

Billboard

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6 QUESTIONS

with DAVID BROZA

by GARY GRAFF

David Broza performed with the late Townes Van Zandt only once, during a Writers in the Round concert in Houston in 1994. After Van Zandt died three years later, the Israeli singer/songwriter was shocked to learn that the Texas music icon had left him a shoe box filled with unreleased poems and lyrics—and that he wanted Broza to write music to accompany them. After some initial hesitation—during which Van Zandt's widow, Jeanene, with Broza's approval, considered more well-known artists for the project—Broza hit Manhattan Beach studios last June with producer G.E. Smith and recorded "Night Dawn: The Unpublished Poetry of Townes Van Zandt," due Feb. 23 on S-Curve Records.

Broza spent four years writing music for 10 of the songs; finished an 11th, "Harms Swift Way," from a Van Zandt demo; and closes the album with his own instrumental, "Too Old to Die Young."

1 What happened that night in Houston when you first met Townes?

There were others there, but it really turned out to be the Townes Van Zandt vs. David Broza show. It went down for four hours, just on and on. That was basically the only time we sat across from each other and really played and talked. We had a brief meeting later that year, in Kerville, Texas, but that was not at all like Houston.

2 What was your reaction when you discovered the shoe box?

I was pretty shocked. . . . It was out of the blue, out of nowhere. I had not talked to Townes or seen him since that one long concert we had done in '94. I didn't sing his songs. I guess he didn't write music to them, so he left that for me to do.

3 But his widow didn't want to give them to you.

She said to me that she would like to talk to me in person. After telling me about their life, she said she would've rather presented these poems to Bob Dylan, Willie Nelson, Waylon Jennings—other singers who she knew loved Townes' work. I told her, "I'm not going to stand in your way. This is something bigger than me." I'm not in a position like a Bob Dylan or Willie Nelson to make Townes' words come to life. But eight years later I was in Houston. I had Jeanene's number and wondered what happened to that stuff. She said nothing had happened, so I went back to Tel Aviv and a few days later I started receiving these beautiful poems.

4 Was there a particular theme that you found in these writings as you got into them?

They all deal with death, almost all of them—and love, but of course he would always cut away suddenly from death and turn into very personal and deep love and affection for someone. When I finished writing all the music to them, they all felt like they were about departure—that's what immediately came to mind.

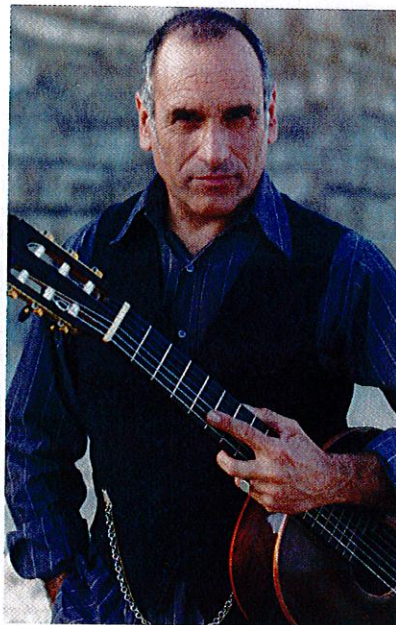
5 What kind of approach did you take to recording these songs?

In three days in the studio we laid down the tracks, one take to every song live with a drum-

mer, double bass, electric guitar, my Spanish guitar and vocal. We added a little keyboard and a couple of voices here and there. In five days we'd done everything. And that's not me; I'm a pop artist, used to doing 171 takes to every song, fixing every word. If I had to sing in front of Townes and sing him those songs, I guess this is what it would be like.

6 You certainly kept quiet about this given that it was brewing for four years.

That was an odd thing for me. [laughs] Normally when I write a song I want to get onstage and sing it in front of an audience.



These songs, I treasured them so dearly, I didn't play them to anybody. I didn't want to tell everybody about it; there was too much to explain. There was one person I played each and every one as I wrote them, by phone or in person. A couple of them I played maybe once in public. But, really, nobody, until this recording was done, actually got to hear me play them. I can only say I hope I've done those lyrics justice, turning that poetry into songs as Townes would've liked it.

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