

## **Review: Guy Clark, Joe Ely, John Hiatt and Lyle Lovett at the Paramount**

John T. Davis

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The era of the Great American Songbook, that unifying canon of popular music that everyone could sing along with, is almost certainly over. They aren't minting any more Cole Porters or Johnny Mercers. Yet, even in the fracturing genres that make up modern pop music, there are artisans whose body of work forms a sort of Unified Field Theory within that particular niche.

Thus fans of singer-songwriters and Americana music need not have seen all four of the artists onstage at the Paramount Theatre on Monday to be familiar with their songs. Though Guy Clark, Joe Ely, John Hiatt and Lyle Lovett each had fierce partisans in the sold-out house, the audience cheered in unison as each trotted out familiar and not-so-familiar selections from their individual songbooks. You'd have thought Mercer and Porter were in the house, along with Jerome Kern and maybe Irving Berlin, to boot.

This tour — amazingly playing Austin for just the first time — is the latest iteration of a songwriters' guitar pull that the four men have been conducting for the past decade or so. Inevitably, tried and true bits of shtick have accrued to the performance: Clark lit up a cigarette at just the right moment in one of Lovett's expository interludes, and Hiatt's tale of a youthful bout of delinquency had the polished sheen of repeated delivery.

In a similar vein, each of the performers slipped into a familiar persona — Clark the craggy patriarch, Ely the boyish, footloose rocker, Hiatt the wisecracking character actor and Lovett the droll, bemused grad student.

But the music each of the men has been responsible for is largely timeless and bereft of artifice. Beginning with Clark's "L.A. Freeway," the four rotated turns in the spotlight. Hiatt lit up the room with his percussive, colorful guitar work on "Tennessee Plates," and was by turn droll and yearning on "Thunderbird" and "Have A Little Faith In Me." Ely essayed one of his best-known songs, "All Just To Get to You," and one of his least, "If I Could Teach My Chihuahua to Sing." Clark's mastery of minimal nuance was on display in "Out In the Parking Lot" and "Stuff That Works." Lovett's wry, elliptical songcraft ("South Texas Girl," "My Baby Don't Tolerate") shone with particular luster away from the orchestrations of his Large Band.

Each man sang his own compositions except for a couple of Woody Guthrie encores and the next-to-last number, Lovett's cover of Clark's first song, "Step Inside This House." Which sparked an interesting notion...on some future leg of this ongoing collaboration, wouldn't it be interesting to hear the performers essaying one another's songs? Just a thought...