

Van Zandt, usually gloomy, lightens up

By DALE ANDERSON
News Critic

"Time flies like an arrow; fruit flies like a banana," Townes Van Zandt quipped as he adjusted microphones in Nietzsche's Monday night to begin what — for him — would be an unexpectedly light-hearted opening set.

A lean, lanky songwriter's songwriter from Houston, Van Zandt is known as much for his deep-down dourness as for his poetic lyrics. Yet here he was, cracking jokes and telling tall tales about another songwriting Texan, Guy Clark.

Equally sunny were his early selections — his card-game ditty, "Mr. Mudd and Mr. Gold," an ode to cheap wine called "Talking Thunderbird Blues," a Lightning Hopkins blues and the whimsical "Shrimp Song" from Elvis Presley's film, "Girls, Girls, Girls."

It wasn't until Van Zandt was well along that it became apparent that a lot of people die in his songs, like the derelict's pregnant girlfriend in "Marie" ("She just rolled over and went to heaven/Little boy safe inside"), or Poncho in his best-known song, "Poncho and Lefty," a hit duet number for Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard.

Those that didn't involve death often were full of near-terminal loneliness, heartache and depression. In introducing one called "Nothin'," Van Zandt cautioned, "If you like this song, first thing in

REVIEW

Townes Van Zandt

Texas singer-songwriter.

Monday in Nietzsche's, 248 Allen St.

the morning you should seek some professional help."

The die-hard half of the crowd, those 50 or so who stayed for the second set, got Van Zandt without artificial sweetening. He said little or nothing between songs and what he played, he played for poetry, not for laughs. The back room gave him rapt attention.

There were songs full of rain, like "Flyin' Shoes" and "Kathleen." There were songs of desperate flight, like "Snow in Retona"

and "White Freight Liner Blues." And to top them all off, there was "Tecumseh Valley," a song about a young woman's hard times and death.


When he broke out a picaresque number called "Mr. Bones," in which a young man embarks on a crime spree in partnership with a skeleton he unearths in a battlefield, the macabre momentarily turned to mirth.

Van Zandt also could joke about his relative obscurity. To combat it, he noted that he's re-recording 60 of his songs that are no longer available on records, for release on a retrospective next year. Though he's probably too brusque vocally to be widely popular, (Guy Clark projects considerably more warmth into his "To Live Is To Fly"), he's too good a writer to go unheralded forever.

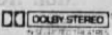
P A C I N O

In search of a killer,
he found someone
who's either the love of his life...
or the end of it.


SEA OF LOVE




GENERAL CINEMA
MARKET ARCADE
DOWNTOWN THEATRE DISTRICT



GENERAL CINEMA
McKINLEY 6
McKINLEY & MILE STRIP BIDS.



GENERAL CINEMA
THRUWAY MALL
HARLEM RD. at WALDEN AVE.



GENERAL CINEMA
UNIVERSITY 8
MARLETTON, E. OF ALYON, MALL

