

## **ACL review: Rodney Crowell**

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Ears ringing from the sonic assault of Austin's the Steps, winners of the Sound and the Jury who were ringing the rafters of the Dell Stage, listeners made their way toward what proved to be musical balm from Gilead by comparison—Rodney Crowell's acoustic set on the AT&T stage. It wasn't so much that Crowell's songs can't flourish in an electric setting—the guy can rock with the best of them. But the tensile intelligence of his writing and the tongue-in-groove tightness of his melodies, it can be argued, come across best in a more intimate context, stripped down to bone and nerve. And Crowell's set was nothing if not intimate, the cavernous setting of the AT&T Stage notwithstanding. His show was more evocative of a club set than a festival showcase. Audience members helpfully supplied him with a lyric when he blanked during "I Wish It Would Rain" ("Thank you for helping me in these senior moments," he said sheepishly.) And the sunbaked crowd seemed to catch its collective breath as Crowell's female fiddle player crafted a passionate extended solo at the conclusion of "Wandering Boy" that climaxed and waned to the trill of a hummingbird's wings. It was a transcendent moment, and Crowell seemed as engrossed and entranced as the audience. The first portion of his set derived from his new album, *Sex and Gasoline*, a collection of songs from and about a female perspective. Songs such as "Moving Work of Art," the Dylanesque title track and "The Rise and Fall of Intelligent Design" all reflected the razor-edged focus and seemingly offhanded craftsmanship which have marked Crowell's entire career, both as a Nashville journeyman and, more lately, a maverick tunesmith pursuing his Muse wherever it happens to lead him. The balance of his show drew from the three critically acclaimed albums he has released since 2001. Cherry-picking songs like "Fate's Right Hand," "U Don't Know How Much I Hate U" and "Earthbound," he still left some fans unsatiated. "I SO wanted to hear 'Shame On the Moon,' lamented one listener afterward. Ah, well. *Photo: Jay Janner AMERICAN-STATESMAN*