotion of *If I Needed You*.

Tonight, Van Zandt will be tapping two of his sets for an upcoming *Sun Country* show at CFRN TV. Tune-up your spirit and call for tickets.

Opening act Danny Mack's finest moment came when he said, "If you remember the '60s you weren't there." His wretched hippie ramblings proved that he probably knows whereof he speaks.