

Hits for Glad-to-Be-Sad Fans

GUY CLARK AND TOWNES VAN ZANDT. Texas-bred songwriters who laugh through their tears. Sunday night, Bottom Line, Manhattan.

By John Milward

GUY CLARK and Townes Van Zandt blew into a sold-out Bottom Line on Sunday night like a couple of twin tumbleweeds. Both accompanied themselves on solo acoustic guitars and wore identical outfits of blue jeans and fresh white shirts, although Clark made a fashion statement by adding a black sport coat. The similarities befit this double bill: Clark and Van Zandt are regarded as the Lone Star State's best singer-songwriters and major influences on such younger Texans as Lyle Lovett and Nanci Griffith.

Both men specialize in songs of depression. Where Clark's sadness is deepest when he's singing of the death of old and lifelong friends, Van Zandt is at his bluest when depicting male ramblers who run away from love. The singers of some of these songs could live in the stories of Raymond Carver or Jim Harrison: hard men who've tasted more of the bitter than the sweet.

Though they remain cult figures, both Clark and Van Zandt have found significant success as

Nashville tunesmiths. Willie Nelson and Waylon Jennings had a hit with Van Zandt's "Pancho and Lefty." When the singer-songwriter performed that tune on Sunday night, he introduced it as "a medley of my hit," but Emmylou Harris and Don Williams also had a successful duet with his "If I Needed You." Clark sang songs known through interpretations by Jerry Jeff Walker ("Desperados Waiting for a Train") and Ricky Skaggs ("Heartbroke"), but neglected the recent hit he co-wrote with Rodney Crowell, "She's Crazy for Leaving."

Van Zandt's gruff voice suggests that of John Prine, but there's also a countryish twist to his upper register reminiscent of Hank Williams. His guitar accompaniment vacillates between folk-based arrangements and the blues. Though he was careful to leaven his set with witty tunes like "Talking Thunderbird Blues," about the dubious joys of drinking cheap wine, Van Zandt remains the dean of the depressed.

There's more of a country lilt to Guy Clark's songs, and unlike Van Zandt, he's apt to mix mirth and melancholy within a single tune. On the other hand, both focus their lyrics on solitary men.

Clark's charm comes from an astute eye for small pleasures. His opening number, "Home-grown Tomatoes," proposes that the juicy red

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