

This One's for Him: A Tribute to Guy Clark

reviewed by [Louis R. Carlozo](#) in the [May 2, 2012](#) issue

In Review



This One's For Him

by various artists

Music Road

As a songwriter, Guy Clark contains multitudes and paradoxes that demand close attention. He's a hard drinker and a deep thinker; he sketches songs with more attention to what he leaves out than what he puts in. Clark gets serious respect from

country luminaries such as Lyle Lovett and Kris Kristofferson. But he's never received a thorough tribute that lives up to his mastery or honors the way he does things: live, spontaneous, without studio trickery to supplant the energy that players create in the moment.

Now comes this double disc, which gathers 30 tracks by 33 Americana artists—friends, colleagues and admirers of Clark—and celebrates his 70th birthday. Lead producer Tamara Saviano knows the terrain well: she's not only writing Clark's biography, she also produced *Beautiful Dreamer: The Songs of Stephen Foster*, which captured a 2004 Grammy in the traditional-folk category.

The performers Saviano enlists turn in inspired takes on Clark's songs. Willie Nelson's vocal on "Desperadoes Waiting for a Train" adds spit and grit to this plaintive song of reminiscence and loss, while Steve Earle's version of "The Last Gunfighter Ballad" hits the listener like a raspy confession from a saloon barstool: "I stood in that street before it was paved / I learned shoot or be shot before I could shave." Coproducer Shawn Camp does yeoman's work on "Homeless," a song that packs the punch of a dozen social justice sermons:

Because all the artists on *This One's for Him* take an old-school recording approach, the project maintains surprising cohesion—more than some albums on which a single artist hires a multitude of producers. But chalk up credit to the scriptwriter himself: Clark injects his songs with so much humanity and poetry, listeners feel as though they've eavesdropped on private conversations or thumbed through a diary. Yet there's more, as Clark also distills literary images and details to intoxicate: the smell of gunpowder smoke, clothes and skin stained with tobacco juice, the sound of hearts pulsing at bedtime while a house settles into its foundation. Clark-coined phrases such as "eat lonesome stew" and "one way or another, we're all in the dark" transmit deeper meaning with zen-koan stealth.

For those unfamiliar with Clark's talents, *This One's for Him* is a profound, inviting introduction. Saviano said in a recent interview that she hopes the project tells the overarching story of a master's career. That it does, and the chapters here are all page-turners.