

## **“WOODY SED” PRESS**

### **What the Critics Sed...**

**Saskatoon Star Phoenix, Tom Eremondi**

**“Woody Sed is pure magnificence.” “... his performance is absolutely unforgettable.”**

**5 stars**

**“Thomas Jones' performance of his own play is an enthralling biography of the legendary folksinger.”**

**“In mere seconds, he captures the master singer/songwriter's character while winning the hearts of the audience.”**

**“Jones brilliantly encapsulates a storied life into a Fringe nutshell.”**

**“As good as the writing is, his performance is absolutely unforgettable. “**

**“He also has the pipes to match, thrilling the audience with classic tunes...”**

**“It's the most powerful performance and captivating Fringe play this reviewer has seen. Simply put, Woody Sed is pure magnificence.”**

**– Tom Eremondi, Saskatoon Star Phoenix**

**Uptown Magazine - Winnipeg's Online Source for Arts, Entertainment & News:**

**“...one of the best at the Fest.”**

**“Jones proves himself a deft musician. Still, it's the acting here that makes this show truly impressive,”**

**“Touching, funny, and full of heartbreak, Woody Sed is a powerful piece delivered by a powerhouse talent.”**

**- JZ**

**Edmonton Sun – MACLEAN:**

**“In *Woody Sed* , balladeer/ writer/ performer Thomas Jones brings Woody to singular life.’ 5 suns (stars)**

**“Jones is a natural storyteller who peoples his tales with vibrant portrayals of Guthrie and his friends, switching characters as smoothly as he changes chords on the guitar.”**

**“... the engaging Jones summons back the genial spirit of ol’ Woody for one more concert.”**

**Orlando Sentinel:**

**“You can’t help but admire Thomas Jones’s remarkable energy. The characters he creates change rapidly and often, and he uses their words to great advantage. It’s a carefully crafted show...”**

**Other quotes:**

**“Jones fills the cozy venue with Big Drama.”  
- Winnipeg Free Press**

**“An impressive performance... Jones inhabits Guthrie’s vocal style and cadence.” - Winnipeg Sun**

**Complete reviews:**

**Review: Woody Sed  
By Tom Eremondi, TheStarPhoenix  
Victoria School Gymnasium  
Today, Sunday, Monday, Thursday and Friday**

**Five stars out of five**

**One might expect a play about dustbowl balladeer Woody Guthrie to be, um, dry. Woody Sed is anything but. Thomas Jones' performance of his own play is an enthralling biography of the legendary folksinger.**

**Jones begins by lying on the floor while writing lyrics for This Land Is Your Land. In mere seconds, he captures the master singer/songwriter's character while winning the hearts of the audience.**

**The story intensifies as we view personal tragedies and demons that Guthrie faced. These experiences coloured his character, and, more importantly, his music. We also view Guthrie as he struggles with the progressive disease, Huntington's chorea.**

**Jones brilliantly encapsulates a storied life into a Fringe nutshell. We learn so much, it's hard to believe the show is just an hour long.**

**As good as the writing is, his performance is absolutely unforgettable. In addition to Guthrie, Jones plays about two dozen other characters, easily using facial gestures and speech mannerisms to make each one distinct.**

**He also has the pipes to match, thrilling the audience with classic tunes like Reuben James, Ain't Got No Home, Why Oh Why, and Bound For Glory.**

**Finally, Jones nails the tragedy - Guthrie's depression over the loss of a daughter, his slide into alcoholism and the decline of his health. It's the most powerful performance and captivating Fringe play this reviewer has seen. Simply put, Woody Sed is pure magnificence.**

**WOODY SED**

**Colin McLean**

**VENUE 5: Acacia Masonic Hall**

Woody Guthrie was the godfather of 20th-century folk music.

He died in 1967 of Huntington's Disease, but for 15 long years, his room in the Brooklyn State Hospital became a mecca for every wannabe folksinger from Burl Ives to Pete Seeger to Bob Dylan.

Guthrie's songs included This Land is Your Land, Goodnight Irene and So Long It's Been Good to Know Ya.

Guthrie was the real thing. He was born in Oklahoma, travelled to California during the dirty '30s, picked up his guitar and wrote about the terrible times the Okies were having in the land of eternal sunshine.

He wrote songs of protest against racism and social injustice. His

famous slogan, "This machine kills fascists," was pencilled on his well-travelled guitar.

Sed Woody, "All you can write is what you see."

Guthrie's Dust Bowl Ballads were recorded for the Library of Congress and became the basis of a famous ballet by Martha Graham and he was a star on the radio.

Guthrie was the original "ramblin' man," wandering from flea-bag hotels in New York to the hobo camps of California and singing his songs for anyone who would listen.

All the while, he was living a life as grim as any Greek tragedy. He battled alcoholism and the threat of the disease that finally ravaged his body and killed him. His mother went crazy, his father burned to death - in fact many of those he loved died horribly.

For those who remember, he was Arlo Guthrie's (Alice's Restaurant) dad.

In Woody Sed, balladeer/writer/performer Thomas Jones brings Woody to singular life.

Jones is a natural storyteller who peoples his tales with vibrant portrayals of Guthrie and his friends, switching character as smoothly as he changes chords on his guitar. Sailors, Okies, hoboes, radio personalities, bigots, black blues shouters, effete dancers, farmers and kids all make an appearance.

Every once in a while, Jones gets out his guitar and sings one of Woody's songs - some well known - others not.

You don't have to be a folkie to enjoy this show.

With the hand clappin' songs and simple folksy approach, the engaging Jones summons back the genial spirit of ol' Woody for one more concert.

---Sun Rating: 5 Suns out of 5

Orlando Sentinel

It has been 50 years since Woody Guthrie's death, yet we still recognize his name and celebrate his songs. Now we have an opportunity to learn more about the man whose guitar displayed the message "This machine kills fascism."

In his portrayal as Guthrie, Thomas Jones entertains with songs such as "This Land is Your Land," "Greenback Dollar" and Guthrie's version of "This Train." He has a good voice (probably better than Guthrie's, in fact) and

encourages the audience to sing along with the better-known tunes.

But “Woody Sed” is far more than a playlist of the music that shaped the folk-song era. With a change of face, posture and voice, Jones introduces the people of Guthrie’s life: people who supported him, who exploited him, and who loved him. It is through these stories that we understand the heart of the man and his work.

There is also an unflinching recognition of Guthrie’s personal demons. Alcoholism, neglect of family, and carelessness with money affected him deeply. Yet he is still a hero. He saw injustice and used his voice to empower people to fight back.

**The Fringe Factor:** You can’t help but admire Thomas Jones’s remarkable energy. The characters he creates change rapidly and often, and he uses their words to great advantage. It’s a carefully crafted show that all can understand and enjoy.

**Curtain Call:** Jones reminds us that Guthrie said “all you can write is what you see.” Guthrie saw a lot: poverty, racism, exploitation and tragedies. This show helps us view the world through his eyes, and to take to heart the meaning of his music.

**More press and an article in the Boston Globe:**

## PERFORMANCE, PLACE, AND POLITICS

THURSDAY, JANUARY 19, 2012

### PuSh 2012 Review #2: Woody Sed at Club PuSh

What happens when the artist from New York whom you've invited to open Club PuSh--the cabaret-cum-festival-within-the festival at Performance Works on Granville Island--cancels at the last minute? Why, you phone up Thomas Jones, of course. Jones is a local writer and performer whose one-man show, *Woody Sed*, played at The Cultch's Culture Lab last October. My loss at having missed it then was my gain last night, as on four days notice Jones got back into character as the legendary American folksinger and political activist, Woody Guthrie, tuned up his guitar, and wowed us all through a combination of story and song.

Actually, Jones got into more than just Guthrie's character, for this solo biographical show (the title is a riff on a column Guthrie wrote for the Communist Party newspaper *The Daily Worker* in 1939-40) calls for him to incarnate many other roles as well, including Guthrie's three wives, the radio broadcaster Ed

Robbin, and the Library of Congress folklorist Alan Lomax, whose conversations and recordings with Guthrie in the 1940s led to his first record, *Dust Bowl Ballads*. Jones steps in and out of each character deftly, moving into a spot, modulating his voice slightly, and adopting a small gesture or significant pose to distinguish different speakers, as well as to mark for us where we are in the story. For the play, while mostly chronological, does weave back and forth in time, beginning with Guthrie's struggles in New York in 1940 to find the right words for his most famous song, "This Land is Your Land," which was inspired by his distaste for Irving Berlin's "God Bless America." We are then transported to the hospital where Guthrie spent the last 15 years of his life, his body and mind slowly deteriorating as a result of Huntington's disease, and with his second wife, Marjorie Mazia (a dancer with the Martha Graham Company), keeping vigil. Only then do we go back to his childhood in Oklahoma, his early troubadouring between there and California during the Depression, his politicization and radio work, and of course those famous conversations with Lomax.

And everywhere along the way we are treated to music, Jones wisely studding his tale--which, despite Guthrie's undeniable legacy today, is not at all a happy one--with both popular and lesser-known tunes from throughout his subject's career. Jones has a rich and warm singing voice and is also an accomplished guitar-player; combined with the deliberate lack of vocal or instrumental amplification and the intimate Club PuSh setting, it really felt that we were sitting around a campfire swapping stories and songs. Which is, of course, what Woody would have wanted. The self-taught musician who famously thumbed his nose at copywriting his work believed, as Jones tells us in a brief program note, that music was above all something to share. And, to that end, the show ended with all of us in chorus on a version of "This Train is Bound for Glory."

A most fitting tribute to Guthrie in the centenary of his birth, and an inspired choice to open the Club.

OCTOBER 5TH, 2012

## Woody Sed Review

BY LIMA AL-AZZEH

It was the first show of the new season at the Shadbolt Centre for the Arts last night and already I'm left wondering how any other show is possibly going to hold a candle to Thomas Jones' captivating performance in [WoodySed](#). This one man powerhouse performance about the tragic, triumphant and tumultuous times of folk singer Woody Guthrie had me singing its praises all the way out the theatre.

Jones's considerable theatrical experience was evident from the get go. In fact, his entire performance was raw, emotionally compelling and extremely physically laborious. No surprise, Jones's background is rife with physically demanding performances, from chasing princesses around in Stanley Park in Boca del Lupo's The Shoes that were Danced to Pieces to being part of the team that created and toured The Number 14 – an exceptional show involving quirky masked characters on a bus. This time around, Jones used his talents in physical and vocal transformations to tell the story of Guthrie's life, inclusive of numerous colourful characters who both inspired and tormented him.

The play was comprised of a masterfully woven series of Guthrie's songs contextualized by the emotionally charged life events and milestones that inspired them. The show touched on Guthrie's early family life and the beginning of a "run of bad luck" that would follow him throughout his travels across North America and into his old age. From foster homes, serial burn victims, government oppression, environmental decline, to lovers, children and everything in between, Woody Sed explored incredibly intimate moments in Guthrie's history culminating in an adventure of a performance and the celebration of a life lived to its fullest, despite all its troubles and tangles.

Yet despite the often dark and depressing situations Guthrie found himself in, his story is one of hopeless and enduring optimism, deftly conveyed by Jones with effortless charm, humour and humility. One anecdote that seemed to perfectly encapsulate Guthrie's resilience and his pervasive glass-half-full attitude recalled how Guthrie wrote and performed 26 songs about rivers, all metaphors for stories of struggles experienced by Americans from coast to coast. Like Guthrie, Jones showed an incredibly aptitude for finding the common thread in every story without it ever being boring or redundant – the mark of truly powerful storytelling.

Simply put, Woody Sed brings to life the story of a dynamic, wondrous man performed by an equally dynamic and adventurous storyteller. I couldn't think of another person better suited to have presented this

epic tale of love and loss in 1930s America. A story of sorrow and salvation in one of the most divisive times in our world's history. Coming back to my original statement, I'm not sure how any show is going to top this performance, but I for one am very excited to find out.

## **Celebrating Woody Guthrie in Framingham**

The inspiration for Canadian actor Thomas Jones creating his prize-winning one-man show about Woody Guthrie, "Woody Sed," originated with a chance comment in an e-mail from a friend.

"My friend saw a PBS documentary on Woody Guthrie in 2006 and mentioned that it would be a great topic for a live show. I went straight to a used-book store, bought a copy of Guthrie's biography, 'Ramblin' Man,' and started reading," Jones said.

Jones, who studied acting in college with an emphasis on mime and mask work, thought he was already fairly well acquainted with the Depression-era folksinger's work through his classic songs, such as "This Land Is Your Land" and "So Long, It's Been Good to Know You."

"But really I knew only about his hobo persona," Jones said. "I was amazed to realize the scope of the times he lived through and the settings in which he found himself, from Oklahoma, where he was born one hundred years ago when it was a brand-new state, through the Depression and the Dust Bowl, into New York City, out to California to work with migrant workers, then on to joining the merchant marine in World War II."

But more than just the biographical details of Guthrie's life, what struck Jones as fascinating were the emotional nuances.

"I think Woody's son Arlo had it right when he described the tragic, complicated story of Woody's life by saying, 'It's Shakespearean. Only Shakespeare could write something like that,' " Jones said. "His life story really grabbed me — heart-wrenching, inspiring, baffling. That



context makes his work all the more immediate and relevant to life today.”

Jones will be performing his play at 8 p.m. Saturday at the Amazing Things Arts Center, 160 Hollis St. in downtown Framingham. The title is a twist on “Woody Sez,” the regular column that Guthrie wrote for the Daily Worker, a newspaper published by the Communist Party USA, in 1939 and 1940.

“What I tried to do was provide a concise picture of his entire life. I want people to understand from this what a prolific artist he was. Whatever in his life he was going through, he expressed through prose or music,” he said.

Even in the throes of Huntington’s disease, Jones said of Guthrie, “as long as he remained physically able to write, he did. He generated tens of thousands of pages of prose, hundreds of drawings, the dozens of songs familiar to us but also some that were never published.”

Jones, who is 47 years old, read nine more books about Guthrie’s life after the one that first sparked his interest. He made use of Library of Congress song recordings and interviews that Alan Lomax conducted with Guthrie in the early 1940s.

“I cobbled a very large amount of material together, and then it was a matter of choosing what to use and finding a framework. The show has a bookended structure. It starts at the end of his life in the hospital, almost like a memory play. I sent the script to a friend, who eventually became the director, and he said, ‘This is a two-hour show.’ So we had to do a lot more editing to bring it down to 90 minutes.”

“Woody Sed,” in which Jones portrays 25 characters to tell the complete story of Guthrie’s life, debuted at the Canadian Fringe Festival. Jones then took it to the Push International Performing Arts Festival in Vancouver, his hometown, followed by performances at the Vancouver Folk Music Festival in July. Along the way, the play gained two Jessie Richardson Theatre Award nominations, and then Jones delivered its American debut in Vermont this fall.

“I want the audience to come away from the performance with a deeper sense of who Woody Guthrie was and what his place in history was,” Jones said. “He was really the father of American folk music. I want people to understand what a massive influence he has on the music we now take for granted. But I also want to convey a sense of his inner strength and his struggle to live.”