

# Cowboy Junkies remember Van Zandt through music

UPPER DARBY, Pa. (AP) — Four lines into the show, the spirit of Townes Van Zandt is on stage with the Cowboy Junkies.

"Ghosts in the basement," sings Margo Timmins. "Screams from the kitchen. I tell you, folks, I think I'm leaving."

The lines were written by Van Zandt, a Texas singer and songwriter who died New Year's Day 1997 before putting the words to music. That task fell to Michael Timmins, the Cowboy Junkies songwriter and guitarist, who added them to "Blue Guitar," a song he had written after hearing of Van Zandt's death.

"It's sort of my lament to him," he said.

The members of Cowboy Junkies — Margo and Michael Timmins, their brother Peter on drums, and bassist Alan Anton — were fans of Van Zandt when they started their band in Toronto in the mid-1980s.

"He was always one of our favorite road tapes," Michael Timmins said. "We'd put it on for late-night drives. His songwriting somehow touched us all."

By 1990, the band was touring with Van Zandt, and he opened their shows as they promoted their album, "The Caution Horses."

"He rode on our bus. We got to know him quite well," Michael Timmins said.

An established musician, with a small but fervent following, Van Zandt became a mentor of sorts to the Canadian quartet.

"I was new to the band and new to singing and wasn't sure if this was something I really wanted to do," Margo Timmins said of her first meeting with Van Zandt. "I knew if I could do what he did for me for just one person."

"He could always just sort of bring

it back to the singing. He always kept the right perspective."

On stage in suburban Philadelphia, Van Zandt's name was not mentioned. But the third song, "Crescent Moon," kept him in the show. The band said in album notes that the song was inspired by his life and friendship.

Van Zandt's death, at age 52 of a heart attack following surgery, was not entirely unexpected by the band.

"I can't say I was shocked; he lived a hard life," Margo Timmins said.

Her brother suggested a more spiritual reason.

"I have a feeling that there were no songs left, so he felt like it was time for him to go," Michael Timmins said. "You sort of think that somewhere out there, Townes is not singing on this Earth. I think we've all sort of lost something."

The newest album from Cowboy Junkies, their seventh, is "Miles From Our Home," and it marked a creative change. The songs were written and recorded in the winter and spring of 1997 at an Ontario farmhouse, several hours outside of Toronto. Previous albums had been crafted at the Timmins' parents house.

Michael Timmins and his wife found the farm and had planned to use it as a retreat following the band's last tour.

"I got up there and started to write and thought I should bring the whole band together now and then," he said.

Margo Timmins said the change of pace made a big difference in how the album came together. Working at her parents' house was like a regular workday, she said, but the farm offered a slower pace.

"We'd go and be there for a few days. Sometimes, it'd be all four of us, sometimes, just Mike and I," she said. "It might not sound like that big a deal,

but when you're writing, it changes everything."

"I enjoyed being out there, living and cooking and talking about the music."

Though there is more of a pop sound to some of the songs — notably "New Dawn Coming" and the title track — the darkness that pervades much of the band's earlier music remains dominant throughout the songs.

"They're about people who are finding themselves in positions and they're wondering how they got there — how the path they're on has veered off," Michael Timmins said.

The brooding themes of their music were overcome on stage by cheery banter from Margo Timmins, who introduced many of the songs with stories. At one point, she admitted flubbing her lines in an earlier show — "It was really embarrassing; I'm not sure why I am telling you" — and proceeded to start the next song with another lyrical slip.

Later in the show, she offered a peek at the band's life on the road. The current tour started in August, including a few dates with the Lilith Fair ensemble shows, and the tour continues through the winter.

Sipping from a mug of tea, Margo Timmins asked for help in the band's weekly combined effort to complete the crossword puzzle from the Sunday editions of The New York Times.

"Mike, they think we're really stupid," she said after laughter from the crowd.

She shared the band's hobbies: she does needlepoint, "the boys" play Nintendo games and everyone watches a lot of movies. Origami paper-folding is a new diversion.

"You can fold a dollar into a little shirt," she said. "Rock 'n' roll is very exciting."

# 'Ally McBeal' is bashing Catholics, protesters say

NEW YORK (AP) — A religious watchdog group says it's concerned about a "clear and intentional pattern of Catholic bashing" on Fox's hit comedy "Ally McBeal."

The Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights protested to Fox's chief executive for broadcasting standards Wednesday after this week's episode included jokes about nuns having sex and a priest videotaping off-color confessions.

Officials of Fox and David E. Kelley Productions, the company that produces the program, wouldn't comment. Monday's show featured a nun who sued the Catholic Church, after being dismissed for breaking her vow of celibacy. At one point, Ally McBeal jokes that "nuns are not supposed to have sex except with other nuns."

The nun said at one point: "A priest has sex with a boy, he gets transferred. ... At least my lover was of legal age."

A priest also videotapes confessions about sex for a documentary, "World's Naughtiest Confessions."

"I can't imagine anyone getting away with saying this if it were any other religious group," said Gregory Coiro, a priest with the Archdiocese of Los Angeles who acted as a script consultant for ABC last year for "Nothing Sacred," a short-lived series about an inner-city priest.

Coiro called the humor "insulting and very demeaning."

The New York-based Catholic League also criticized a Sept. 28 episode in which a Protestant minister tells a lawyer about his affair with a parish worker and said, "I realize that doesn't make me an altar boy." The lawyer responds: "If you were an altar boy, you'd be with

"You read these lines from 'Ally McBeal' and you'd really have to stretch the imagination to say there's no anti-Catholicism here."

GREGORY COIRO  
priest

a priest."

The Catholic League said Fox had been "inundated" with complaints about the show. Fox spokesman Jonathan Hogan said he wasn't aware of any phone calls of complaint.

Many Catholics debate whether to ignore such references in entertainment or aggressively point them out, Coiro said.

"You read these lines from 'Ally McBeal,' and you'd really have to stretch the imagination to say there's no anti-Catholicism here," he said. "A person who would think this is not anti-Catholic would probably go to a minstrel show."

One Fox executive, who wouldn't talk publicly about the show, noted that it was broadly satirical and recently included a story line about a frog on life support. The segment about the priest videotaping confessions also poked fun at Fox when "World's Naughtiest Confessions" landed a place on the network's schedule.

## Dropped Notes

American String Quartet to play Sheldon Art Gallery

Classical.  
It's the only word to describe the American String Quartet.

The group, composed of four 1974 Juilliard graduates, plays classical chamber music on instruments made more than 200 years ago.

Lincoln audiences can hear their work Saturday evening at 8 during a concert at the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery, 12th and R streets.

The Quartet features Laurie Carney and Peter Winograd on violin, Daniel Avshalomov on viola and David Gerber on cello.

Each of the musicians plays an instrument made in the 16th, 17th or 18th centuries.

The Quartet's concert consists of two classical works: Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart's Quartet in C Major, K. 465 titled "Dissonance" and Ludwig van Beethoven's Quartet in F Major, Opus 59, No. 1. Contemporary chamber music will be represented in a work by Richard Danielpour titled Quartet No. 2, "Shadow Dances."

The concert is sponsored by the Lincoln Friends of Chamber Music. This 33-year-old community organization presents a series of four to five concerts each year at the Sheldon.

David Neely, associate professor of violin at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, will give a lecture before Saturday's concert at 7:30 p.m.

Admission for the event is \$25 for adults and \$5 for students. Tickets are available at the door.

For more information, call the Lincoln Friends of Chamber Music at (402) 435-5454.

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