



NIGHTHAWKS
Robert Trussell Brian McTavish

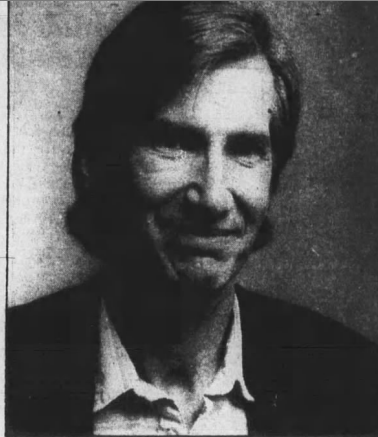
Considering the profusion of fried folk freaks in this part of the country, it seems odd that Townes Van Zandt hasn't played a gig within striking distance of Kansas City before.

The acclaimed singer/songwriter will do just that this weekend when he takes part in an "Evening of Aggressive Folk Music" in Lawrence.

"I broke down in Hays for three days one time," Van Zandt said from his home in Nashville, Tenn., the other day. That was about 20 years ago. He holed up in a motel room while his VW bug was repaired.

"I watched some serious television," he recalled.

Van Zandt will perform with his old buddy Guy Clark and young colleague Robert Earl Keen Jr. at 8 p.m. Saturday at Liberty Hall, 642 Massachusetts St. in downtown Lawrence. Tickets, available at Ticketmaster outlets, cost \$10 in advance and \$12 at the door. The concert is part of the annual Kaw Valley Festival of Song.



Townes Van Zandt

Van Zandt is regarded as a songwriter's songwriter, having been cited by a whole generation of tunesmiths as a major influence. His classic outlaw ballad "Pancho and Lefty" is performed by folkies across the country. That song, like the body of Van Zandt's work, has captured the imaginations of countless incurable romantics trapped in the modern age of plastic wrap and overflowing landfills.

Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard recorded a duet of "Pancho and Lefty." Other Van Zandt songs have been performed by Doc Watson, Emmylou Harris and Don Williams.

"It's real flattering," Van Zandt said. "Obviously, it's not run-of-the-mill Top-40 type of stuff."

Van Zandt was born in Fort Worth, Texas, and his music career began in Houston when he was 20. He was a guitar-playing pre-law student, but he said he was never any "great shakes" when it came to studying. For a time he roomed with Clark and Jerry Jeff Walker before any of them had made names for themselves.

"That little Houston folk scene at that time, there was a bunch happening," he said. "Guy just came back from the Peace Corps. Jerry Jeff was always in and out. Jerry Jeff was a traveling folk singer, and I was like a college-student folk singer, and folk singing eventually won out."

Van Zandt, whose songs have a tendency to be stark and melancholy, remembers when he first felt the urge to be a singer.

"This sounds funny, but I think the first inkling was when I saw Elvis on the 'Ed Sullivan Show,' "

he said. "All those girls and Cadillac! I didn't understand much about money, but I was beginning to understand girls and Cadillac."

Van Zandt's first job was at the Jester Lounge in Houston, where he earned \$10 a night. In those days an unknown could walk into a folk club, audition on Wednesday and get a weekend gig. It was all so simple then.

"If you don't have an album, or if you're not a hot local act, you can't just walk into a club anymore," he said. "Now people tend to go into their basement with a tape recorder and try to do it that way. It seems much harder now."

Van Zandt said he stumbled into his first record deal simply by throwing his guitar in the back seat and driving to Nashville.

"Those days are over. It makes it much harder for younger guys, and that's a drag," he said. "Guys sometimes ask me whether I have any advice. And I say, 'Well, you've got to get a guitar and play it and blow everything else in the world off.' "

Van Zandt released a series of LPs in the 1970s and then

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