

Passionate music worth waiting for from songwriter Townes Van Zandt

Townes Van Zandt: *At My Window*
(Sugar Hill Records)

We say: **An original.**

While revered by peers as an eloquent and visionary songwriter, Townes Van Zandt, the performer, has gone largely unnoticed by the listening public. His passionate and fascinating lyrics have received some big-time exposure, via the country chart-toppers "If I Needed You" by Emmylou Harris and Don Williams and "Pancho and Lefty" by Willie Nelson and Merle Haggard, but the native Texas folksinger remains unabashedly obscure in the

comfort of his favorite coffeehouse venues. In fact, it took the fabled Nashville producer Jack Clement to lure him into the studio last year to lay down the tracks for *At My Window*, his first LP in nearly 10 years.

The resulting collection is a series of Van Zandt's soul-touching love songs, adorned by his unique southwestern country and blues stylings. And though the album is not a lavish production, it pulls some extra texture from Van Zandt's music that was never fully realized on his previous LPs (all of which were released on tiny independent labels, and are subsequently out of print).

As a poet, Van Zandt is a sharpshooter.

With gut-felt emotion, he deftly applies his paint to canvas, as he so wonderfully does on "Buckskin Stallion Blues": "If love can be, and still be lonely, where does that leave me and you?/Time there was and time there will be, where does that leave me and you?" The words are sobering, but not depressing, for in Van Zandt's world, lovers are not wantonly discarded, but cherished for their spirituality.

The romantic assessments that Van Zandt makes are often painful reminders of how relentless love is to a man's soul. And his observations often cut hard and deep like jagged glass: "Livin' is laughin', dyin' says nothing at all/Babe and I are lyin' here

watchin' the evening fall."

But, when there is triumphant love to deal with, Van Zandt rallies with rollicking abandon, such as in the bluesy "I Ain't Leavin' Your Love": "Poor man got him an airplane, tryin' to cruise across the traffic jam/Rich man got him a Chevrolet, but I'm stayin' right where I am, I ain't leavin' your love."

Van Zandt doesn't have a pretty voice. His rambling drawl is sometimes a bit monotonous, but by and large, he evokes a distinctive honesty, delivered with a tender, soulful moan. As lyrically skillful as Van Zandt is, his melodies are equally compelling. The somber tone of "For the

"Sake of the Song" comes back to haunt long after the tune fades out. —

Additionally, the music on *At My Window* gets a sensitive nod for the supporting instrumentalists, (which notably includes Van Zandt's touring partners Mickey White on lead and slide guitar, and Donny Silverman on sax and flute) who appropriately whisper their accompaniment on the slower tracks, and provide fervent drive on the upbeat offerings.

It's exciting to hear Townes Van Zandt on record again. *At My Window* with its spacious variety of material, proved to be an ideal vehicle for this man's work.

Although 10 years is an awful long time to be without a Townes Van Zandt album, I can't say that it wasn't worth the wait. —

— LOGAN NEILL