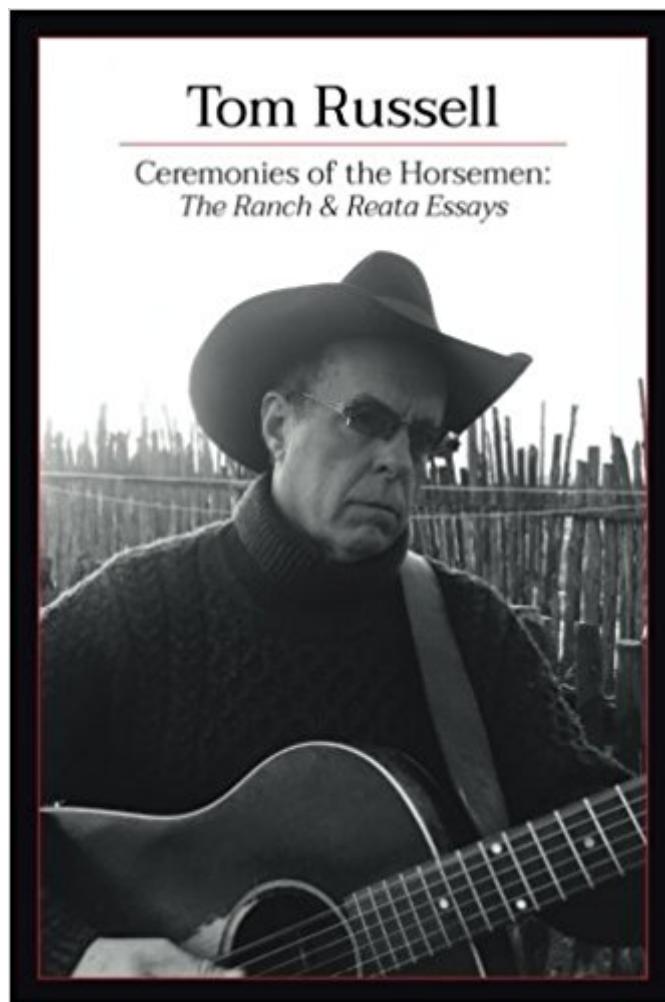


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# Ceremonies Of The Horsemen: The Ranch & Reata Essays



## **Synopsis**

These are some selected essays by singer-songwriter Tom Russell as they appeared in the journal of the American West, Ranch & Reata. From subtle humor to serious-as-a-heart-attack looks at life, Tom Russell brings his no-holds barred writing style to a wide variety of works that study and display the human spirit in the West. As Russell says of the region, "The West was where you went to re-invent yourself - in the manner of Will James, Roy Rodgers, or Ramblin' Jack Elliott. Your persona thus reinvented, you wrote or sung up your singular cowboy vision. The plot usually centered around, or led back to - the horse. In that respect I call these essays Ceremonies of the Horsemen, a phrase stolen from a Bob Dylan song. I hail from The Irish, with a feint touch of Norwegian. My father's father settled in Iowa. He was the sheriff of Chickasaw County and a horse trader on the side. Or vice versa. I have his card here on my desk: Russell Brothers - New Hampton Iowa - Dealers in Live Stock - Horses and Colts a Specialty. We're Irish, and our besotted roots trace back to pirates and gypsies - a tribe or rascals who would sell a lame horse to a blind priest. It wasn't long before my father left Iowa - gone west to grow up with the country. He worked his way up, discovered Hollywood Park Racetrack, played poker with Hopalong Cassidy on the backside of the track, and sired four kids. My brother Pat jumped out of the crib and was soon hot-walking racehorses, then building a bucking barrel in our backyard. Hang and Rattle, kid. Soon he was riding real bulls at Crash Corrigan's film ranch. Brother Pat's record collection was well formed early on: Tex Ritter, Johnny Cash, Marty Robbins, George Jones, Hank Williams...and several LP recordings of bullfight music. The stage was set. I absorbed the music and stole his Tijuana gut-string guitar, learned a bunch of old cowboy songs and poems, and became the songwriter. He carried on with the rodeo and the family trade in livestock. To this day he's horseback, behind some arena in Nevada or California. Bringing in the fresh cattle. These essays are my own Moveable Feast. The mystic priest, Fr. Richard Rohr, says the second half of life is the time we're finally able to fall upward, and find our true selves. Finger's crossed. Guitar in hand. The story's the thing. The myth. The legends. Whatever I couldn't fit into a three-minute song I fleshed out into an essay. Here they are."

## **Book Information**

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## Customer Reviews

Tom Russell Singer songwriter, painter, essayist - Tom Russell has recorded thirty five highly acclaimed records, & published five books: 120 Songs of Tom Russell; Tough Company - Letters with Charles Bukowski; Blue Horse Red Desert: the Art of Tom Russell; Blodsport a crime novel published by Aschehoug, Norway; and - And Then I Wrote: The Songwriter Speaks, with Sylvia Tyson. Tom Russell songs have been recorded by Johnny Cash, Doug Sahm, Nanci Griffith, K.D. Lang, Ramblin' Jack Elliott, Ian Tyson, Iris Dement, Joe Ely, and a hundred others. Tom Russell graduated from The University of California with a Master's Degree in Criminology. He was recently awarded the 2015 ASCAP Deems Taylor Award for excellence in music journalism In 2015 Russell released a 52 track "folk opera" on the West, The Rose of Roscrae, was deemed: maybe the most important Americana record of all time by UK Folk, the top Folk album of 2105 by Mojo Magazine, and hailed in top ten lists in two dozen publications including The Los Angeles Times. He has appeared on the David Letterman TV show five times. His latest release (May 2016) is The Tom Russell Anthology 2 (Gunpowder Sunsets) - 19 Tracks.

Tom Russell's book, Ceremonies of the Horsemen: Excellent (5 stars). Intelligent, insightful, interesting and very well written. Great story on Tex Ritter and his High Noon ballad. Young people may know his voice and "Blood on the Saddle" as a song by Big Al, a singing bear, at Disney World. This book should be a best seller! Great essays on Hemingway, Ian Tyson, Leonard Cohen and more. Fascinating tales of the old west and its current incarnation. A great read and very enjoyable- plus I learned things I didn't know- always rewarding. Tom is a great songwriter, performer, painter and writer. A western Renaissance man. Get his CDs for sure, check out his paintings, and read this book. You will be glad you did.

I subscribed to ranch and reatta just to get these columns. Tom is a renaissance man who paints, sings and writes beautifully. This book would make a great Christmas gift for all your friends who are

real people. It cuts to the heart of the matter.

When the Tom McGuane book, "Some Horses" came out in 1999..., I had send a hard copy edition to my dear old Dad. I got a call from him soon after. He said that he was surprised when it unexpectedly arrived in the mail and that he opened the package up at the post office..., then went straight home..., and read it through. Well..., if the old boy was still around..., he would be getting another book in the mail. The one pictured here.Yeah..., I was first exposed to Tom Russell by his writing on his old blog..., and that drew me to his music..., which I have written about..., here..., and..., here. I even fashioned a few YouTube video slide shows..., here..., here..., and here.About five years ago Tom started writing a column for an online magazine called Ranch & Reata. It was a high class and beautiful production..., though a bit slow and clunky loading for those of us still stuck in the dial up dark ages out on the ranch. I only got to read a couple of the essays before the magazine hid behind a pay wall. So I was pretty excited to see that the essays had been collected in book form..., and I was not disappointed.From the opening essay about the famous bronc rider Casey Tibbs and scattered though out the book I was having flashbacks of that dear old Dad of mine. I don't recall us specifically seeing Casey ride at The Lewiston Roundup..., but it is a distinct possibility..., and I certainly knew his name as one of the great ones. And I pretty much grew up with a Johnny Cash sound track in my head..., along with Marty Robbins, Tex Ritter and Hank Williams...., all of whom appear in book. And Tom writes of the pack horse men like Rayburn Crane in the high Sierra and Russ Knox in the Grand Canyon that bring back hunting camp memories.OK..., not all of the memories that Tom brought back are so fondly remembered..., I wish I could forget an incident of my own that involved the subject of Tom's essay on Tequila..., "After reaching the bottom and eating the worm I thought my chair was dancing the cumbia. I toppled over backwards, spun a few times, and passed out. I was ushered into a long and nightmare laden sleep, broken only by the sounds of six a.m. garbage trucks at first light, and the smell of bagels steaming up from the shop below. I was alive. There were no mystic revelation in the journey. No Aztec maidens or curanderos named Don Juan. My tongue felt like it had swept the bottom of the Sonora desert. Lesson learned. From the worm."I haven't been too fond of Tequila since I did my own tongue sweeping of something way worse tasting than any desert sand. But it is a testament to the quality of Tom's writing..., that I find myself wanting to seek out a 100% Agave Reposado..., maybe..., after I get this posted and the chores done today.Yeah..., if you are a fan of anything western in nature you will find something that will utterly delight you in many of the 25 essays found in "Ceremonies of the Horseman: The Ranch and Riata Essays". And those that don't utterly delight

you..., will certainly be more than pleasing. My only disappointments..., were running out of stories..., and not being able to share them with my dear old Dad. So I will share them with you..., get the book.

If you are a Tom Russell fan, there is nothing I need to tell you about this collection. It is exactly the book you would expect: wide-ranging, well-written, a gift for poetic imagery that seems so easy because it's so right, and a strong, clear voice. I read most of these when they were published in Ranch & Reata, and it is great to have them all in one book. If you are not yet a Tom Russell fan, you will also love this book, for all the same reasons. Tom Russell's topic is America: where we came from, where we are. how we got here, where we're heading, and all the side-trips we take. Now that we've lost Leonard Cohen, Tom Russell is one of the very few singer/songwriter/poets we have left.

Tom Russell is descended from Irish storytellers, distilled through horsemen in the American West. He has been known as a great singer/songwriter for many years, but these essays are a new, fleshed-out way for him to inform and captivate us. Casey Tibbs "the rainbow rider," Johnny Cash finding inspiration and nearly perishing in the desert, Gram Parsons (who actually did ...) and lots more. Great stuff. Highly recommended.

The places Tom's essay take you are indifinable by genre or terrain but he covers plenty. RANCH & REATA is a more than suitable spread to find out. I not only bought the original magazines these essays came from, but I bought CEREMONIES OF THE HORSEMAN the day it came out. You get em' under one cover and can wander all you want. Tom's take on music, literature, art, film that you won't come across anywhere else. My guess is that if you came this far already you should definitely order up. He's up there with the best of em' ...

Best book I have read in years. Whether it is poetry, songs, or prose, Tom Russell is way up there on another level.

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