Waits, Tom (1949-) Encyclopedia Article

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The music and lyrics of Tom Waits evinced nostalgic pathos for the archetypal neighborhood barfly at a time when much of America was listening to soft rock or gearing up for punk. Like a time-warped beatnik, Waits debuted in 1973 with *Closing Time* and followed with several acoustic jazz/folk albums throughout the 1970s. His gravelly, bygone, bittersweet voice became one of the most distinctive in popular music. Later Waits revved up his stage persona and electri-fied his music for a semiautobiographical stage cabaret, album, and feature-length video, *Big Time* (1988). Tom Waits is also a regular contributor to film soundtracks and has appeared in movies as well, typically playing a gruff, gin-soaked palooka as in *The Outsiders* (1983), *Down by Law* (1986), *Ironweed* (1987), and *Short Cuts* (1992).

Further Reading:

Humphries, Patrick. *Small Change: A Life of Tom Waits.* New York, St. Martin's Press, 1990.