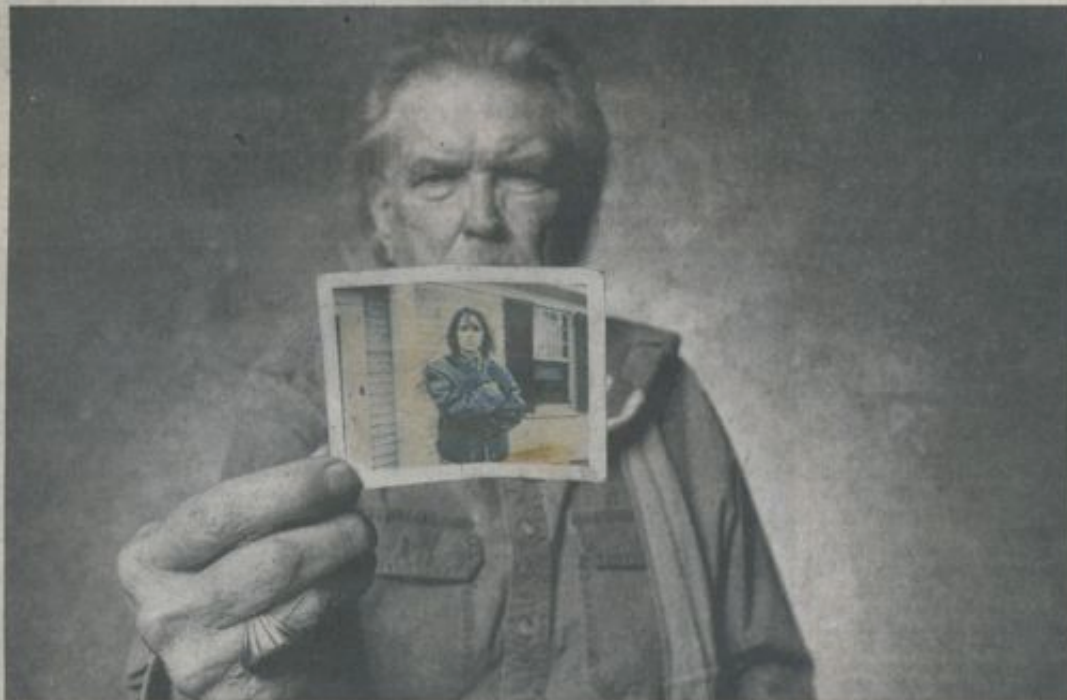


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LIFE & ARTS COVER STORY

MUSIC



The cover of Guy Clark's new album, "My Favorite Picture of You," shows the Texas-born songwriter holding a photo of his wife, Susanna, who died in 2012. CONTRIBUTED PHOTOS BY DUALTONE RECORDS

'I know this song'

Guy Clark finds inspiration from a photo on 'My Favorite Picture of You'

By Peter Mongillo
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When "This One's For Him: A Tribute to Guy Clark," a double-disc collection of the Texas-born songwriter's music, was released in 2012, the contributors — all accomplished songwriters — talked about what made Clark's songwriting and collaboration special and influential.

"(His was) the most informative friendship or relationship I had as far as what it takes to make a good song," Rodney Crowell said in interviews with American-Statesman contributor Brian Atkinson, who wrote the liner notes for the album. "Guy was the guy who knew what a good song was."

Lyle Lovett called Clark's imagery and subject matter "poetry."

"He has a different sense, tells a story better than most people," Vince Gill said. "It's real earthy."

In other words, Clark, who turns 72 this year and has been crafting hits since his move to Nashville in 1971, works well with others, and those others view him as a master.

Crowell and Lovett both have songwriting credits on Clark's latest, "My



"Favorite Picture of You" (out Tuesday on Dualtone Records) — Clark recorded Lovett's "Waltzing Fool" and co-wrote "I'll Show Me" with Crowell — as does past collaborator Shawn Camp and Jedd Hughes, a 31-year-old Australian songwriter based in Nashville. Clark, by phone from his home in Nashville, said Hughes is one of his favorite young songwriters: "He's really good, he's really bright and quick, a marvelous player."

"My Favorite Picture of You" is Clark's first album in four years, and the title track is highly personal, a decades-old story that almost demanded its own song.

The album cover shows Clark holding a photo of his wife, Susanna, who died in 2012. Back in the early '70s, Clark and his longtime friend Townes Van Zandt were drinking, or already drunk, at the Nashville home of John Lomax III — "We were just roarin', being jerks as we often did when we got together," Clark said.

Susanna walked in and found them. "She'd had enough," Clark said. Unhappy with the scene, she stormed outside, where Lomax snapped a portrait of the songwriter, arms crossed inside a navy-colored snap-up jacket. Clark sings about the photo, backed by a melancholy cello: "My favorite picture of you/Is the one where your wings are showin'/Your arms are crossed and your fists are clenched/Not gone but goin'."

The song evolved out of a songwriting exercise, when Gordie Sampson (who shares a co-writing credit on the song) came to see Clark with a list of song titles, one of which was "My Favorite Picture." "I was just looking at the titles and I saw 'My Favorite Picture of You,' and I said, 'Wow, I have that picture,'" Clark said. "I looked over my shoulder and there it was pinned

Clark continued on D10

The tone is mostly somber

Clark

Continued from D1

to my wall, and I said, 'I know this song.'"

The rest of the record's songs are varied. "The High Price of Inspiration," another personal tale, has Clark looking in the mirror at the toll of a muse always calling him to "get high." Two of the songs are poignant stories pulled from news headlines; others feel more folk or traditionally inspired. All of them reflect the sentiments of Clark's high-profile admirers.

On "Coyote" (and again on "Heroes," which deals

with a veteran suffering from what sounds like PTSD), Clark moves from personal to topical, with a dark song that tells the story of Mexican immigrants struggling (and tragically failing) to cross the border into Texas.

Clark said that he got the idea from a news story about a human smuggler who abandoned a locked truck full of people in the South Texas sun.

In the final verse, he describes the scene inside the truck, where the men are packed in "like cattle": "The braceros are askin' in whispers 'Why the truck stopped in the heat of the day/At the first sign of trouble/He's left us all the by the road and he's walking away.'"

Clark said that imagining such a tragedy from the perspective of those involved wasn't easy and that he wrote but didn't include one last, more

graphic verse from the perspective of those who died. Even without a more graphic description, the song paints a grim picture.

Opening track "Cornmeal Waltz," a glowing tale of a night at the dancehall warmed further with backing harmony from Morgane Stapleton, introduces the album on a lighter note. Later, "Waltzing Fool" has a similar effect, this time with a mandolin joining in the dance. Those songs, however, are as bright as "Picture" gets, with "Good Advice" ("Life's such a bitter pill"), desperation tale "Rain in Durango," and murder ballad "Death of Sis Draper," which references folk song "Shady Grove," all delving into darker places.

There was no specific plan behind the writing the songs on "My Favorite Picture of You," Clark

said that his albums come together with no particular goal other than playing and writing music with friends over time, and that co-writing, something that he didn't always do, forces him to come face-to-face with his ideas. In a sense, it's an approach that echoes what Crowell and others had to say about the help he offers to others: "I enjoy the process of sitting in a room and tossing ideas back and forth and that kind of interplay," Clark said.

"You have to commit yourself, you can't just sit there and think about it like you can when you're writing by yourself, humming along, and then two weeks later and you still have the same melody and the same song and you haven't sung it."

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Guy Clark will release "My Favorite Picture of You" on Tuesday. CONTRIBUTED BY DUATONE RECORDS