



Joel Rafael Band "**Woodeye**" Inside Recordings

The short, opening track of Rafael's previous album, "**Hopper**" [2000], was titled "Train Yard" and featured the voices of Woody Guthrie, Joel and Carl Johnson, set against the sounds of a [railway station] freight yard. The album also included Rafael's rendition of the Billy Bragg/Woody Guthrie collaboration "Way Over Yonder In The Minor Key." Since the 1998 inception, in Okemah, Oklahoma, of the annual, free Woody Guthrie Folk Festival, Rafael and his band have performed there every year. Totally enamoured by Woody's birthplace, Joel closes this fine collection with "Talking Oklahoma Hills," a wonderful half spoken/half sung song he wrote in tribute to Okemah. And when the band comes in to support Joel's vocal, the sound they attain will plain rip your heart out.

If the foregoing are just a few of the tangible, *real life* things that connect Rafael and Guthrie, please believe me when I say that, spiritually, they are *brothers*. Having interviewed Rafael at length, anyone with an inkling of Guthrie's life and philosophy would draw the same conclusion. On "**Woodeye**," Rafael brings together Guthrie tunes that are well known and some that are less familiar, in a celebration of one man's life and art. Within that mix there are a couple of Guthrie/Rafael collaborations. The traditional "Sowing On The Mountain," with additional vocals and vocal arrangements courtesy of Jennifer Warnes, finds words adapted by Guthrie, married to a melody that Rafael has arranged. Having been presented with a Woody lyric [by his daughter, Norah], Rafael has created an upbeat melody to accompany "Dance A Little Longer."

Rafael opens this album with an old-timey sounding rendition of "When The Curfew Blows," the tale of a fugitive on the run from the city sheriff. Jamaica's harmony vocal supports her father's lead on "1913 Massacre," as Joel recalls the events that occurred, that year, during the Copper Miners Children's Christmas Party in Calumet, Michigan. Thugs hired by the mine owner, the miners were on strike at the time, locked the hall door after shouting "Fire." In the ensuing rush to get out the building seventy-three children were trampled or smothered on the exit staircase. The obscure "Don't Kill My Baby And My Son" recalls the lynching of members of the Nelson family in Okemah, circa 1910. "Pretty Boy Floyd," the tale of Oklahoma's early twentieth-century *Robin Hood* styled outlaw, the Guthrie, Leadbelly and Lomax co-written blues classic "Ramblin' 'Round," and "Plane Wreck At Los Gatos [Deportee]" are among the better known Guthrie songs included on "**Woodeye**." Townes Van Zandt, in his time, was a fine exponent of the [humorous] talking blues. Supported [only] by album producer Dan Rothchild's bass, Joel picks his acoustic guitar and wends his way through Guthrie's amusing "Talking Fishing Blues." A number of the tracks feature relevant background sounds – a river on the aforementioned fishing song, a passing train on "Danville Girl," an aeroplane flies overhead on "Deportee."

The support players on this truly exceptional tribute album include time-served Woody Guthrie Folk Festival participant Ellis Paul, the multi-talented Van Dyke Parks and the [aforementioned] vocally adept Jenny Warnes.

Folkwax Rating 8 out of 10

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