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IN FAVOR OF MUSIC; AGAINST ELECTROSHOCK

Dear Editor,

Roky Erickson truly is the comeback king, and Margaret Moser's Dec. 30 piece is sweet ["Starry Eyes," Music]. Moser is, however, understandably misleading about Erickson's "vicious battle with schizophrenia, all but doomed to a lifetime of substandard living and mental illness." Roky's biggest battle was not with "schizophrenia," but with those who called him that and treated him accordingly. Schizophrenia is a psychiatric garbage term for disturbed or disturbing behavior that is considered beyond the pale. The label "schizophrenia" is a justification for actions which almost destroyed Roky – in Moser's words, the iforced hospitalization ... that destroyed the band and began Erickson's descent into three hellish decades of mental instability." To really understand this sentence, the reader needs more information, which I will share, as it has already been made public. For an estimated 1.5 million Americans each year, forced treatment means an immense violation of liberty – unwilling incarceration in a psychiatric hospital. For the vast majority, including Roky Erickson, it also means forced drugging. For so-called schizophrenia, that means with neuroleptic drugs, which are known to have caused the largest epidemic of neurological disease in the history of the world – tardive dyskinesia. In Roky's case, another standard psychiatric treatment, electroshock (also known as electro convulsive treatment) was forcibly administered, repeatedly. By all rights, Erickson should have been destroyed by psychiatry; his recovery truly is miraculous.

Another Austin music legend has been the subject of much recent attention in the *Chronicle*. Margaret Brown's documentary, *Be Here to Love Me*, about Townes Van Zandt, is magnificent ["Life and Work, Light and Dark," Music, Dec. 9]. In one moving scene, Van Zandt's sister tells the audience of their mother's regret that she had trusted the best medical help she could find for her son. Like Roky, Townes was a victim of psychiatric electroshock treatment. As the film revealed, Townes lost a big part of the precious memory images of his childhood as a result.

As a steering committee member of the Coalition for the Abolition of Electroshock in Texas, I am working now to stop the two Austin hospitals that still inflict electroshock on their patients – Seton Shoal Creek and St. David's. Visit the CAEST Web site at www.endofshock.com to learn more, or call 800/572-2905 to tell us your ECT story.

*Thank You,
John Breeding, PhD*