

Twangville

by Eli Petersen

There are songwriters that are so prolific, that they write a song a day. Maybe once a week, they write a good one. The difficulty then comes in figuring which ones are really good. Guy Clark is not that kind of songwriter. He is a true craftsman in every sense of the word. Working on songs for long periods of time to make sure that every line is in its place. His new record *Somedays the Song Writes You*, particularly the first three songs, is both a testament and a metaphor for his method. The lead off title track being the most obvious of these, fleshing out the idea that it's not always Clark writing the song, sometimes it's the song writing Clark. The second track "The Guitar", which features the ebullient guitar picking of Verlon Thompson, finds Clark in an instrument store playing a dusty old guitar that practically plays itself, having literally been made for Clark to play. It's never Clark's doing, the song's write him and the guitar plays him. These ideas both belie and embrace his songwriting method. It appears seamless, yet it is the precise nature of his songwriting that makes it sound so easy. The ideas presented in these songs are hardly novel, but they evoke an authenticity that is weighed against Clark's 30 year career as singer, songwriter, player, and performer.

The third of these songs is my favorite on the record "Hemingway's Whiskey", which covers similar themes. The reference to Hemingway is all too appropriate, given that Hemingway's terse writing style, using stark simple imagery to create an intense portrait of life, bears a great resemblance to Clark's songwriting. I love whiskey, I love Hemingway, and I love Guy Clark.

This record finds Clark once again co-writing much of the record with both the usual suspects (Rodney Crowell, Shawn Camp, Verlon Thompson, Gary Nicholson, Jon Randall, Ray Stephenson, Joe Leathers) and some surprises (youngsters Ashely Monroe, Patrick Davis, and Jedd Hughes). The only cover is the now customary Townes Van Zandt number. Clark has been recording a Van Zandt song for each of his records since Van Zandt's death in 1997. The two were close friends, even closer than Steve Earle whose entire record of Van Zandt covers was released earlier this year, and complimentary songwriters. For *Somedays The Song Writes You*, Clark has chose Van Zandt's elegant ballad "If I Needed You". Clark and his wife Susanna were the first to hear the song, which Van Zandt had reportedly written in his sleep. Yet another example that sometimes the song just writes you.