

Theater Review: John D. Alexander becomes Teddy Roosevelt

By Jim Lowe
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MONTPELIER — Theodore Roosevelt (1858-1919), the 26th president of the United States, might be considered a benevolent despot by today's standards, but his undeniable charisma made him one of the most popular and accomplished of American presidents.

Roosevelt eerily came to life again as actor John D. Alexander convincingly portrayed the president in Lost Nation Theater's production of "Bully! An Adventure with Teddy Roosevelt," Jerome Alden's one-man show in Roosevelt's own words. This is a reprise of Alexander's performance four years ago, but a much more natural one.



John D. Alexander portrays President Theodore Roosevelt in Lost Nation Theater's "Bully!" Jim Lowe / Staff photo

"Bully!" brings not only Roosevelt to life, but also an exciting era in American history. The United States was only emerging as a world power, and Roosevelt quite successfully elbowed his way onto the world scene, even winning a Nobel Peace Prize for brokering an agreement between Russia and Japan.

Roosevelt also anticipated his relative, President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in fighting big business for the little guy. (I doubt he would have won much support in today's national Republican Party.) Although somewhat of an egotist, Roosevelt saw the presidency as a responsibility to the entire American populous rather than to special interests. His apparently radical view was that there was plenty for everyone.

"Bully!" also explores how Roosevelt became such a broad-minded president, from his sickly youth to his living in Europe to his Wild West experiences. There are certainly parallels to President John F. Kennedy.

There is no question that "Bully!" is a fan letter of sorts, though it does imply a certain megalomania of the sort not uncommon in stars in all fields. It might be interesting to see a show written by someone who detested Roosevelt, and there must have been many.

Lost Nation Theater's stylish production, directed by Tara Lee Downs, was quite convincing and thoroughly entertaining. Alexander, save for an early stiffness, was convincing to the point that he seemed — without changes in makeup — to visibly age throughout.

Before it was over, Alexander was even able to deliver Roosevelt's charisma.

The production benefited from a stylish set by Casey Covey, a variety of colorful costumes by Cora Fauser and very effective lighting by Susan Bero.

Alexander's Roosevelt in "Bully!" provides a fascinating and entertaining history lesson.