

# Script For Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson

## REVIEW: The Wilbury Group's *Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson*

*By William F. Oakes, East Bay News*

Odds are, when you encounter a play entitled "Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson", you will have no luke-warm reaction to it. You'll either love the show or hate it. Well folks, I loved it. The production by Providence's The Wilbury Group presents American history as a rock 'n' roll nightclub act and is a rough and ready riotous romp. "Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson" is comprised of equal parts slapstick, smarts and sheer silliness and the polarization produced by the title is part of the point.

Andrew Jackson, our nation's seventh President, was, both in his day and in the annals of history, a man who provoked strong and contradictory opinions. 'Old Hickory' was lauded as the hero of the battle of New Orleans and damned for his forced relocation of American Indian tribes. The political image of himself as a 'man of the people' garnered him considerable acclaim as well as the nickname 'King Mob.' The musical takes a no-holds-barred look at his life and times but, especially as it presents this story as Vaudeville, that most indigenous and populist of American Performance styles, is ultimately most successful in depicting just how divided and contrary the collective American heart has always been.

Throughout the evening's zany historical irreverence this is the point underscored again and again-think that we are a divided nation now? Guess what! We were as divided in our nation's infancy and what's more, we're still arguing over the same things! The show's rousing opening number happily declares "Populism Yea, Yea!" then spends the rest of the evening asking "Yeah, what then?" "People are confusing", a despairing President Jackson remarks, "you don't know what you want." Along his journey to the White House he encounters our preening and posturing political forefathers in Washington and campaigns both on 'change' and the need to 'take this country back'. And the more things change the more our conflicts remain the same.

This take on the American political psyche has a lot akin to the way, say, that Jon Stewart or "The Colbert Report" satirizes politics today-the operating philosophy behind the work is the same, in that the play's authors Alex Timbers and Michael Friedman have taken the time to research and know all their facts about their subject before proceeding to make really goofy jokes about it. And while wackiness abounds the evening's comedic sketches provide an awful lot of factual knowledge about Jackson, his life and times-I've never learned so much while laughing so hard in my life! And amidst the considerable ribald and slapstick humor there are also jokes about Susan Sontag and Alexis de Tocqueville. Throw in the great rock songs into the mix and "Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson" proves to be one heck of an enjoyable wild ride!

This sort of show, seemingly roughhewn on the surface, requires considerable finesse in order to pull the trick off and happily The Wilbury Group's ensemble has the requisite chops. The production takes place in the large and utilitarian warehouse space on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the Butcher Block Mill in Providence. The audience is seated cabaret style on round tables at one end of the hall. The sets are minimal and there is a definite underground vibe to these proceedings especially when, at the start of the show, the entire cast marches menacingly through the audience like a band of marauders on a mission of conquest.

And what a cast they are! Joe Short, in the title role, is every inch an "Old Hickory." Lean, mean and thoroughly in control of the scene he saunters about the stage with a Rock Star's swagger. His charisma onstage is boyishness combined with a jagged cutting edge and it's a winning combination that makes you want to both cheer him in concert and vote for him come November.

The rest of the collective ensemble seems as vast as a young nation with lots of actors playing various roles, all are deft, delightful and delirium provoking as they juggle their many parts.

**Script for Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson** is a unique and provocative theatrical piece that blends historical fact with contemporary musical elements, creating a compelling narrative about one of America's most controversial presidents. Written by Alex Timbers, with music and lyrics by Michael Friedman, this rock-infused musical debuted in 2009 and has since captivated audiences with its bold storytelling and energetic performances. In this article, we will explore the script's themes, characters, and its critical reception, as well as its place within the broader context of American musical theater.

## Overview of Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson

"Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson" is not your typical biographical musical. It takes an unconventional approach to the life of Andrew Jackson, the seventh president of the

United States, known for his populist style and controversial policies, particularly regarding Native American removal and the enforcement of slavery. The musical is a satirical portrayal that blends history with modern political commentary, using humor and rock music to engage the audience while prompting them to reflect on the complexities of Jackson's legacy.

## Historical Context

To understand the script fully, it is essential to consider the historical context surrounding Andrew Jackson's life and presidency. Jackson was born in 1767 in the Carolinas to immigrant parents and rose to prominence as a military hero during the War of 1812. His presidency from 1829 to 1837 was marked by significant events, including:

- The establishment of the Democratic Party
- The Indian Removal Act of 1830
- The Nullification Crisis
- His opposition to the Second Bank of the United States

Jackson's often ruthless tactics and populist appeal have made him a figure of both admiration and disdain. The musical captures this duality, presenting Jackson as both a champion of the common man and a tyrant.

## Structure of the Script

The script for "Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson" is structured as a series of vignettes that blend musical numbers with spoken dialogue. This format allows the audience to experience Jackson's journey from his early life through his presidency and the controversies that defined his legacy.

## Key Characters

The musical features several key characters, each contributing to the narrative and themes of the piece:

1. **Andrew Jackson** - The protagonist, portrayed as a larger-than-life figure, embodying both charisma and brutality.
2. **Rachel Jackson** - Andrew's wife, whose tragic story highlights the personal toll of

Jackson's political ambitions.

3. **John C. Calhoun** - The vice president who becomes a political rival during the Nullification Crisis, representing the conflict within the government.
4. **Martin Van Buren** - Jackson's ally and eventual successor, providing a foil to Jackson's more aggressive tendencies.
5. **Various Native American characters** - Representing the voices and experiences of those affected by Jackson's policies.

## Musical Numbers

One of the most striking aspects of "Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson" is its score, which incorporates various musical styles, including rock, folk, and pop. The songs are integral to the storytelling, with lyrics that reflect the characters' emotions and motivations. Some notable numbers include:

- **"Populism, Yea Yea!"** - A rousing anthem that encapsulates Jackson's appeal to the common man.
- **"The Hunters of Kentucky"** - A narrative-driven song that recounts Jackson's military exploits.
- **"I'm Not That Guy"** - A poignant moment reflecting Jackson's internal struggles and the consequences of his decisions.
- **"The Ballad of Andrew Jackson"** - A satirical take on Jackson's self-image and the mythologizing of his persona.

## Thematic Elements

The script of "Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson" is rich in thematic content, addressing issues such as:

### Populism vs. Tyranny

The musical explores the tension between Jackson's populist image and his authoritarian tendencies. While he presents himself as a champion of the people, his actions often reflect a willingness to use violence and coercion to achieve his objectives. This duality prompts the audience to question the nature of leadership and the sacrifices made in the

name of progress.

## **Identity and Mythology**

Jackson's legacy is steeped in myth. The musical examines how narratives about historical figures are constructed and the impact they have on public perception. By portraying Jackson as both a hero and a villain, the script encourages the audience to engage in a more nuanced understanding of history.

## **The Consequences of Policy**

The Indian Removal Act and its devastating consequences for Native American populations are central to the narrative. The musical does not shy away from addressing these issues, using humor and satire to highlight the tragic outcomes of Jackson's policies. This bold approach serves as a critique of American history and the often-ignored suffering of marginalized communities.

## **Critical Reception**

Upon its debut, "Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson" garnered mixed to positive reviews from critics. Many praised its innovative blend of history and rock music, as well as its sharp wit and willingness to tackle complex issues. However, some critics felt that the musical's irreverent tone could undermine the gravity of its subject matter.

The production received several awards and nominations, showcasing its impact on the contemporary musical theater landscape. It opened on Broadway in 2010 and ran for a limited engagement, further solidifying its place in American theater history.

## **Conclusion**

The script for "Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson" represents a bold and innovative approach to musical theater, merging historical narrative with modern sensibilities. By presenting Andrew Jackson as a complex figure, the musical invites audiences to reflect on the nuances of leadership, the construction of identity, and the consequences of policy. It challenges viewers to consider how history is remembered and the voices that are often left out of the narrative.

As American society continues to grapple with its past and present, "Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson" remains a relevant and thought-provoking piece that encourages dialogue and introspection about the legacy of one of the nation's most polarizing presidents. Whether viewed as a historical commentary or a compelling musical experience, the script offers a unique lens through which to explore the complexities of American identity.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **What is the primary theme of 'Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson'?**

The primary theme revolves around the complexities of American identity, the contradictions of democracy, and the mythologizing of historical figures, particularly focusing on Andrew Jackson's controversial legacy.

## **Who are the creators of 'Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson'?**

The musical was created by Alex Timbers and Michael Friedman.

## **What style of music is used in 'Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson'?**

The musical features a rock-infused score that incorporates elements of punk and pop music.

## **How does 'Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson' portray Andrew Jackson's character?**

The musical portrays Andrew Jackson as a larger-than-life, often flawed hero who embodies the spirit of populism while simultaneously highlighting his violent and controversial decisions.

## **What historical events are depicted in the musical?**

The musical depicts significant events such as Jackson's rise to political power, his presidency, the Indian Removal Act, and the Battle of New Orleans.

## **Is 'Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson' a comedy or a tragedy?**

The musical blends elements of both comedy and tragedy, using humor to address serious historical issues while also exploring darker themes.

## **What is the significance of the title 'Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson'?**

The title reflects both Jackson's violent reputation and the bloody consequences of his policies, particularly regarding Native American removal.

## **How was 'Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson' received by**

## critics and audiences?

The musical received mixed reviews from critics but gained a following for its innovative approach and unique blend of history and rock music.

## What message does 'Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson' convey about leadership?

The musical conveys a message about the complexities of leadership, questioning the morality of decisions made by leaders and the impact of their choices on marginalized groups.

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