

The Arts Desk

Guy Clark, *Somedays The Song Writes You* (Dualtone Records)

by Adam Sweeting

Clark's first batch of new material since 2006's *Workbench Songs* continues his tradition of distilled and finely crafted songwriting, and once again almost all the material is co-written. The sole exception is his easeful version of old comrade Townes Van Zandt's "If I Needed You", sprung over upright bass, mandolin and Kenny Malone's tactful percussion. Considering that Clark was always a solo writer, the collaborative mode fits him remarkably snugly. Among numerous highlights are his two-hander with Rodney Crowell, "Eamon", the saga of an old seafarer who comes back to dry land to die, which gains extra force from being understated and unsentimental. Clark is a keen amateur guitar-maker, so "The Guitar" (co-written with Verlon Thompson) must have almost composed itself. The narrator goes into a pawn shop and unearths a haunted guitar which inspires him to play like a combination of Segovia and Jimi Hendrix (or in this case like Verlon Thompson), then eerily finds his own name already on the guitar case. Any criticisms would centre on the album's overriding downbeat tone, expressed in the likes of Hollywood ("you'll always be a stranger here") or the thoroughly dispiriting lowlife saga, "Wrong Side Of The Tracks". "The Coat" is pretty glum too, though that doesn't prevent it from being a painfully affecting piece of writing. Overall, Clark fans will love it, and non-Clark fans could easily learn to.