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NIGHT MUSIC

Poets as songwriters: Andersen, Van Zandt

By ERIC SHEPARD

You don't hear too much about songwriters as poets anymore. In fact, you don't hear much about songwriters or poets anymore. Both occupations demand an appreciation of craft and literacy that today's music consumer doesn't seem to value very much. Poets and songwriters have not disappeared, however. Sometimes, they're even the same people.

Eric Andersen and Townes Van Zandt made up the double bill of the year at Turning Point last Thursday. Neither is currently in style, though lots of folks are singing Van Zandt's songs. Neither sings like an angel, though Andersen can be haunting when in good voice. Each takes words very seriously, even when not being very serious at all.

Andersen, whose most famous songs are now over 20 years old, opened for Van Zandt. A bit shaky at the start, he talked less and sang more as the set moved leisurely along. For material, he reached back to his earliest songs—"Violets of Dawn," "Come to My Bedside" and "Close the Door Lightly"—his excellent 1972 album "Blue River" and performed some new tunes, periods separated roughly by a decade each.

Always romantic and autobiographical writer, Andersen's songs rarely stray too far from his own experiences and feelings. While he invites charges of being self-absorbed, like most singer-songwriters, more often than not he writes his way past them, with sharp imagery and deep emotion. Simply stated, his confessions are compelling.

Of the recent songs, the beautifully evocative "Spanish Steps" and the oblique "Girls of Denmark" showed that he has not lost his touch. The brand new story song, "Ghosts Upon the Road," seemed a bit forced in the first few verses, but drew on some powerful imagery as it described a songwriter's Boston to New York trek.

Andersen introduced Van Zandt as his "favorite songwriter." He's not alone in that assessment. In the midst of numerous references to his cult status, Van Zandt's press kit is full of similar accolades from other artists. Known, if at all, for his song "If I Needed You," "None but the Rain" and "Pancho and Lefty," (Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard had a hit with the latter), Van Zandt is

like no other performer, though he has influences.

He once told a writer that he spent a lot of time in college listening to Hank Williams, Lightnin' Hopkins and early Bob Dylan. It shows. Borrowing a bit from each of these men and adding a perspective all his own, Van Zandt welds blues, country and folk into a singular style. While he has built a reputation for writing sad songs, at The Turning Point he allowed his slightly twisted sense of humor to take over. (A smart move, because Andersen's music does not make for light listening.)

Who else would introduce one of his tunes by saying "it's not that I dislike this song," sing not only an awful shrimp saga from a forgettable Elvis Presley movie and then back it with "Old Shep," and tell a very old penquin joke? Then again, who else has mastered the talking blues form since early Bob Dylan? Van Zandt's "Talkin' Thunderbird Wine Blues," and "Talkin' Karate Blues" rivaled Dylan's Bear Mountain and World War II efforts.

Van Zandt's self-effacing humor, which dominated the asides, stories and intros as well as many of the songs, kept the audience chuckling throughout the show and helped make us forget that he's not much of a singer. To remind us who we were dealing with, Van Zandt dropped in his very unfunny gems, "Buckskin Stallion Blues," "Snow on Rotone" and "Pueblo Waltz" among them. Each of these songs, crammed with emotional insight and sense of place, proved Van Zandt's reputation to be deserved, as did "Pancho & Lefty" itself, the brilliant story song.

In a piece written 10 years ago, Lola Scobey captured best Van Zandt's music. Comparing it to poetry, she pointed out that "Townes' writing is larger than the sum of its parts. Unlike a commercial hookline song, which can be diagrammed and analyzed into controllability, Townes's best songs are elusive. Even in those which are positive and seemingly simple, there is a shadow around each corner—suggesting a shape but not exposing the substance." Neither Van Zandt nor Andersen mesh with today's music culture. Their songs aim to interrupt, slow down and engage the listener. Rather than offering a brief diversion or immediate pleasure (although there's some of this, particularly in Van Zandt's wackier moments) they write songs that will be around for years.

COMING UP: TURNING POINT: Michael Minard, Thurs; Pat Keating Duo, Fri; Speedo Jones, Sat; Group Sax, Sun; Clearwater Benefit, Tues; Finn & the New Sharks, Wed... OLDE STONEHOUSE: Nancy Morano, Sat; Loren Koveec, Tues; Red Brigham, Wed... SANDALWOOD LOUNGE: Two of a Kind, Wed-Sat... LOCK, STOCK & BERRER: Ray Longchamp, Thurs; Kevin Cronin, Fri; Loren Koveec, Wed... CAFE CAPE: Jamey Andrews, Fri... STRUGGLE'S: Sylvia Sims, Fri & Sat... THE OFFICE: Broadcasters, Fri, Walt Whitney, Sat... COVEN: Super Starr, Fri; Gardania, Sat; Doug Harding, Sun... EASTWICK'S: Eastwick's Revue Band, Fri... WEST GATE: John E. Bee, Wed-Sat.

THE CALENDAR

Theater

"The Mousetrap" by Agatha Christie. Presented by the Beltry Repertory Company. 8:30 p.m. Fri. and Sat., 7:30 p.m. Sun. through Nov. 1. Beltry Theater at St. Paul's United Methodist Church, south Broadway, South Nyack. Tickets: \$6.

"Uncle Vanya" presented by the Elmwood Players. 8:30 p.m. Fri. and Sat., 1:30 p.m. Sun. through Oct. 18. Elmwood Playhouse, Park St., Nyack. Tickets: \$8; students and senior citizens, \$4. Fri. and Sun. mat.

"My One and Only." Dinner theater production. Through Feb. 22. Performances Wed. through Sun. Seating at 6:15 p.m. Dinner 7 to 8 p.m. Curtain at 8:30 p.m. An Evening Dinner Theater, Elmford. Admission: Dinner and show: \$24-37.50; show only, \$18 and 20.

"Go Back for Murder." 8 p.m. Tues. through Sat., 7 p.m. Sun., 2 p.m. Thurs. through Nov. 2. Woodstock Playhouse, Woodstock, N.Y. Tickets: \$9-14.

New Jersey Shakespeare Festival: "Noises Off." 8 p.m. Thurs. and Fri., 2 and 8 p.m. Sat., 7 p.m. Sun. through Oct. 19. Festival Theater, Drew University, Madison, N.J. Tickets: \$10.50-18.75.

"Baby" presented by the Bergen County Players. 8:30 p.m. Fri. and Sat., 7:30 p.m. Sun. through Oct. 26. Little Firehouse Theater, 298 Kinderkamack Road, Oradell, N.J.

"Sophisticated Ladies." Dinner theater production through Jan. 25. Nell's New Yorker Dinner Theater, Mountain Lakes, N.J.

"Oklahoma." 8 p.m. Fri. and Sat., 3 p.m. Sun. through Oct. 25. Mainstage Theater, William Paterson College, Wayne, N.J. Tickets: \$7.

"The Man Who Came to Dinner." 8 p.m. Thurs. through Sun. through Oct. 25. Abbott Kaplan Theater, Performing Arts Center, SUNY at Purchase.

"Same Time Next Year." Dinner at 7, show at 8 p.m. Wed. and Thurs. through Nov. 27. Dinner Theater at the Lido Restaurant, City Island. Tickets: \$30.

"Raggedy Ann." Opens Oct. 16. Nederlander Theater, 208 W. 41 St., NYC.

"The Common Pursuit." Opens Oct. 19, previews now. The Promenade Theater, 2162 Broadway, NYC.

"A Little Like Magic." Opens Fri. Lyceum Theater, 149 W. 45 St., NYC.

Music

"A Spanish Night" with the Rockland Suburban Symphony, 8 p.m. next Sun. Cultural Arts Center, Rockland Community College. Tickets: \$9; senior citizens, \$7; children, \$6.

The Stellar Consort. A program of renaissance music. 8 p.m. Sat. Threefold Auditorium, 260 Hungry Hollow Road, Spring Valley. Tickets: \$7; senior citizens and students, \$4.

The Philharmonia Players in Concert. 3 p.m. Sun. New City Library. Free.

"Dido and Aeneas" presented by the Rockland Cameraia. 8 p.m. Sat. Cultural Arts Center, Rockland Community College. Tickets: \$5; senior citizens, \$4.

Light Opera of Manhattan: "The Vagabond King." 2 and 8 p.m. Wed., 8 p.m. Thurs. and Fri., 3:30 and 8 p.m. Sat., 3:30 p.m. Sun. through Nov. 2. Cherry Lane Theater, 38 Commerce St., NYC. Tickets: \$17.50-20.

"Werther" presented by the New York City Opera. 8 p.m. Fri. New York State Theater, Lincoln Center, NYC. Tickets: \$7-30.

"Die Fledermaus" presented by the New York City Opera. 2 p.m. Sat. New York State Theater, Lincoln Center, NYC. Tickets: \$7-30.

"Faust" presented by the New York City Opera. 8 p.m. Sat. New York State Theater, Lincoln Center NYC. Tickets: \$7-30.

"Melistofele" presented by the New York City Opera. 1 p.m. Sun. New York State Theater, Lincoln Center, NYC. Tickets: \$7-30.

"La Traviata" presented by the New York State Opera. 7 p.m. Sun. New York

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The Journal-News/Ted Neuhoff

Michael Minard

Piermont composer turns to cabaret act

Piermont resident Michael Minard, a 34-year-old composer and TV and film music producer, is about to expand his talents.

This time as a performer.

Tonight at 8:30 p.m. and 10 p.m., he will be introducing his new cabaret act, "Songs: 1969-1986," at The Turning Point, 468 Piermont Ave., Piermont.

According to Minard, his best songs have been written in Rockland County.

"When I first moved to South Nyack in 1975," he says, "I began writing music for a Joseph Papp production called 'Almost Music.' It never quite made the boards."

That musical, written in collaboration with Rockland resident Kathleen Collins, marked the beginning of his creative love affair with Rockland County, he says. "There is something about the county, its people, its warmth and its quiet, which makes the writing of music particularly comfortable."

The focus of his performance tonight, and again on Thursday, Nov. 6, at The Turning Point will be the songs he created from 1969 to the present day.

"I've loved to perform," Minard says, "but my life has primarily been devoted to jotting notes on score paper and working in studios to write background music for shows like CBS' 'The Lions of Etohsa' and the syndicated series, 'Tales of

the Unexpected.' I've even been a songwriter for 'Sesame Street.' But I like to get in front of an audience, too. I love the feel of a live crowd."

"Songs: 1969-1986" will be presented as a cabaret-style performance. Minard will be accompanied by multi-instrumentalist David Snider, a longtime resident of South Nyack, and percussionist-singer John Ballesteros who, until recently, lived in Palisades.

In describing his act, Minard makes a careful distinction between cabaret and the traditional concert-style performance.

"Cabaret is a bit more like theater. Instead of just presenting sets of music, there is an emphasis on spoken material," he explains. Although most of material in the show was written by himself, Minard states that some of it is the product of collaboration with other lyricists, including Artie Resnick of Valley Cottage, best known for pop classics like "Under the Boardwalk" and "Good Lovin'."

"I love writing words," Minard adds, "but working with another lyricist offers a point of view that I can't provide myself. That's why I sometimes enjoy collaborations."

"Songs: 1969-1986" will be performed at 8:30 and 10 p.m. tonight and on November 6.

Admission is \$6.50 for the early show and \$4 for the late show.

For reservations, call 359-1089.