

A step back in Time

story by kyle whitacre • photos by robert mckay

Merchants, performers celebrate 16th century England at Texas Renaissance Festival



William the Wheelmaster races his chariot on the Tournament Field in a competition for the hand of a fair maiden "pucked" from the audience.

Just south of Plantersville, Texas, exists a small, 50-acre plot surrounded by buildings that look as if they are straight out of 16th century Europe. All manner of royalty and common people walk through the tall pines and grass fields unabated by each other's presence or that of monks, wizards, swordsmen and Texans.

Vendors selling a variety of goods call through the dirt trails as acrobats perform on small stages littered about the grounds.

The 24th Annual Texas Renaissance Festival is in full swing this weekend and is open every Saturday and Sunday from 9 a.m. to dusk through Nov. 15.

Thousands of Texans are experiencing the romanticized times of knights, wizards and fairies in New Market Village, the site of the festival.

A variety of actors, performers and fans travel around the country with these festivals, entertaining the masses with the culture, style, manner and dress of 16th century England.

Stephen Jones, one of the festival's stage performers and the manager of the Cherry Poppin' Daddies, said he has participated in Renaissance Festivals around the country.

"I've been doing this for about 10 years now," Jones said. "We go from coast to coast and do about 12 fairs a year."

Hosting the jousting event on horseback and performing in the morality play "The Nature of Mercy," Jones dresses like a character in the movie Ladyhawk with an accent to match.

His fellow actor David DeAngelis said an actor gets unique experience out of traveling across the country and acting in various festivals.

"It's an incredible amount of experience for an actor to get," DeAngelis said. "We're performing rehearsed and improv acts for up to 10,000 people a day."

Over 250 different shops border the land and circle around inside to create a pathway system through the festival.

Jim K. Johnson, group sales manager for the festival, said each independently owned shop is opened only for the seven weeks of the festival.

"The design for each shop must be approved by us for it to be built," Johnson said. "The owners take care of everything; we let them

use the land, and that's the only part we play."

Items sold include pewter, swords and armor, stained glass, furniture, sculptures, jewelry, hand-blown glass and Renaissance clothing.

Twenty stages with continuous entertainment are also located throughout the site.

Among the entertainment is the jousting tournament. Jones hosts the events with his booming English voice and fancy horsemanship. Four knights compete in events testing speed and ability and then finish the competition with jousting. Each section of the audience roots for a different knight competing in the tournament.

The Dead Bob Show held at the Player's Podium is one of the humorous performances to catch at the festival. Starring a witty skeleton and his zombified cadaver ventriloquist, the act incorporates its audience to create dark, graveyard humor.

The Human Chess Match is an hour-long stage show with each performer dressed as a chess piece. The chess-piece actors fight for control of the stage board with comedy and stuntwork. The match is performed on the Falconer's stage, which also showcases Birds of Prey, a show on falconry and other trained birds.

The comedy and juggling act of the Flaming Idiots features two jugglers who perform on the Globe Theater stage.

The performers combine biting sarcasm and death-defying feats to entertain their audiences.

Other acts at the Renaissance Festival this year include The Duelists and Cliff Hanger at the Castle Theatre, Chariot races at the Tournament Field, Scottish Highland Games and Society for Creative Anachronism at the Battle Mound, The Sturdy Beggars at the Mud Pit and Chateau du Macabre, a haunted dungeon.

Besides the scheduled stage entertainment, walking around the festival is entertainment enough with all the great costumes and character actors strolling through the grounds all day.

Renaissance music fills the air with acts such as Cantiga, The Rogues, Istanbul, Celtaire, I Madrigali, Featherstone, Wyndwyre and His Majesty's Sackbutts.

The spirit of merry old England stays alive in the heart of the Texas Renaissance Festival where all the romanticized legends of 16th century England can be enjoyed without any of the disease, famine, pestilence or Holy Wars.



Two washwomen push their carts of dirty laundry through the Grand Marche parade route.

One-man performance chronicles life of former president T. Roosevelt

BY BETH FOCHT
The Battalion

The audience in Rudder Auditorium will travel back in time this weekend to the years of President Teddy Roosevelt's life. The MSC Opera and Performing Arts Society presents Jerome Alden's adaptation of Roosevelt's life, "Bully, An Adventure with Teddy Roosevelt."

"Bully," a one-man show starring John Davidson of "Hollywood Squares" fame, celebrates the life of the former president through stories, speeches, letters and imagined conversations between Roosevelt and his friends, family and enemies.

Davidson adds this play to a long list of television and stage performances as "Bully" makes the second stop of its national tour in Bryan-College Station.

Davidson said "Bully" is the biggest accomplishment of his career, and he is looking forward to his national tour.

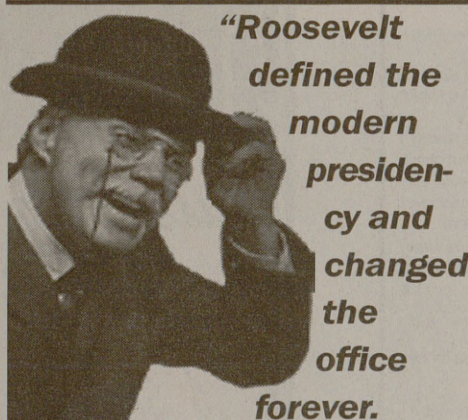
"We tried 'Bully' out a year and a half ago for about three weeks to see if the production would work and if I could handle this character," Davidson said. "It was received wonderfully by audiences, better than we expected it to be, so we are taking it out for a tour."

Davidson said for him, the most challenging part of doing the play was not learning the script but the emotional roller coaster he goes through in his portrayal of Roosevelt.

"This play covers Teddy Roosevelt's whole life, and the character goes through every possible emotion," he said. "I have to go through intense fear when I'm fighting a grizzly bear or when the character sur-

vives an assassination attempt. "I then have to be able to switch gears very quickly and be giddy with joy at one moment and then go through devastating sadness when Roosevelt's first wife and mother die the same night."

He said the way the audience responds to the production is very motivating and also keeps the show going.



"Roosevelt defined the modern presidency and changed the office forever."

"... This is a way to look toward the future and see how the presidency will change in the next century."

John Davidson
Star of "Bully"

"Teddy Roosevelt attacked life, and he did it very theatrically," Davidson said. "The character is very charismatic, which makes the show most entertaining."

As a one-man show, the relationship built between the star and the audience is very important and essential for the success of the performance, he said.

"Most of the time, I am speaking directly to the audience," Davidson said. "The play really communicates with the audience, and it (the audience) is cheering me on by the end."

Davidson said doing this production is not very different from doing a musical performance, for which he is most well-known.

"Live theater is one of the most exciting things," he said. "Acting in this play is not different from performing in a musical production because I warm up my voice before show time in the same way as if I was going to have to sing."

"You see, this is a very vocal and musical performance. I have to use my voice in a range of octaves to help add to the characterization of Roosevelt."

Davidson said he feels it is important that this play is happening during the centennial of Roosevelt's career, so Roosevelt's life can be celebrated.

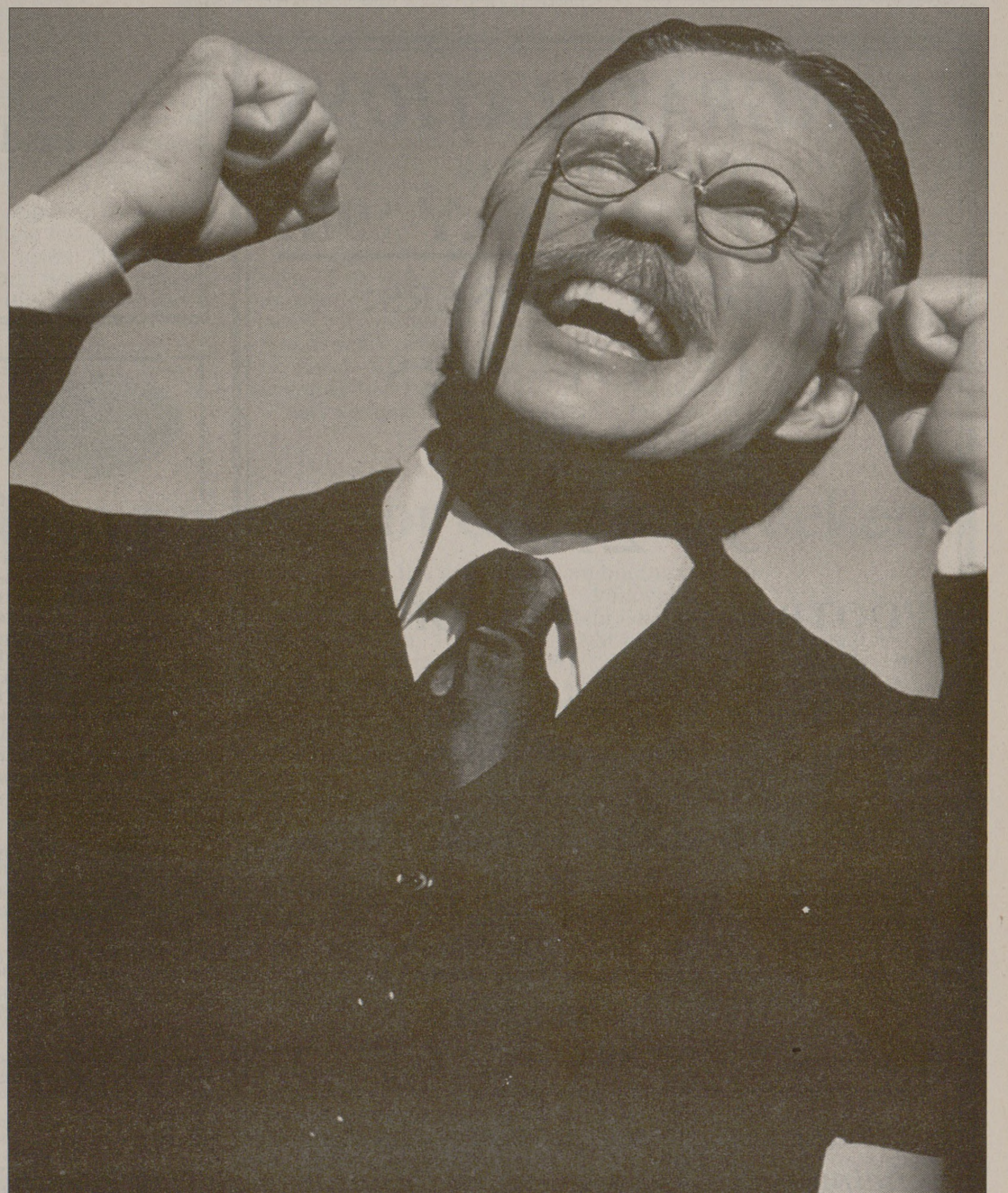
"Roosevelt defined the modern presidency and changed the office forever," he said.

"As we are going into the next century, this is a way to look toward the future and see how the presidency will change in the next century."

"Bully" performances will be held on Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 3 p.m.

Following each performance will be a question-and-answer session with Davidson.

For tickets or more information on "Bully," contact the MSC Box Office at 845-1234.



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JOHN DAVIDSON

John Davidson, former host of "Hollywood Squares" and "That's Incredible," stars in "Bully," a play chronicling the life of former president Theodore Roosevelt. The play is presented by OPAS. "Bully" performances will be held Saturday and Sunday in Rudder Auditorium.