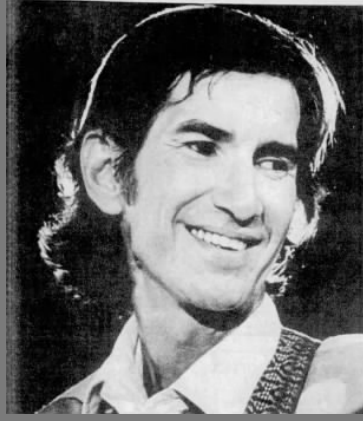


## Townes Van Zandt resurfaces a decade later to pen more heartfelt lyrics



Singer/songwriter Townes Van Zandt will give a solo acoustic performance at Greenstreet's Thursday night, Greenstreet's is in The Bazaar on Harden Street. For information, call 779-8252.

By MICHAEL MILLER  
Staff Writer

One time Townes Van Zandt had to write 20 songs in three days to satisfy a publishing deal. So he sat down with coffee and cigarettes and wrote 20 songs in three days.

But that's not how Van Zandt likes to write songs. He knows good songs are hard to come by, so he takes his time and does it right.

"It usually just starts with a line," he said recently by phone from his home in Nashville. "It could be a line you hear in conversation or anywhere — and that line could become the first line in a poem, story or song."

"I just come up with a line, then maybe I'll be on a canoe trip or something, and I'll remember it and just start adding to it."

Van Zandt has been hearing lines and adding to 'em for more than 20 years. He's influenced everyone from songwriting stalwarts, such as Guy Clark and Bob Dylan, to hot newcom-

ers, such as Michelle Shocked and Lyle Lovett.

His stories about rambling, gambling, falling in love, falling down drunk and getting up with cottonmouth and the sun in his eyes are some of the most heartfelt poems ever set to music. His latest album, *At My Window*, is his first recording in almost 10 years, and it's filled with tunes that make you feel things about yourself you might not want to feel. Then again, a certain song could make you feel great.

"I kind of dropped out (of the recording world) because my business deals became really tangled up," Van Zandt said. "But I kept writing and singing and moving all around the country. Then things got straightened out, and I decided to make an album."

Van Zandt is a native Texan who has seen his share of hard times and hard nights. His life seems to be a cross between Woody Guthrie and Charles Bukowski — a chapter out of Kerouac's *On the Road* and a verse from a Lightnin' Hopkins blues song.

He recorded six albums between 1968 and 1973 that are now almost impossible to find. Like Rembrandt paintings, albums such as *For the*

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— Townes Van Zandt

made a lot of friends, and I can write good songs."

Two of his best-known songs are "Pancho and Lefty," a hit for Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard, and "If I Needed You," a duet recorded by Emmylou Harris and Don Williams.

"When I started out about 15 or 20 years ago, I wrote steadily — I was out to change the world with my guitar," Van Zandt said. "It was those kinds of times."

"I have a lot of friends now who write all the time — just to stay busy. But I'm not that way. It's tough mentally — just getting a song done — getting all the phrasings in the right places and things like that."

"When I start a song, I either take my time and do it right, or just pass on it."

In a warm and sagacious voice, Van Zandt said his carousing is mostly a thing of the past. He's "kind of settled down now" and has a young son.

"I guess this is the first time I've lived in a house in five years," he said. "You know, if it wasn't for what I do, I'd just be a normal person."

Fans of the art of songwriting are glad that Van Zandt is still doing what he does.

*Sake of the Song, Our Mother the Mountain and High, Low and In Between* are treasured by folk fans who own them.

Steve Earle, one of modern country's most acclaimed artists, said "Townes Van Zandt is the best songwriter in the whole world, and I'll stand on Bob Dylan's coffee table in my cowboy boots and say that."

Van Zandt counters by describing himself as "just a folk singer who's