

Tommy Lee Jones

Contributed by Administrator
 Monday, 12 April 2004
 Last Updated Friday, 28 December 2007

With his jutting beetle brow, rough complexion and unsettling gaze, Tommy Lee Jones has brought a dangerous yet sympathetic and highly intelligent edge to a wide range of leading and featured roles since the 1970s. After graduating cum laude from Harvard, he worked regularly on the New York stage in the early and mid-70s, most notably in his Broadway debut, "A Patriot for Me", and in Sal Mineo's controversial Off-Broadway production of the prison drama "Fortune and Men's Eyes";

Maybe because of his alma mater (where he roomed with future Vice President Al Gore), Jones began his film career in 1970 with a small part as Ryan O'Neal's Harvard roommate in "Love Story" (Reportedly author Erich Segal has claimed that both Gore and Jones were the models for the character played by O'Neal). After a stint from 1971-75 on the TV soap opera "One Life to Live", he played an escaped convict hunted down by the police in his first starring role in a US film, "Jackson County Jail" (1976). Whenever a time came that it seemed Jones, an eighth-generation Texan, was about to become typecast in country-boy roles, or his taciturn demeanor shunted him into villainous roles, his sensitivity managed to add depth to the most routine parts. Not that dull parts came along all that often: Subsequent roles included eccentric billionaire Howard Hughes in the TV biopic, "The Amazing Howard Hughes" (CBS, 1977); convicted murderer Gary Gilmore (an especially exciting performance that won him an Emmy) in the TV drama "The Executioner's Song" (NBC, 1982); a psychotic detective who terrorizes Faye Dunaway in the 1978 thriller "The Eyes of Laura Mars"; and country singer Loretta Lynn's husband in "Coal Miner's Daughter" (1981).

Some less than successful features ("The Betsy" 1978, "Back Roads" 1981) slowed down his feature film career in the early 80s, and for a time he appeared primarily in such little-seen features as the total misfire, "Black Moon Rising" (1986). TV helped pick up some of the slack, with Jones returning to his theatrical roots with the small screen remakes of "The Rainmaker" (HBO, 1982), opposite Tuesday Weld, and "Cat on a Hot Tin Roof" (Showtime, 1984), with Jessica Lange. One of his most important TV portrayals was as Woodrow Call, the repressed Texas Ranger who dragged the corpse of his partner (Robert Duvall) back to Texas in the acclaimed miniseries "Lonesome Dove" (CBS, 1988).

Since his unnerving portrayal of Cosmo, the unflinching mobster in Mike Figgis' noir, "Stormy Monday" (1988), Jones reasserted himself as one of Hollywood's leading heavies, bringing to his roles a sense of tormented moral ambiguity. He teamed with director Andrew Davis on the uneven thriller "The Package" (1989) then left audiences chilled with his eerie portrayal of suspected Kennedy assassination conspirator Clay Shaw in Oliver Stone's "JFK" (1991), a role that garnered him a Best Supporting Actor Academy Award nomination. Jones reunited with Davis for the thrillers "Under Siege" (1992), as a rockin'-n'-rollin' psychopath who takes over a naval carrier, and "The Fugitive" (1993), a film remake of the hit 60s TV series wherein he played a hardened lawman unwilling to relinquish his hunt for Harrison Ford's Dr. Richard Kimble. More than a few reviewers felt that Jones caught—and surpassed—his leading man.

The Best Supporting Actor Oscar Jones received for "The Fugitive" extended the renewed prominence in Hollywood, reflected in such standardized but high-profile genre fare as "Blown Away" and "The Client" (both 1994). He also kept extremely busy in the occasional prominent character lead ("Natural Born Killers" 1994) and slammed his way through an uncompromising portrait of the profoundly ambiguous baseball great Ty "Cobb" (1994) in the poorly received biopic. Jones rebounded as part of the high-powered entertainment package, "Batman Forever" (1995), chewing scenery as 'Two-Face', a crusading district attorney turned dualistic bad guy.

Although the disaster picture "Volcano" blew up in his face, Jones was back on top with the blockbuster hit "Men in Black" (both 1997), a sort of "The X-Files" meets "Ghostbusters". Based on the comic book creations of Lowell Cunningham, "Men in Black" chronicles two alien busters (Jones and Will Smith) of the pan-galactic version of Immigration and Naturalization Services (INS) who track down and subdue extraterrestrial invaders, "neuralizing" any witnesses (with the enormous ray guns atop their 1962 Ford LTDs) into believing the saucer that just flew by was a weather balloon, or St. Elmo's fire, or swamp gas. All very tongue-in-cheek, Jones' Agent Kay, with his dead pan comic sense, was the perfect foil for Smith's smart-alecky freshness, and they reprised their mega-hit roles for the successful 2002 sequel "Men in Black II."

He doffed his ebony duds and stepped back into his award-winning role Sam Gerard for the lesser-quality sequel "U.S. Marshals" (1998), this time on the trail of a different quarry (Wesley Snipes), then lent his voice to the hard-nosed action figure-come-to-life Maj. Chip Hazard in Joe Dante's "Small Soldiers" (1998). Jones then appeared in the simple but popular thriller "Double Jeopardy" (1999) opposite Ashley Judd, setting the template for a series of similar, affordably made films that typically teamed a woman in jeopardy (frequently Judd) with an older, father-figure-like A-list male star. He also carried the weight of director William Friedkin's slightly-better-than-routine military legal drama "Rules of Engagement" (2000) opposite Samuel L. Jackson, before lending his considerable charisma to his role as a daredevil pilot in director Clint Eastwood's amusing comedy adventure "Space Cowboys" (2001), joining Eastwood, Donald Sutherland and James Garner as a quartet of over-the-hill astronauts who must suit up to solve a world-threatening crisis in space.

Jones re-teamed with Friedkin for "The Hunted" (2003), an efficient, stripped down chase film that pit Jones' grizzled FBI deep-woods tracker captures the assassin he trained who has turned on society (Benecio del Toro). Then he portrayed a world weary part Native American shaman who reunites with his distant daughter (Cate Blanchett) when one of her children is kidnapped in director Ron Howard's disappointing Western thriller "The Missing" (2003). Radically shifting gears, Jones tried his hand at a lightweight comedy with thriller elements in "Man of the House" (2005), playing a no-nonsense Texas Ranger forced to oversee a quintet of ditzzy college cheerleaders who witness a murder. Jones gamely tried his hand at comedy and light romance, but seemed far too accomplished intelligent to have much tolerance for the lowbrow material. He next had a cameo as a hitman-turned-door keep in "A Prairie Home Companion" (2006), Robert Altman's fictional take on Garrison Keillor's long-running radio show that featured an unusual cast of local talent and the host's rambling monologues about the ideal town, Lake Wobegon.

Family

- Daughter: Victoria Kafka Jones. Born c. 1991; mother, Kimberlea Cloughley
- Father: Clyde Jones. Worked in Texas oil fields
- Mother: Lucille Marie Jones. Owned beauty parlor; parents were married and divorced twice
- Son: Austin Leonard Jones. Born c. 1983 on a location shoot in New Zealand; mother, Kimberlea Cloughley

Significant Others

- Companion: Lisa Taylor. Education
- Harvard University, Cambridge, MA, English, BA, 1969
- St. Mark's School of Texas, Dallas, TX Milestones
- 1960 Won a scholarship so he could attend a prep school, St. Mark's prep school in Dallas, TX
- 1969 Landed first acting job on Broadway ten days after arriving in New York City in John Osborne's play "A Patriot For Me"
- 1969 Starred in Sal Mineo's controversial Off-Broadway production, "Fortune and Men's Eyes"
- 1970 Feature film debut, "Love Story"
- 1971 Played Dr. Mark Toland on the ABC daytime serial drama, "One Life to Live"
- 1971 Appeared in the Broadway production, "Four on a Garden" with Carol Channing and Sid Caesar
- 1972 Played a leading role in the low-budget Canadian feature, "Eliza's Horoscope"
- 1974 Cast as Stephen Daedalus in "Ulysses in Nighttown" co-starring Zero Mostel
- 1976 First lead in a Hollywood feature, "Jackson County Jail"
- 1976 TV-movie debut, the pilot movie for the ABC-TV series, "Charlie's Angels"
- 1977 First TV miniseries, "The Amazing Howard Hughes" (CBS), in which he played the title role
- 1982 Played the lead role of convicted killer Gary Gillmore in the acclaimed NBC miniseries, "The Executioner's Song"
- 1989 First film with director Andrew Davis, "The Package"
- 1989 Played Woodrow F Call in the four-part CBS miniseries, "Lonesome Dove"; received an Emmy nomination
- 1991 Renewed his prominence in Hollywood features after his performance in the controversial Oliver Stone-directed hit film "JFK"; earned first Oscar nomination
- 1993 Offered an Academy Award winning performance as US Marshal Samuel Gerard in "The Fugitive"
- 1994 Received a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame
- 1995 Debut as director and screenwriter (written with J T Allen), the TV-movie, "Good Old Boys" (TNT); also starred
- 1997 Teamed with Will Smith for smash hit "Men in Black"
- 1998 Reprised "Fugitive" role of Sam Gerard in "U.S. Marshals"
- 1999 Appeared as a parole officer to Ashley Judd in the hit "Double Jeopardy"
- 2000 Starred with Samuel L Jackson in "Rules of Engagement"
- 2002 Reprised role of Agent K in sequel "Men in Black 2"
- 2003 Starred in the action feature "The Hunted"
- 2005 Feature directing debut, "The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada," also starred and co-produced; earned an Independent Spirit Award Nomination for Best Feature
- 2006 Cast in Robert Altman's ensemble feature "A Prairie Home Companion," based on Garrison Keilor's radio program

- 2007 Played a Local Sheriff in the Coen brother's film, "No Country For Old Men"; earned a SAG nomination for Outstanding Male Actor in a Supporting Role
- 2007 Played a father who's son, a soldier who recently returned from Iraq, mysteriously goes missing in "In the Valley of Elah"
- Returned to TV after five years in feature films to act in an HBO production of the play, "The Rainmaker"
- Worked with father in Texas oil fields before entering Harvard