The Colorado Shakespeare Festival’s production of “Woody Guthrie’s American Song” finds its greatest moment not in its title role but in the songwriting. 

Adaptor and director Peter Glazer first staged the musical 20 years ago. Special for this summer’s stagin is that Glazer has turned a folk song written in the 1930s, a bloody incident in a small southern Colorado town in 1914, where National Guardsmen killed 20 people, including children of mine workers who were on strike.

Glazer inserted the song into the top of Act II just for the CSF show. The five actors in the musical, accompanied by a haunting rhythm pounded out on the wooden bodies of stringed instruments. It’s a chilling rendition. It’s also the most dramatic example of Guthrie’s songs presented here still resonate.

This is as overtly political a show as CSF has staged, at least in the past two decades. And while some of the songs taken from Guthrie’s work are not necessarily “I’m not a Communist... necessarily” -- the issues in Guthrie’s songs presented here still resonate.

Glazer, whose father, Tom Glazer, was a folksinger and periods of his life.

Sam Misner is the young Guthrie, suffering through the Great Depression, after he’s settled in New York years later.

As its title suggests, this isn’t a deep exploration of Guthrie as a personality. Instead, it allows the characters and situations of life among America’s working poor in the 1930s, ’40s and ’50s. The Great Depression, the era in which the show begins, seems worlds away, at first. It’s difficult to imagine an America without a Starbucks down the street and 24-hour television, not to mention indoor plumbing.

Natural disasters like the drought and dust storms that ravaged parts of the middle of America in the 1930s, and the drought and dust storms that ravaged parts of the middle of America in the 1930s, and the scene in which the character could be singing about 2005 and Hurricane Katrina. Later, the song “Plane Wreck At Los Gatos” details a crash in which several Mexican mi...
Maybe Guthrie's most radical song is his most well-known. When you get down to it, the lyrics in the chorus are a "no trespassing" determination to live an unfettered life.

When he sang about how this land is our land, and this land is his land, Guthrie wasn't dividing up property, he was talking against the idea of the haves owning the land and its profits, while the have-nots toil away with little or nothing.

(Kind of puts a different perspective on the recent private-land disputes that have cropped up in southern Colorado.)

"The Sinking Of The Reuben James" feels contemporary, as well. When a man in a bar sings to the spirit of patriotic Guthrie pulls out another tune that tells the story of the Reuben James, the first U.S. military ship sunk during World War II. The song remembers the soldiers lost in the incident. It echoes a familiar theme today when many people say they support an war but don't support the troops serving there.

Four musicians, who play a variety of acoustic instruments, join the five-person cast onstage. The cast and musicians make up a strong ensemble.

Waxman's harmonies -- delivered robustly by the cast -- are exquisite, and his arrangements reinvent several of Guthrie's songs.

"New York Town" becomes a delightful comic interaction between Misner and Mueller, playing Cisco Houston and Guthrie, the two singing partners, on their first ever tour. They played in a minor key with a restless backbeat, becomes a haunting warning more than a song filled with cheerful anticipation. "Another Man Done Gone," with lead aching and intimate moment, perfectly rendered.

As you might expect, "This Land Is Your Land" is a cathartic show ender. Long before then, we're ready to sing along. We finally get the chance.