



Signs of Life in Music, Film & Culture

Guy Clark: *My Favorite Picture Of You*

BY HOLLY GLEASON July 23, 2013

As he enters his 71st year, Guy Clark consolidates his standing as the *eminence grise* of Texas singer/songwriters with *My Favorite Picture of You*. A collection of songs that embraces the beckoning of Lone Star dance halls (the deeply sweet “Corn Meal Waltz,” Lyle Lovett’s “The Waltzing Fool”), the mortal foibles of humanity (“Hell Bent On A Heartache,” “The High Price of Inspiration”) and classic storytelling (“The Death of Sis Draper,” the wry “She Ain’t Goin’ Nowhere” sequel “Rain In Durango”), *Picture* hones Clark’s lean writing to Raymond Carver-esque proportions.

There’s an uncharacteristic undertow, too: a politicism previously eschewed. The gut string “El Coyote,” a look at immigrants risking their lives to cross across the border, only to be abandoned by the traffickers to die, is Woody Guthrie’s “Deportee (Plane Wreck at Los Gatos)”’s soulmate, while the dignified “Heroes”—featuring Emmylou Harris’ vocals—paints a picture of a Gulf War vet reeling from what he saw and just can’t live with. These aren’t just forgotten, but discarded people, and Clark lifts their story up for all to consider.

For all the tenderness and social conscientiousness, Clark has lost none of his swagger. Quick to take that ragged, split-rail voice and paint a picture of bravado and its fallout, “I’ll Show Me” is a blues-drenched saunter that is self-inflicted implosion. Morgane Hayes’ tart taunt leavens the bluster as Clark musters, “See myself as a young Richard Burton, reading Dylan Thomas to some Welsh coquette... How bout this, I’m a suave bullfighter or a war correspondent for the BBC...”

As the world becomes faster, cheaper, more disposable, Guy Clark understands building things to last, taking responsibility and being the sort of man that owns his failings. On the title track, inspired by a particularly high-timing afternoon shared with Townes Van Zandt, Susanna Clark has had more than enough—and her crossed-arm rage burns a hole into the camera, leaving an impression of how high the stakes are.

Those stakes have challenged Clark to raise the bar with each passing record. As a master wordsmith who believes in simplicity over all, he’s excavated the human heart, calloused pride and faltering dignity with a scalpel. On *Picture*, it’s all there; Verlon Thompson and Shawn Camp’s tasteful acoustic guitar-playing setting the mood as the waltzes, aggressive folk and blues variations create a cozy handful of snapshots capturing a life well-lived.