

Of Note: Two Texas originals release CDs

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Two of the best songwriters Texas ever produced released records this year. Willie Nelson's "Let Face the Music and Dance" came out in April. Guy Clark's "My Favorite Picture of You" drops today. Both artists take a look back with fondness. One honors music of a by-gone era. The other honors his lady love.

Nelson and Family laid down tracks for "Let's Face the Music and Dance" in the Pedernales Studio in Austin. It was produced by Butch Carr of Nashville.

The "family" includes sister Bobbie on piano, drummer Paul English, Mickey Raphael on harmonica, Billy English on gut string and snare drum, Kevin Smith on upright bass, Jim "Moose" Brown on B-3 organ, with Willie's son, Michah, adding percussion on several cuts.

According to a press release, this record is one of the first releases "in a historic record deal between Willie Nelson and Legacy Recordings, the catalog division of Sony Music Entertainment." Nelson recorded his monumental record "Red Headed Stranger" for Sony in 1975.

"I'm really happy to be back home with Sony Music," Nelson said in the release. "We share a great history and I'm looking forward to many more years together."

Nelson, 80, looks to songwriters like Irving Berlin, Mack Gordon, Carl Perkins and Spade Cooley for inspiration, including the title cut, "You'll Never Know," "Matchbox," and "Shame On You," sliding in out and out of the lyrics as only he can.

One of the standouts is "Twilight Time," performed in a slow, easy tempo, with Nelson's rich baritone floating over a the simple arrangement. Close your eyes and the band will take you to last call at a smoky bar, with cowboys and cowgirls circling the dance floor in a dreamy haze.

Another memorable moment is the jazzy cover of Django Reinhardt's instrumental "Nuages," which was originally recorded in 1940. Several members of the band get to highlight their skills. Nelson shows off his picking on his well-traveled guitar, Trigger, while Raphael's harmonica provides an extra dose of mellowness. Bobbie gets a turn, too, on the keyboard. In the video, Nelson lights up a fat one during his sister's solo and rests in an ashtray as he brings the song to an end. As I said, only Willie could pull this off and look utterly cool doing it.

