



Pickers and Poets: The Ruthlessly Poetic Singer-Songwriters of Texas (John and Robin Dickson Series in Texas Music, sponsored by the Center for Texas)

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Many books and essays have addressed the broad sweep of Texas music—its multicultural aspects, its wide array and blending of musical genres, its historical transformations, and its love/hate relationship with Nashville and other established music business centers. This book, however, focuses on an essential thread in this tapestry: the Texas singer-songwriters to whom the contributors refer as “ruthlessly poetic.” All songs require good lyrics, but for these songwriters, the poetic quality and substance of the lyrics are front and center.

Obvious candidates for this category would include Townes Van Zandt, Michael Martin Murphey, Guy Clark, Steve Fromholz, Terry Allen, Kris Kristofferson, Vince Bell, and David Rodriguez. In a sense, what these songwriters were doing in small, intimate live-music venues like the Jester Lounge in Houston, the Chequered Flag in Austin, and the Rubaiyat in Dallas was similar to what Bob Dylan was doing in Greenwich Village. In the language of the times, these were “folksingers.” Unlike Dylan, however, these were folksingers writing songs about their own people and their own origins and singing in their own vernacular. This music, like most great poetry, is profoundly rooted.

That rootedness, in fact, is reflected in the book’s emphasis on place and the powerful ways it shaped and continues to shape the poetry and music of Texas singer-songwriters. From the coffeehouses and folk clubs where many of the “founders” got their start to the Texas-flavored festivals and concerts that nurtured both their fame and the rise of a new generation, the indelible stamp of origins is inseparable from the work of these troubadour-poets.

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