

Songwriters shine on a rainy night

BY SHIRLEY JINKINS
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Just a couple of guys, with just a couple of acoustic guitars, and they weren't even onstage at the same time, but Robert Earl Keen Jr. and Townes Van Zandt managed to satisfy the Caravan of Dreams crowd on a less-than-lovely night.

Intermittent rain last night didn't keep away Van Zandt's hometown cronies or Keen's growing fandom, but it did help to squelch rumors that had been building all day that Keen's buddy Lyle Lovett might show up to sit in (he didn't).

That's OK — both Keen and Van Zandt were in good form, and the stories and songs flowed like runoff during

Review: Music

**Robert Earl Keen
Jr. and Townes
Van Zandt**

Last night: at Caravan of Dreams

a pair of sets apiece that stretched well past midnight.

These two illustrate what's right about the state of songwriting in Texas. Their works rely on strong imagery, quirky humor and timeless themes, and together with the works of such other singer-songwriters as Lovett, Nanci Griffith, and Guy Clark, they paint a realistic picture of modern Texas.

Keen, long noted for his raucous tunes like *It's the Little Things* and *Copenhagen*, has shifted his focus toward more serious material and an increased emphasis on performing skills. His baritone seemed sure and steady on *Mariano*, a poignant tale of a migrant worker's plight.

Van Zandt, whose past shows have at times been uneven and tentative, was endearing with his gentle humor and characteristic, splintery voice.

It would be hard to declare a winner between the two, which makes the real victors the audience.