The lone stars’ state

Guy Clark and Townes Van Zandt are classic Texas songwriters

By Lynn Van Matre

As it comes to singer-songwriters, Texas always has produced more than its share, from pop pioneers such as Buddy Holly to latter-day country greats like Willie Nelson. And nobody seems to be sure why—not even Texas singer-songwriters themselves.

Guy Clark, who hails from Marfa, Texas, speculates that it might have something to do with "the independent spirit that people in this part of the country seem to value second nature to Texans. I think it’s the same way in the South and the Midwest as well, where a lot of these腩e people may have more of an experimental, artistic feel to their music. But I’m not sure about all of that. I do know I’ve always been interested in writing and playing music, and I’ve always wanted to put my own spin on things, to do something different from the norm."

Concludes Clark, "It’s just one of those mysteries."

In recent years, some of the people who started out "playing on weekends" and went on to greater glory have included Gram Parsons, Bob Dylan, Lyle Lovett, Nap Grifffith, Shelly Poole, and Townes Van Zandt. Theirs is a lineage that spans some of the most revered names in Texas songwriting.

"I think that there’s something about the way Texas has always been a land of opportunity. There are so many different cultures and influences that have come together in the state, and that has led to a unique blend of sounds that is truly Texas."

Townes Van Zandt

Van Zandt, who is a consummate songwriter, has yet to hit the commercial big time despite being a favorite of many. He’s not the only one to continue to eschew the crowds and instead choose to tour in more intimate settings.

"I think that the real story is the music itself, not the fame or the money. I just want to make sure that the songs have the life they deserve."

Some of Van Zandt’s hits include "Blue Suede Shoes," "Memphis," and "Alone Again, Nite After Nite." He’s also recorded with a variety of other artists, including Bob Dylan, John Prine, and Townes Van Zandt.

"I’ve always admired Townes’ songs. They’re so simple, yet so powerful. I think that’s what makes them so special."

Clarks and Van Zandts

As for the differences between Clark and Van Zandt, the former is known for his quirky sense of humor and his ability to make people laugh, while the latter is more serious and introspective.

"I think that’s what makes us so different. I’m always looking for the humorous side of things, while Townes is more focused on the darker side of life."

The two artists have worked together on several occasions, and Clark has recorded several of Van Zandt’s songs. "I think that we make a great team, and I’m glad that we’ve had the opportunity to work together on several projects."

"I think that it’s important to have a good sense of humor, even in the midst of the darkness. That’s what makes us who we are, and it’s what makes our music so special."

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Guy Clark and Townes Van Zandt are classic Texas songwriters

They’ve been a part of the Texas music scene for several decades, and their songs have become classics in their own right.

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