

Texas boys provide a rich evening

By ROGER CATLIN
Courant Rock Critic

For staid Lloyds Restaurant, the double bill of Townes Van Zandt and Guy Clark Monday night was like a hot, dry blast of air from Texas.

The two premiere singer-songwriters from the Lone Star State brought with them their simple, compelling portraits of the people back home, lively postcards of the wide-open landscape and bleak black and white snapshots of dire, utterly human situations.

They sang of unrepentant winos yearning for Dallas whores, gun-slingers felled by autos and all manner of relationships blossoming, fading and mourned.

It was a long, rich evening of acoustic music, with the two men trading off two full sets of music each. But because they were traveling light — and sharing one guitar — they didn't ever get together on stage for duets.

Although the two aren't exactly household names up here, a good many of their songs sounded familiar, from recordings by a number of other, mostly country, artists.

Van Zandt, a shy, almost painfully soft-spoken performer who wears moccasins instead of cowboy boots, struck a figure of young Abe Lincoln perched on a stool to sing songs that included the mini-epic "Pancho and Lefty," recorded by Merle Haggard and Willie Nelson as well as Emmylou Harris.

A number of songs were just as



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Townes Van Zandt performs Monday night at Lloyds Restaurant.

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moving in their detail and memorable turns of phrase. A new song, "Marie," about a hard-luck couple on the dole, deserves a place alongside the loneliest Woody Guthrie hobo ballad.

Other songs, such as his "Talking Thunderbird Blues," were as funny as his wry, between-song jokes. His only cover was "The Shrimp Song," perhaps the goofiest thing Elvis Presley ever sang in all of his bad movies.

Van Zandt's rough-hewn voice, given to talking narration through many of his songs, added an authenticity that compensated for its lack of technical skill. Because Clark is a

bit more outgoing, he tended to be the stronger performer.

When Clark expressed surprise at the number of requests that filled his second set, someone in the seats explained, "You wrote too many good ones!" To which the songwriter muttered: "I'll be lucky if I can remember 'em."

Despite all the requests — and a relatively new album to promote — he was able to squeeze in his own cover songs.

And despite the absence of long-neck Lone Star beer and a conspicuous lack of pickup trucks, it all seemed to work in a Yankee place that made Clark marvel and peg as surely and accurately as any detail in one of his songs by drawing: "This is a pretty calm little honky tonk isn't it?"