

# My Name

Is—

## Tom Jones?

By ANTHONY CARTHEW

LONDON.

**T**OM JONES, the sinisterly handsome Welshman who recently completed a month's tour of the United States, is the first solo singer to top the British hit parade since the Beatles converted pop singing into a group activity. He is also the first citizen of the renowned "Land of Song" to make a successful career in beat music. The Welsh tend to overplug this "Land of Song" thing; by "song" they usually mean "All Through the Night," or "Men of Harlech" rather than "What's New, Pussycat?", a ditty that got Jones banned from the Ed Sullivan show for "suggestive writhings."

The rise of Jones seems to indicate a movement toward toughness in the pop world. "Tiger Tom," as they call him in the Rhondda Valley where his father cuts coal in the pits of Pontypridd, is 25 and large with it—over six feet tall and as broad as two Beatles put together. He has green eyes set in a long, slightly villainous face, and his hair, from forehead to nape of neck, is a mass of tight black curls resembling a well-woven fireside rug. He even uses hair oil, a practice that gives the free-flowing fringes of Liverpool the horrors. Apart from his on-stage writhings, which he claims are "natural body movements," Jones eschews gimmicks. Even the name is almost real. In full, he is Thomas Jones Woodward.

**P**UBLICITY pictures show him clad in white sweat shirt, tight white pants and white shoes. The result suggests a detergent commercial and Jones is gratifyingly ashamed. "Makes me look like a fairy prince," he says, "and I'm not like that at all." He's not. His personality is heavily masculine. He likes pubs and beer and the sporting conversations of men.

In a trade not noted for integrity, he exudes a certain honesty, and it is this which appears to give him a wider appeal than most pop stars. Men actually like his singing—"He sounds sincere, and you can hear the words." When young girls ask for his autograph, they frequently add: "Can I have one for my Mum as well?"

Outside the stage door at a Jones concert you will see a sprinkling of mink wraps as well as children toting banners marked "Tom Jones Forever." Record critics praise his ver-

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**The New York Times**

Published: November 14, 1965  
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**WELSH BARD**—The outfit "makes me look like a fairy prince," says singer Jones, but he is really all guy.

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satirize: "He can belt like Little Richard or soothe like Brook Benton." He seems to have only one current worry—that his style is too masculine. He says: "A lot of the younger girls have said they're frightened of me."

**I**F the majority of pop singers are Mods, Tom Jones is a Rocker. He has his own views on the subject and expresses them in an articulate, Welsh way:

"It's a question of the way you live, see? The difference between a Mod and a Rocker is a matter of temperament. Mods are very sort of clean and round-shouldered. What they think is smart is to be neat and compact. And when they dance, it's with dainty steps.

"In my teens I was a Teddy Boy, and proud of it. I used to wear a sky-blue suit and black suede, crepe-soled shoes. We were all very aggressive. Teddy Boys were men with big shoulders. Our girls were aggressive, too. They wore a lot of makeup and were very tough. That's the kind of thing I grew up with, and it's left its mark. Teen-agers don't have to be aggressive today because older people aren't fighting them. They can round off the edges."

There is another, perhaps more important, ingredient in Jones's toughness—his struggle to escape his environment. He had a long way to travel from South Wales to the prosperity that became his when his recording of "It's Not Unusual" reached the top of the hit parade six months ago. Most people born in the som-

bre valley of the Rhondda dream, when they are young, of escaping. Few succeed. Jones's father swore his son would never become a miner.

But around Pontypridd there is not much else to do; the pits are the life and death of the men of the valleys. There are usually just two ways of escape: by using your voice, as actors Richard Burton and Stanley Baker did, or by using your fists, as a long line of boxers have done. Both methods need outside assistance.

In Jones's case, help came in the person of Gordon Mills, a 30-year-old songwriter and recording manager. Mills, who wrote several hits for the British star Cliff Richard, heard Jones singing in a pub. He says: "It was obvious that the boy had talent. I started to persuade him to come to London there and then." Jones did not take much persuading.

"But," Jones says, "I wasn't ambitious. I don't think I'm ambitious now. It was just that I had no alternative future." He had left school at 15 and avoided the pits, only to find that there was little money to be made elsewhere. He worked in a glove factory as a machinist, but the machines that brought the highest pay could not be operated by anyone under 21, so he decided to exercise his well-muscled frame on local building sites. He laid bricks and dug roads and then, while wielding the pick one cold morning, it came to him that he might as well capitalize on his singing voice.

He says: "My father and my uncle were both singing

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Welsh miners. They belonged to every choir for miles around, and I had sung with them and in most of the chapels in the district. So I turned professional and began to work the clubs and pubs." Soon he became well known in the beer halls of Pontypridd, and "Tiger Tom" was born.

**M**ILLS brought Jones to London and spent all the money he had made from song-writing on promoting him. He says: "After all these groups who just stand and shake their heads, I thought the youngsters were ready for a handsome man who sang well and moved his whole body." (Someone must have said something exactly like this when Elvis Presley was created, but the pop world is a small world and

numbers wearing a dark gray business suit.

Appropriately, on St. David's Day, March 1, the Welsh national day, "Unusual" went to the top of the hit parade. Bunches of leeks, the Welsh emblem, spread their heady perfume through his apartment. Simultaneously, he revealed the dread secret of the Jones family. He had arrived in London described as a bachelor, aged 22. Overnight, with success assured, he gained three years, a wife and a 7-year-old son.

It appears that Jones, at 16, had married his childhood sweetheart, Malinda, and the marriage had rapidly been blessed by a baby to whom they gave the name Mark. The pre-discovery Jones, and everyone else in Pontypridd, considered this a situation of model



**AT WORK**—Jones can cry or croon, to the delight of teen-agers, men and mums.

the wheel comes full circle quickly.)

The reasoning was sound enough, but they couldn't find a song capable of boosting Jones to the top. They made demonstration disk after demonstration disk, and all they were left with at the end was a heap of old plastic. Jones was thinking of going back to the club-and-pub circuit when Mills wrote "Unusual." They recorded it with a backing of four trumpets, two saxes, a trombone and an organ. Jones was sure the disk would be "too brassy for the charts." He was spectacularly wrong.

Thus began the rise of Tom Jones. It was routinely meteoric; no pop star rises any other way. Last Christmas he was virtually unknown. By the end of January he had a fan club and was getting gushing letters like the one from a woman of 52, who wrote: "You'll probably think I'm nuts, but I adore you."

In February he replaced an American, P. J. Proby, in a touring package show. Proby had become unpopular because the highlight of his crude act was to split his trousers. Jones, unlike Proby, responded to advice. When the manager of one dance hall complained that his all-white breeches were "too sexy," he promptly changed and went through his

domestic bliss. But the sages of London's Tin Pan Alley shook their heads. "You must," they said, "remain a bachelor for the purposes of the hit parade. Marriage harms the image." So Malinda and Mark were left behind.

**I**N order that teen-age dreams should continue unshattered, Mrs. Jones, heavily veiled, journeyed to London each Saturday for illicit weekends with Mr. Jones. She says: "I always posed as a girl friend. It was rather thrilling pretending not to be married." Jones says: "I'd heard of so many singers who never got breaks because they had wives. But it's wrong to fool people, especially teen-agers. I'm glad I owned up."

His family status does not seem to have harmed him much. He has been around the Top Twenty through most of the year, mainly because his big, choir-bred voice is something of a relief after the succession of grunTERS and reedy twitterers.

Or as Jones himself puts it, with his Welsh scorn for lesser singing breeds: "If I didn't have the voice, I would never have had the nerve to be a singer. Some of them nowadays have such small voices I wonder whatever put it into their heads to sing at all."