

## That Nashville Texan, Townes Van Zandt

By JIM WISE  
Herald style editor

He maintains he is a folksinger, even though his voice sounds like the Lord made it with a truckstop jukebox in mind.

And when he sings, it's about open spaces and yesterdays and loves that somehow went wrong. And even though he's Texas-born, he now calls Nashville home.

"I consider myself a folksinger," said Townes Van Zandt, author of *If I Needed You* and *Pancho and Lefty*, who shares a bill with fellow singer/songwriter Guy Clark at the ArtsCenter in Carrboro tonight.

"A contemporary folksinger. I don't play any country jobs [such as dance halls and state fairs] and I don't have a band ... I've always been acoustic."

And as for Nashville, if you look at all the artists, producers and writers in Music City, "It must be close to half of them, literally half of them, are from Texas."

Just as he has worn the Texas label due to accident of birth—"We moved a lot, so I'm not as Texas-oriented as a lot of people"—Van Zandt has had the "country" label pinned on him "because there are so few classifications for music. ... Country came in because of the shape of the guitar I play."

After all, this is a guy whose favorite albums include discs by Muddy Waters, Mozart, Bob Dylan, The Rolling Stones and Hank Williams.

Van Zandt was talking by telephone from his Tennessee home, which he described as being on the outskirts of Nashville and four minutes from the airport. Sensible place for a man in the music business, but seemingly a little odd for one who was once so well-known for dropping out of sight that one of his records was titled *The Late, Great Townes Van Zandt*.

Life now is "real settled down for me," said Van Zandt at 9 a.m. (Nashville time) one day last week, having just returned from taking his 5½-year-old son to school.

Time was, Van Zandt was known for the same sort of barroom escapades that seem to come with the pop-music territory, and more than one commentator has remarked that the lines in his skinny face and the sadness in his lyrics are souvenirs of a rough life.

He agrees, he's done some hard living.

"Partially, it's sensitivity and partially the geographics of the industry," he said. "It's really hard, especially in the early years [of a career] to live in one place. For years, I didn't have an address ... you're just vulnerable to all that. And the hours."

Living a settled routine, Van Zandt said, "that eliminates a whole lot of spare time. If you do what I do, you can be going 24 hours a day ... for a month" between traveling, setting up, performing and going on again.

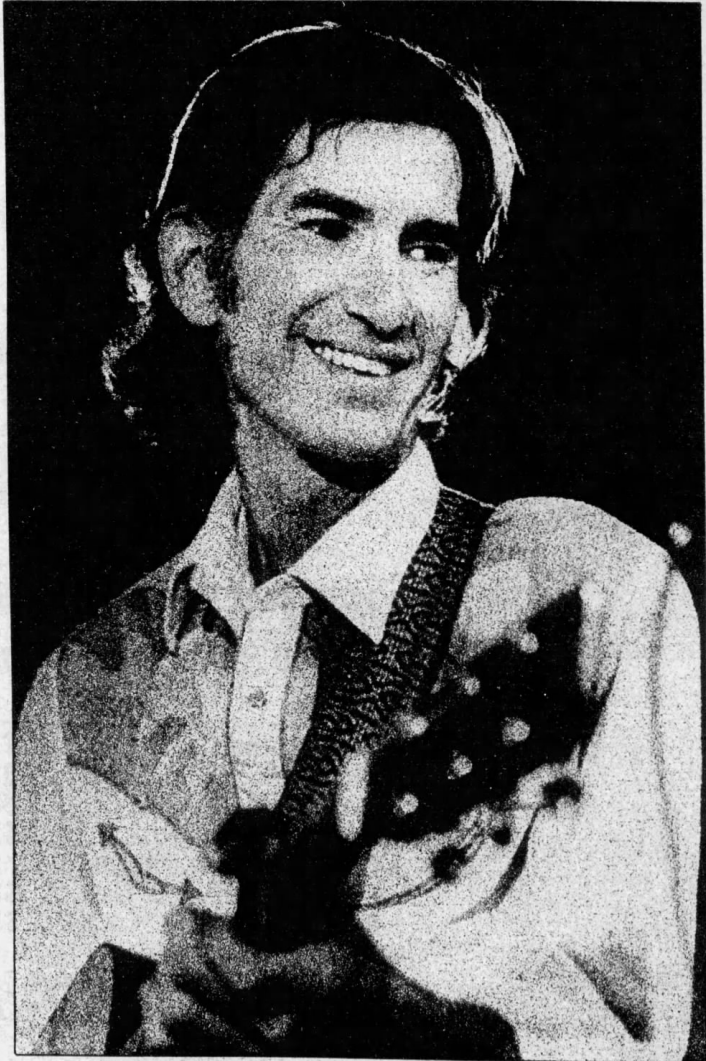
Then, when a tour is over, "I put down my suitcase and guitar and realize I have absolutely nothing to do. It's full-tilt boogie to nothing."

He continued, "There's a lot of daytime TV and just a lot of time; if you're not braced against it, it's just obvious—make up some fun."

In his case, as in those of many colleagues, the fun was drinking, gambling and long, spur-of-the-moment trips. "If you do go that route, you either overcome it or it overcomes you," he said.

Life is relatively settled now "because of family," he said, then added, "I'm not over the hill or anything like that, but there are signs every once in awhile that I'm

See Van Zandt/23



"Country came in because of the shape  
of the guitar I play."

□ Townes Van Zandt