

Earle wows 'em at Sheridan's WYO Theater

• Folk troubadour inspires, provokes sold-out crowd Saturday night

At 54, folk troubadour Steve Earle is just two years older than his teacher, mentor and friend Townes Van Zandt was when he died.

During a sold-out performance Saturday at Sheridan's WYO Theater, Earle said nothing could have prepared him for the series of shows in which he performs songs from his newest album, "Townes," comprised entirely of covers originally written and performed by Van Zandt.

"I wish he could have been here to see it," lamented Earle, who spent the evening playing songs from "Townes" and discussing Van Zandt's influence on his life.

Earle's musical path took quite a course from Van Zandt, who died in 1997 at age 52 from health issues related to substance abuse. Though he spent many years living hard with Van Zandt, even pawning his guitars for heroin, Earle cleaned up in jail and launched a noticeably more successful musical career following his release.

Earle's domestic life, at times tumultuous, has quieted down as well and includes a relatively long marriage to alt country musician Allison Moorer, Earle's sixth wife. Moorer tours with Earle and opened Saturday's concert.

Van Zandt, a country/folk singer/songwriter, emerged in the South's Outlaw Country movement in the late 1960s and '70s. His songs, themed around drinking, drugs, and the counterculture movement, propelled him to cult status, and though he didn't have a hit

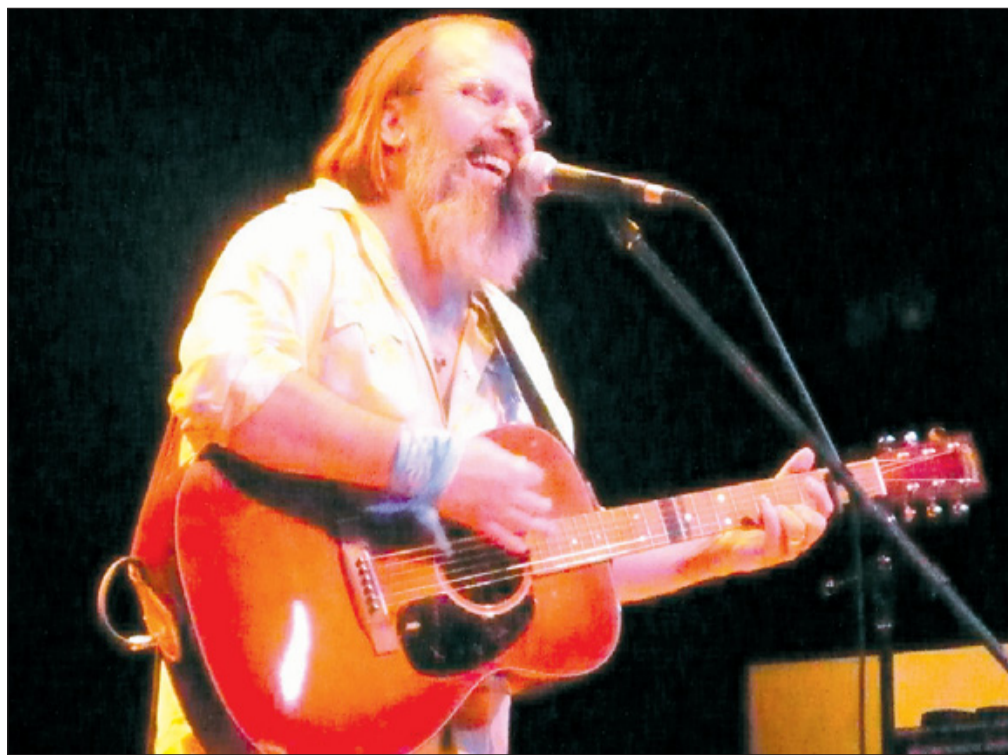


Photo by Anna Paige/Pen and Paige

Musician Steve Earle sings to a sold-out crowd Saturday night at the WYO Theater in downtown Sheridan.

record during his career, many consider Van Zandt a godfather of the folk movement.

Earle has been quoted as saying that Van Zandt was "the best songwriter in the whole world, and I'll stand on Bob Dylan's coffee table in my cowboy boots and say that."

When Earle took the stage Saturday at the WYO, blue bandana wrapped around his right wrist, stringy hair dangling from his balding head, and thin wire-rim glasses set below a crinkled forehead, he was met with exuberant applause from the audience.

He opened his set with "Where I Lead Me," his harmonica at times sounding like a train whistle, his distinctive drawl belting through the art deco theater. With the sound of beer bottles tipping down the theater's sloping floor and the echoing cracks of Coors cans, Earle moved directly into the Van Zandt song "Colorado Girl."

Though Earle seemed nervous, fumbling with his guitar and clothing, when he began to discuss his friend and teacher Van Zandt, he became a different man.

"Townes was the best that I ever saw, a migratory beast who summered in Colorado, wintered in Texas and Tennessee, and those of us lucky enough to live along that migratory path waited with baited breath until he came around."

Earle was 17 when he met Townes. He told the audience in singsong style of the "coolest thing" he'd ever heard, of Van Zandt riding his horse, Amigo, from Aspen to Crested Butte, Colo.

"When the '70s wound down, times got hard and he had to let Amigo go," Earle said. "It is my belief that Townes began to die that day."

Earle traveled that same route recently through a tenacious storm, where the assaulting snow swirled in the vehicle's headlights like "low-flying ghosts," and Earle swore he saw Townes and Amigo riding among the blizzard. It was then that he decided to make a record of Townes' songs.

How does a musician go about recording the music of Van Zandt, which spans 30-plus years and whose discography encompasses just as many studio and live albums? Earle mentioned he started with 28 songs and whittled the album down to 15 covers, saying he applied his life experiences when selecting each song.

Earle said the song "Poncho and Lefty" recalls his first day in jail, where he learned if you knock out the biggest guy in the joint, "you got to keep your radio." In "Brand New Companion," Earle recalls Van Zandt saying, "There's the blues and zippity-doo-dah. Well, this ain't zippity-doo-dah."

Van Zandt's music, grounded in time and place, was haunting in its recollections. Earle's renditions brought Van Zandt alive in cyclical stories of sharing, learning and a tragic ending that, for Earle, was a shocking jolt into sobriety.

Earle endured a bit of heckling from the crowd, especially when he began to discuss "clean" coal technology, telling the audience there is no such thing. Several members of the audience exited the theater, seeming disgusted at Earle's outspoken nature.

But the renegade isn't known for his quiet nature. Earle speaks candidly of his political and social views in his live performances, and Saturday was no exception.

A vehement opponent of mountaintop mining, Earle said that it's not possible to restore mountains to their original state after extracting coal from them and told the audience to "take care of the place you live."

Most of the audience seemed to soak in Earle's captivating performance, giving the artist a standing ovation and urging him to the stage for an encore.

Anna Paige is a freelance writer based in Billings. You can reach her at www.penandpaige.com.

Around Wyoming

Bankruptcy judge approves sale of Hitching Post

CHEYENNE (AP) — A federal bankruptcy judge has approved the sale of a well-known hotel in Cheyenne.

The Ramada Hitching Post Inn filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in February. On Monday, a judge in New Jersey approved the sale of the hotel from Mantiff Cheyenne Hospitality to HCW Hospitality for \$3.7 million.

The judge has given those involved in the sale until Aug. 31 to close the deal.

Court filings show the hotel owed Fidelity Bank about \$4.3 million as of July 28.

The hotel is a popular place for state lawmakers to stay during the legislative session. The state revoked Mantiff Cheyenne Hospitality's corporate license about a year ago.

Parents reminded about vaccines

CHEYENNE (AP) — The Wyoming Department of Health is reminding parents to make sure their kids have received the vaccines they need before the new school year starts.

State Health Officer Dr. Brent Sherard says certain vaccines are required for all youth attending school in Wyoming.

In addition, he recommends parents contact their doctor to check on whether their kids are up to date on immunizations.

Wyoming has a program that provides vaccines at no cost to some 130 participating providers across the state. While the state provides the vaccines for free, providers may charge a small fee for each shot.

Jackson Hole man tries to raffle \$735,000 home

JACKSON (AP) — A Jackson Hole man is attempting to raffle off his \$735,000 home after it languished on the market for more than a year.

National Park Service firefighter Brad Bradley is selling \$100 raffle tickets in advance of the Oct. 1 raffle.

The nonprofit Jackson Hole Volunteer Firefighters Association is administering the raffle. A publicist says ticket sales will be limited to 15,000 but at least 10,000 must be sold for the raffle to take place.

Chief says Rawlins house fire was arson

RAWLINS (AP) — The Rawlins fire chief says a fire that damaged a vacant house last month was arson.

Chief Scott Hannum said last week authorities have no suspects in the July 23 fire and that the investigation is still under way.

No one was injured. Hannum says the owner of the house had planned to have it torn down on July 25. Hannum says the owner is not a suspect.

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Sheridan County School District #2

is now accepting applications for two Trustee positions, as two members have resigned.

Those interested must be a resident of School District #2.

To apply, send a letter of interest by the morning of August 14th, to: Sheridan County School District #2; P.O. Box 919; Sheridan WY 82801; Attn: Richard Bridger, Chairman.



WYARNO RAILROAD
CROSSING WORK
SCHEDULED
Closure and Detour

A Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway Crew is scheduled to be working on Thursday, Aug 13 and Friday, Aug 14 on the Wyarno railroad crossings on Hwy 336 to Wyarno.

The crossing will be closed from 7 AM to 5 PM Aug 13 and Aug 14. The crossings will re-open during night time hours. Traffic will be detoured to the Dutch Creek Road (County Road 84).

For information about this project, contact WYDOT public involvement specialist Ronda Holwell at (307) 674-2356

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