

Guy Clark's lyrics raise ordinary language to art

With Malaix, Van Zandt at the Music Hall

By DAVID PRINCE

Shunning in their clarity and humbling in their depth, the songs of Guy Clark take a listener places they may never have thought possible. His narratives are the stuff lesser writers can only dream of. The words he chooses and the way he arranges them routinely raise everyday language to the level of poetry, and his melodies are filled with timeless, archetypal grace. They have the comfortable ring of the familiar, even the first time through.

Yet despite the unanimous acclaim of his peers (frequent songwriting partner Rodney Crowell puts him in the same league as Bob Dylan, Leonard Cohen and Tom Waits, while Emmylou Harris says "He uses words like a brush and canvas to paint a picture of the American soul"), Guy Clark's name is anything but a household word.

This Thursday, New Mexicans have the opportunity of witnessing the unpretentious genius of Guy Clark when he shares the Old Santa Fe Music Hall stage spotlight with fellow-Texan Townes Van Zandt. Local hero Malaix rounds out the bill.

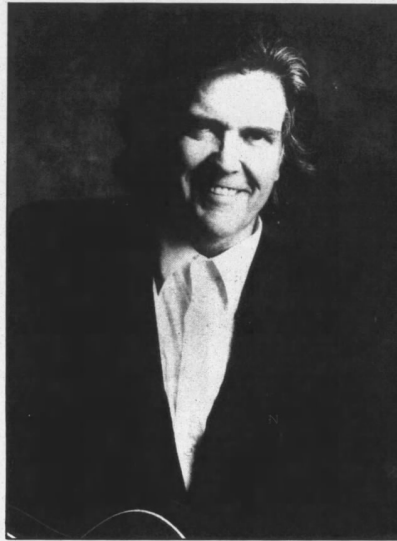
"Actually," Clark said during a telephone interview recently, "Texas is always home, but Nashville is where the business is, so that's where I've lived for the last 20 years."

For if Guy Clark's name is known at all to the public at large, it's as a writer of hits for other people. The earliest of his tunes to score country music points were *L.A. Freeway* and *Desperadoes Waiting For A Train*, both in versions by Jerry Jeff Walker. *Desperadoes*, his most popular piece, has since been covered by, among others, Rita Coolidge, Bobby Bare, Tom Rush and Slim Pickens ("That's the best one," he said.)

Other compositions have been done by Tammy Wynette, Vince Gill, Asleep At The Wheel, The Everly Brothers and Johnny Cash. Even Spanky & Our Gang got into the act once.

"Writing songs occurred to me, really, when I met Townes (Van Zandt). He was already writing his own stuff at the time, and it just seemed like the right thing to do."

As it turned out, Van Zandt recorded Clark's *Don't Let The*



Guy Clark: he makes every word count

Señor McGuire

DETAILS

WHO/WHAT:

Guy Clark,
Townes Van Zandt & Malaix/
Concert

WHEN:

8:30 p.m. Thursday, March 21

WHERE:

Old Santa Fe Music Hall

INFO:

Tickets \$16 advance;
\$18 door.
Call 982-8158

Sunshine Fool You in 1972, three years prior to Clark's own album debut. Since *Old No. 1* was released, there have only been seven more. The exceedingly lovely *Dublin Blues* (Asylum Records) is the latest.

Like its predecessors, *Dublin Blues* reaches the grandest of effects by eschewing the grand gesture. The playing is understated, and so is Clark's delivery, but he makes every word count. Each of its 10 cuts is a multifaceted gem, from the opening title tune's tender ache to the cathartic release of *Randall Knife*, a eulogy for his father, which brings the album to a close.

Clark said *Dublin Blues* and its predecessor, 1992's *Boats To Build*, both of which he co-produced, have the best

sound of all his records, and he credits this to the live-in-the-studio techniques used during these sessions. "We did the vocals at the same time as the basic instrumental tracks," he said, "and even though other things were added later, it made for a real feeling. *Old No. 1* has good songs, but it doesn't have the same feel."

Though he limits himself to somewhere between 60 and 70 live shows a year, Clark believes writing and performing are inextricably linked. He writes to have something new to perform; he performs to present the new material. Still, he's quick to admit that the selling of songs to other stars makes up the bulk of his income.

When he plays the Music Hall, Clark will be joined by his son, Travis, on bass, and the duo setting will no doubt add a level of intimacy to whatever they choose to do.

"I love playing with him," Clark said of his son, who doubles on guitar. "It's the most fun playing, in fact, I've ever had. I don't tell him what to do, but there's a certain familial buzz that goes on, unspoken. We never rehearse, we just start playing."

The playing starts at 8:30 p.m. Thursday, and you're well advised to be there, or be sorry.