



## **Guy Clark - *My Favorite Picture Of You* Biography**

We've not left much room for the making of things that matter in this modern world. For the careful, private passion of handwork and contemplative creation. Instead of art we've embraced certain obsolescence, offshore manufacturing, factory farming, and digital truths that arrive with the half-life of a firefly. Packaging.

And yet the tradition somehow endures: homegrown tomatoes, locally brewed beer, hand-knit sweaters. Bits of jewelry. And a few careful songs which still seek to tell private and public truths. At least so long as Guy Clark and his loose-knit confederation of ornery musicians keep writing and recording them.

Which makes *My Favorite Picture of You*, Clark's first album of new material in four years, a rare and treasured work, a custom creation much like the guitars he fashions on a simple workbench downstairs. It is also, arguably, the most emotional album of his much-decorated career. Consider the lingering memories of its title track, the banked fury of "El Coyote," and an incautious number titled "The High Price of Inspiration." And, alas, "The Death of Sis Draper," a fictional character about whom Clark and Shawn Camp have been writing for nearly a decade.

Not that he would admit any intentional coherence. "I don't do theme records," says Clark with a dry chuckle. "It's just the best ten songs I've got, that's the way I record."

No matter his long tenure at the edge of Music Row, Guy Clark is inescapably from Texas. A resolute, elegant man, regardless the simplicity of his clothes, nor the wear of his 71 years. The elder statesman of a clutch of gritty, gutty songwriters which includes the late Townes Van Zandt, Rodney Crowell, Steve Earle, Lyle Lovett, and Nanci Griffith. And, of course, the late Susanna Clark, who died June 27, 2012. It is her picture which adorns her husband's new record, the lasting image of his creative partner who so long ago insisted he quit his day job, go ahead and write songs. And then did the same.

"That was always my favorite picture of Susanna, probably 30 years old," he says, with dignity and time buffing the hurt from his voice, only tenderness left behind. "Me and Townes are in that house, just drunk on our asses, jerks. And she'd had enough, she walked out that front door. I think it was John Lomax who snapped that picture. I had it pinned on my wall, and Gordon [Sampson] came over. We were writing and he had a list of lines and titles and all that shit that most people carry around. I was going through it and I hit on this line that said, 'My favorite picture of you.' I turned in my chair and it was right there in front of me. The lyrics just poured out because all it boiled down to was describing the picture. We might have written it in one day."

One day, not twenty minutes.

This is not work that he has to do, not at an age when most men are safely retired, except that he does. He's written enough songs — "Desperados Waiting for a Train," "L.A. Freeway," "The Randall Knife" — to leave a legacy and pay the bills, if that's what mattered.

"It's what I enjoy," he says. "It gets harder, all the time. It doesn't fall out of the sky, you know. But I have joy doing the work, I enjoy the creative process. I write and build guitars in the same space, and I find that one is right brain and one is left brain, and they kind of feed off of one another. But, I don't know. It's just a way to while away the time until you die."

An artist, not an auteur. In some circles Nashville's penchant for co-writing has a bad name. For Clark it is an essential tool. "I just write 'em one song at a time," he says. "Whoever comes through the door with a better idea than I've got."

Formidable talents come through Guy Clark's door these days, and have for years. Shawn Camp, of course, and his long-time guitarist Verlon Thompson. Chris Stapleton, The SteelDrivers' original songwriter and vocalist, whose wife, Morgane sings much of the harmony on this record. Gordy Sampson, from Halifax. Noel McKay from Bandera, Texas. Ray Stephenson, Jedd Hughes, Rodney Crowell.

"Oh, I don't consider it mentoring," Clark says. "If they're good enough to sit in a room with me and write...they don't need mentoring, as far as I'm concerned. I'm not trying to mentor anyone. I just enjoy the process of co-writing simply because of the give and take, especially with bright people who are good at what they do."

Clark does not write angry. He writes carefully, shaving off the unnecessary bits until the story's told. And yet, at the center of *My Favorite Picture of You* are two striking topical songs. Angry songs. "Well...I think about that stuff," is all he offers.

"Heroes" was suggested by press coverage of the suicide epidemic afflicting soldiers returning from the Middle East. "They can't live with what they did and what they saw," Clark says, an edge to his voice for the first time. "Where's Woody Guthrie?"

Guthrie comes to the foreground of "El Coyote," a song about a crooked smuggler of people over the Mexican border. "'El Coyote' was about a situation that really happened," says Clark. "Something spooked the driver, and he just pulled over to the side of the road, left 18 workers in the Texas sun, and walked off. Locked them in, and they all died. I just thought it was something that needed to be addressed. And Noel speaks really good Spanish, been around that all his life, too. So I presented him the idea of writing that song, and he was very helpful."

Add into the mix a cover of Lyle Lovett's "The Waltzing Fool," the song Clark made Tony Brown listen to back when, and the result is a formidable collection of songs.

A testament to the poetry of carefully wrought songs, and a powerful pleasure.

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