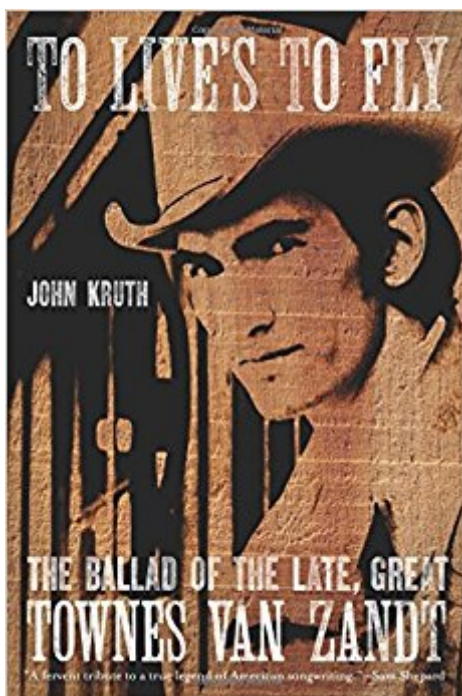


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To Live's To Fly: The Ballad Of The Late, Great Townes Van Zandt



Synopsis

At last, the authorized biography of Townes Van Zandt (1944-1997), who wrote such unforgettable songs as "Pancho & Lefty" and "If I Needed You." Born to a wealthy oil family in Ft. Worth, Texas, hounded by alcoholism and depression, Van Zandt pursued a nomadic existence following his muse, whatever the cost to himself, friends, and relatives. Based on exclusive interviews with those close to Van Zandt, including his best friend Guy Clark and colleagues like Steve Earle and John Prine, *To Live and to Fly* captures all the humor, hijinks, poetry, and heartbreak of this revered, genuinely outlaw country artist.

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Customer Reviews

Finally, the first official biography of singer-songwriter Townes Van Zandt (1944-1997) arrives; unfortunately, the life story of this troubled Texas troubadour is nearly as grueling to read as it was for Van Zandt to live. Kruth (*Bright Moments: The Life and Legacy of Rahsaan Roland Kirk*) deserves credit for interviewing scores of family members, friends and associates, but his efforts are diminished by oddly alternating first- and third-person narratives, awkward transitions and text cluttered with excessive quotes. In addition, many anecdotes and quotes from Van Zandt lack attribution. That said, Kruth (a veteran musician himself) shines when providing perspective on the evolving American folk scene and in dissecting numerous albums (some issued after Van Zandt's New Year's Day death at age 52). To be sure, Van Zandt's outrageous penchant for gambling, alcohol and women, not to mention his irresponsible career management, make him a

less-than-sympathetic character; more insight into why-rather than countless tales of how-would have made this bio a more worthwhile read. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Not unlike fellow alt-country inspiration Gram Parsons, Townes Van Zandt was born rich yet became an iconic country singer and countercultural hero. Discovering Leadbelly, Mance Lipscomb, and Lightnin' Hopkins at an early age, he was an ardent "Elvis fan and a good Elvis mimic" to boot. Recognized reasonably widely as "a living legend, albeit more often than not an unknown one," he got fellow alt-country icon Steve Earle's nod as "the best songwriter in the world," which sentiment Earle said he'd "stand on Bob Dylan's coffee table and say." Van Zandt famously replied, "I've met Bob Dylan's bodyguards and if Steve Earle thinks he can stand on Bob Dylan's coffee table, he's sadly mistaken." Self-deprecating, wistful, haunted by a rasher of demons, Van Zandt died young, leaving behind such songs as Willie Nelson's hit "Pancho & Lefty" and influencing many younger performers. Kruth's enthusiasm for Van Zandt is obvious throughout his detail-laden yet very readable book, which well might revive Van Zandt's memory. Mike TribbyCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Hang in there with this one. Kruth gets off to a shaky start, with one early chapter consisting entirely of an account of a drunken Guy Clark essentially telling the author to go to hell. But the narrative acquires power and tragic beauty as one of the most talented songwriters of all time slowly destroys himself with alcohol and drugs. The end of Van Zandt's life will look all too familiar to anyone who's ever watched an alcoholic ride the disease to the end of the line - the sheer horror of reaching the point where he can't continue to drink, and can't quit drinking, either. If you haven't already done so, you may want to steep yourself in Van Zandt's music before you read *To Live's to Fly*. Besides being required for anyone who gives a damn about the art of songwriting, I'm pretty sure this is a prerequisite to sticking out this tale to the bitter end.

While I agree with the previous reviewers that the book is flawed, I find more interesting the phenomenon that Townes Van Zandt is still, ten years later, the center of a vortex. The fact that author John Kruth was stymied in his search for the ghost inside Townes' machine is, in fact, the answer we all sought when we bought the book. Townes worked on everyone who knew him like a

customized koan, frustrating us in precisely the most infuriating and mindblowing personalized ways. All of us are the donut, and Townes is the energy at the center of it all. The joke's on us for trying to nail down anything about an evanescent creature, like trying to pick up a watermelon seed with wet fingers. I won't go into the stylistic and editing flaws of the book, but I will correct a factual one: in the photo section, a shot of Townes with Mickey White and Harold Eggers in 1982 misidentifies the man with them as "Merrick." It is Marek Gorecki, a concert host in central Pennsylvania. My final answer--I learned some stuff. I'd buy it again.

I think John Kruth really nailed Townes' life and legacy. Very well written. He portrayed Townes in a truthful light showing him as all of the complexities that he was.

Good writing and excellent subject

Not a bad effort considering the subject remains even in death an illusive enigma at the very get-go and good luck to those biographers who believe they can conveniently pigeon-hole TVZ and then attempt to analyze both TVZ and his songs and then attempt to speak in definitives. It's not going to happen. TVZ has already seen to that! As for John Kruth's interview with Guy Clark, well, if only for the, shall we say, blow by blow backbeat and banter, it still makes interesting reading. True, Susanna Clark, and IMO, perhaps one of the very few on this planet who really knew TVZ in depth, gave Kruth the waive-off [Laments Kruth, p. 39, "I had just driven fifteen hours to Nashville from New York and was blown off in a matter of moments." [sic] And then there is Susanna's husband, Guy Clark, who was quite possibly put off by Kruth sporting those NYC "plaid shorts and Doc Marten boots" [p.39 -- Kruth -- and PS, that surname is spelled "Martens" with an 's'], anyway, between the get-up shorts and UK boots and Kruth passing on the welcome drink [causing Guy to do the eye-roll thing] and Kruth well noting Guy's chain-smoking and epithet hurling a la Guy referring to Kruth as a "little Yankee journalist" [sic], well, hey, it's said by some that Guy either takes an immediate liking to you or he doesn't. But then too, the interview did bear fruit, as they say, because Guy put it succinctly in two very memorable sentences AND which I believe TVZ fans [like me] can well relate, to wit: "Townes went for the passion, not a bunch of clever bull****." [...] "What we had in common was to truck no bull**** and applaud craziness." [sic] As for Guy going on about his song, "The Randall Knife", and then Guy allegedly pointing a real knife at Kruth's nose [p. 43], hey, that's Guy Clark! Nahhhh, it had to be Kruth's plaid shorts and Doc Martens boots! And to pass on 'both' alcohol and tobacco! Whew! I mean I still have the tobacco habit from my Army days and

when the lectures or the 'look' begins from non smokers, or worse, ex-smokers, I turn a deaf ear and a blind eye just as I would when there is a knock on my door and the person asks me if I've been "saved." Now if someone should relate my comments to Guy who Kruth characterizes as a "burly Buddha" [sic] and "an old time preacher like the guy on the Quaker Oats box" [sic -- p. 44] and Guy demands to know who the reviewer was who brought that up, tell him you think it was ... Jack Prigg. [!] If I know Guy, he'll laugh it off and that should be the end of it. At worst, I'll appeal to Susanna for a favorable nod to convince Guy that I'm just as much an avid Guy Clark fan as I am TVZ! Thus soothed, perhaps I could convince Guy to release any further audio and/or video he might have from the 70's when the 'gang' met around the table at Guy and Susanna's Nashville digs! Cue "Silent Night" [!] ... and all that. I think the book covered a lot of ground [especially the so-called 'missing years'] and there were many interviews but, again, consider the subject who is difficult to get a 'read' on because even what Townes said himself is often open to not just interpretation but, alas, the very veracity of the story itself which 'greatly' varies from telling to telling! Witness "Pancho and Lefty" and TVZ's various comments on how he came to write the song. All too often it can become a question of who do you believe! TVZ was a complex guy and not to mention his life-long struggle with very early glue sniffing to the max, depression issues and followed by chronic alcohol and drug abuse. Take a gander at the two DVD's involving TVZ which every TVZ fan should have in their collection, "Heartworn Highways" and "Be Here To Love Me." It's another glimpse at an enigma but perhaps the old horseshoes analogy can come to the fore, you know, and in any attempts to 'analyze' TVZ, close, perhaps even 'very' close ... but no cigar. I sometimes equate those who attempt to "figure out" TVZ with "Uncle" Seymour Washington [** "Heartworn Highways", 1975, released in 1981], you know, when TVZ says, "Unc, you had a birthday recently .. you were .. 36?" and this bit of facetious banter and humor literally flew over Unc Washington's head as he responded to TVZ in a rather dead-pan manner as if to simply 'correct' TVZ on the age error and tells TVZ matter-of-factly, "79!" In effect, and waxing comparatively, to attempt to talk in definitives concerning TVZ or contemplate the 'why' of those things he said and did is a questionable undertaking. At best, the enigma of TVZ is still as strong as it ever was. When I do his songs on my guitar and even on the piano, I sometimes sense his ghostly presence along with his beloved dog, "Geraldine" [who lived to be 17 years], and he quips, "Are you hip ... put whatever interpretation on the song that you feel fits because even "I" am not sure of its full meaning ... and I wrote the song!" Doc Tony

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