



## HEARTWORN HIGHWAYS

**A film by James Szalapski**

1976 / U.S. / 92 min. / In English

**Press materials: [www.kinolorber.com](http://www.kinolorber.com)**

Distributor Contact:

Kino Lorber

333 W. 39th Street

New York, NY 10018

(212) 629-6880

Sales: Jonathan Hertzberg, [jhertzberg@kinolorber.com](mailto:jhertzberg@kinolorber.com)

Publicity: David Ninh, [dninh@kinolorber.com](mailto:dninh@kinolorber.com)

## Synopsis:

“Sometimes, a documentary maker is present at precisely the right moment to capture lightning in a bottle. It happened with essential punk doc *The Decline of Western Civilization*, it happened with Dylan’s *Don’t Look Back* and Chet Baker’s *Let’s Get Lost*, and it happened with 1976’s *Heartworn Highways*.

The iconic performance documentary saw filmmaker James Szalapski travel to Texas and Tennessee to capture the radical country artists reclaiming the genre via an appreciation for its heritage in folk and bluegrass and a rejection of the mainstream Nashville machine. Townes Van Zandt, Guy Clark, Steve Young, David Allan Coe, Steve Earle and many others appeared on both screen and soundtrack, where musical highlights include Clark’s brilliant “Desperados Waiting For A Train,” Young’s stirring “Alabama Highways” and Van Zandt’s emotional “Waiting Around To Die.”

The hard living – and hard partying – lifestyles of outlaw country’s figureheads are played out on screen as we visit Van Zandt’s Austin trailer, see Coe play in Tennessee State Prison, join the gang in Nashville’s notorious Wig Wam Tavern and witness a liquor-fueled Christmas at Clark’s house. No wonder the film’s original tagline read: “The best music and the best whiskey come from the same part of the country”.

Outside of a couple festival screenings, the movie remained unreleased for five years after its completion, finally hitting screens in 1981 and finding a cult audience ever since.”

– Light in the Attic

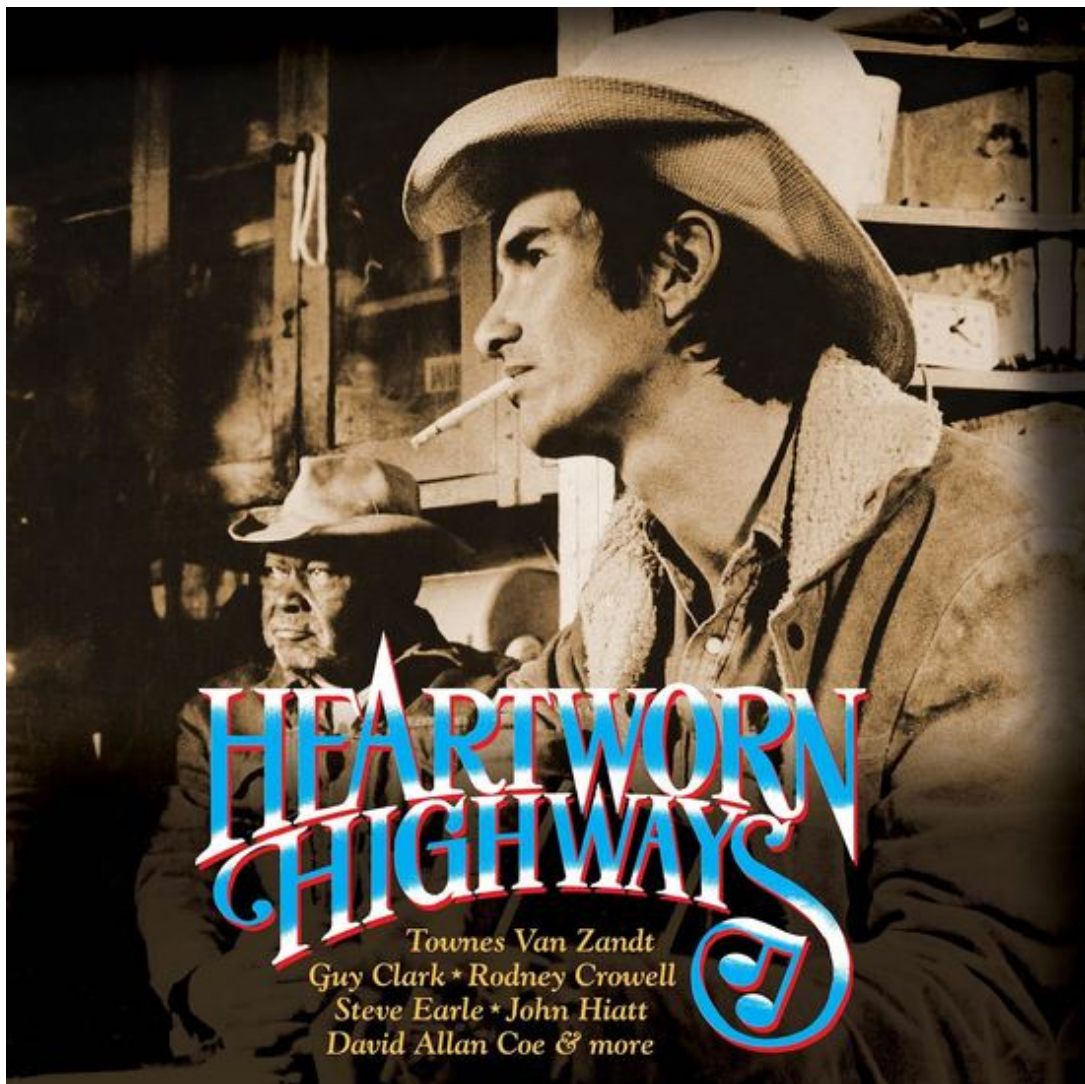
## The Record:

Produced by David Gorman, Patrick McCarthy, Michael Nieves, Matt Sullivan and Sam Sweet.  
Released in 2016 by Light in the Attic.

Featuring songs by **Guy Clark, David Alan Coe, Rodney Crowell, Steve Earle, John Hiatt, Gamble Rogers, Townes Van Zandt** and **Larry Jon Wilson**.

“Musically, it’s almost impossible to pick highlights but Guy Clark’s “That Old Time Feeling” is a husky delight and when Seymour Washington, a friend of Van Zandt’s (born 1896!) hears him sing “Waitin’ ‘Round To Die” he can’t prevent teardrops from rolling down his cheeks; neither will you.”

– ***Record Collector***



## **Producer's Statement:**

### **Heartworn Highways - the path chosen long ago.**

**In 1974 I was a private art dealer in twentieth century art, living between London and Paris, hoping that business would pick up in the recession, that something exciting might catch my eye, quicken the pace, make things more interesting... It was then I met Jim Szalapski in Paris, a fateful event that would decisively change my life.**

At the time, Jim was traveling around Europe with his girlfriend in a classic Citroen "deux chevaux" (France's riposte to the Beetle) which reflected his gentle, offbeat character and belied his true genius for close observation as an ambitious documentary filmmaker. We became fast friends and he made my Holland Park pad his home base for several months. It was there he turned me on to the music of songwriters, Guy Clark and Townes Van Zandt, among others. It was a revelation!

November '75, found me in New York for the Fall art auctions, only this time I stayed with Jim in his artist-converted Soho loft rather than the swank uptown Stanhope, where I usually stayed. The art market was in a stagnant pit, so I borrowed a VW bus from my art dealer-friend, Bill Beadleston, and we headed for Nashville and this other world I could barely imagine...

On the trip we listened endlessly to tapes Jim had compiled with his friend, Skinny Dennis, who had initially introduced him to Guy Clark and the Nashville scene, opening a barred gate to this fantastic, intimate world so that Jim could capture its quintessence on film. Sadly, Dennis died at age 29, before we'd even begun filming, and HH is dedicated to his memory.

We finally rolled into Nashville in a rented car, having ditched the VW which broke down en route, and caught Guy Clark playing acoustic at the Exit Inn. He was mesmerizing, each verse of every song nailed down with poetic force & graphic precision. After the show, Susanna Clark invited us to their home where we met their circle of friends. It was the inner sanctum of this renegade wave of new country music. It was a thrilling privilege, visceral... unlike anything I had previously experienced.

I'm not sure how serious I was about making this film when we set out from NY, but I'd skipped the auctions, blown up a friend's VW bus and been introduced to these so-called "outlaws" as the producer of this film, which they'd heard about from Skinny Dennis and Jim. So I found myself cast in the role and thought, why not play along, must be fun to be a producer!

Mind you, I knew nothing about the film business, I just knew that Jim had a deep-rooted, lucid vision to which he was 100% committed. He was one of the most patient, talented people I'd ever known. We had clicked spontaneously as friends, why not as a director-producer team?

Jim figured we could make the film he envisioned for c.\$35,000. That seemed reasonable it seemed we had everything going for us, given our exclusive access to the heart of this nascent, unexplored music scene. However, that budget would balloon as the film grew in scale and scope. Nevertheless, in that high moment, it felt like the chance of a lifetime...

One month later, before I'd fully realized what I'd done, Jim had assembled a dream crew of four friends, who'd long-since committed to working on the film whenever it came together, and we were back in Nashville looking to start filming. All within a flash of having first set foot there!

The rest is a fascinating history - the shoot, the edit, the exhaustive, painfully frustrating attempt to sell and distribute our baby - an vivid case study in devotion, tenacity, resourcefulness and heartbreak...

Had I not met Jim, it is highly probable I would never have become a producer. It is the path I chose because of him. It's certainly debatable whether I would have been happier as an art dealer... I would certainly have been far richer! One thing for sure, HEARTWORN HIGHWAYS is a defining

accomplishment that I will always be proud of. It has also been the bedrock of my film education and of great friendships. We became a close-knit family as we pursued Jim's vision with unrivaled purpose, creating a film that is now beloved and acclaimed. Tragically, Jim died in 2000, right before HEARTWORN HIGHWAYS became available on DVD and discovered an audience beyond the rare bootleg VHS tapes that had been religiously passed around for years by musicians and fans.

45 years later, with the Kino Lorber release fast approaching, we trust Jim's unique vision and talent will be rewarded with the audience he had always believed was ready to take the trip...

Personally, it feels like I've been following this path ever since we first met. It remains the path chosen and it has become my story.

**Graham Leader, New York, 2021**



January, 1976, the crew arriving at Nashville State Penitentiary for David Allen Coe's concert, having traveled from Dallas overnight on his tour bus.

top row: Jim Szalapski (director), Graham Leader (producer), Michael Harris (grip)  
bottom row: Alvar Sluggard (sound), Larry Reibman (gaffer), Phillip Schopper (ad & editor)

"...fine, persuasive documentary" — v. voice

MAY 13-26 ONLY

# HEARTWORN HIGHWAYS

*The best music  
and the best whiskey  
come from the same  
part of the country.*



GUY CLARK • TOWNES VAN ZANDT • DAVID ALLAN COE  
LARRY JON WILSON • BAREFOOT JERRY • RODNEY CROWEL  
STEVE YOUNG • GAMBLE ROGERS • CHARLIE DANIELS BAND

1:30, 3:10, 4:45, 6:30, 8:15, 10:00

A CINEMA 5 THEATRE

**AET**

8th St. East of 5th. Ave. GR 3-7014



## **The Players:**

**Guy Clark** was a folk and country singer-songwriter best known for his songs “L.A. Freeway” and “Desperadoes Waiting for a Train” and for being one of the creators of American roots music or Americana. *The New York Times* called him “king of the Texas troubadours.”

**David Alan Coe** is a country and blues singer-songwriter known country-charting singles like “Mona Lisa Lost Her Smile,” “Longhaired Redneck” and “You Never Even Called Me by My Name.” He wrote the chart-topping hit “Take This Job and Shove It” for Johnny Paycheck.

**Rodney Crowell** is a two-time Grammy Award-winning country singer-songwriter whose 1988 LP *Diamonds & Dirt* yielded five number one U.S. Country singles.

**Steve Earle** is a three-time Grammy-winning singer-songwriter, social justice activist, author and actor. His breakthrough record *Guitar Town* reached number one on the U.S. Country charts and his music has the distinction of charting on Country, Mainstream, Rock, Folk and Indie charts over the years.

Since his early 1970s debut singer-songwriter **John Hiatt** has made his mark in various genres including country, new wave, rockabilly and blues. He’s released 22 LPs, been nominated for 9 Grammy Awards and collaborated with a wide range of artists from Bob Dylan to Iggy Pop to Linda Ronstadt to B.B. King and many more.

**Gamble Rogers** was a fixture in his native Florida as a folk musician and storyteller who wrote almost exclusively about his home state. The self-described “modern troubadour” died heroically while trying to save a drowning man in the ocean.

**Townes Van Zandt** is considered one of the great American singer-songwriters and poets of the ‘60s and ‘70s and his influence is felt in the worlds of country, folk, rock and indie music. Suffering from drug and alcohol addiction for most of his life, he recorded sporadically in the ‘80s and ‘90s prior to his premature death from addiction-related health issues.

**Larry Jon Wilson** released four acclaimed country LPs in the 1970s before leaving the music industry for three decades. He released a self-titled comeback record in 2008, two years before he died of a stroke.

**Crew**

Director: James Szalapski

Writer: James Szalapski

Producer: Graham Leader

Editor: Phillip Schopper

**With**

Peggy Brooks

Guy Clark

David Alan Coe

Rodney Crowell

Charlie Daniels

Steve Earle

Wayne Moss

Gamble Rogers

Glenn Stagner

Townes Van Zandt

Seymour Washington

Larry Jon Wilson

Steve Young