



Submitted photo

Derek Evans tours the U.S. portraying former president Theodore Roosevelt. His tour stops in Hartford on Friday.

# Living Teddy's legacy

## Man performs as nation's 26th president

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To Derek Evans, Theodore Roosevelt is largely underrated as a president and a neglected American hero.

Today, he tours the country playing the role of the former president, telling stories of his life and doing so dressed just like him, mustache, glasses and all.

Evans brings his national tour to Hartford for one show at 7:30 p.m. Friday at the Schauer Arts and Activities Center, 147 N. Rural St., Hartford, for "The Man in the Arena."

"We don't study him the same way in school that we do George Washington and Abraham Lincoln," Evans said of Roosevelt. "This was a guy who did everything in real life that John Wayne did in the movies."

However, at one point, he was guilty of overlooking the United States' 26th president.

About 15 years ago, he knew of Roosevelt, but that's where his knowledge of him ended. Then, he saw the 1944 film, "Arsenic and Old Lace," starring Cary Grant.

In that film, there is a character who believes he is Teddy Roosevelt. Evans was never the same.

"I was astonished with how extraordinary he was," he said. "He suffered so grievously from asthma that his parents thought he was going to die, they kept a casket for him."

A short time later, an agent approached him about an idea to tour the country posing as Roosevelt. The agent told him there was a belief "we could make some money going around dressed like Teddy Roosevelt."

Evans thought he was joking. No way would

it work.

"This agent got me to read some books," he said. "That was about 15 years ago."

"I discovered I was in the presence of a man who was a walking miracle."

Evans said the closest person he thought in his mind who had that kind of effect on the world was Winston Churchill.

"At age 55, he was learning Portuguese," Evans said. "He was a writer. He wrote 36 books. He had a posthumous best-seller. He was an extraordinary man."

Roosevelt took office in 1901 after the assassination of President William McKinley, six months into McKinley's second term. Roosevelt was the vice president.

He was president until March 1909. He died Jan. 6, 1919, at the age of 60.

Evans joked he's too old to play Roosevelt at 73. But he is honored to portray a man he admired and calls a hero.

Roosevelt served in the Army and the New York National Guard, he was a state legislator and the governor of New York.

He was also the founder of the U.S. Forest Service. He signed the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906 — what ultimately became the Food Safety and Inspection Service. He was instrumental in getting the Panama Canal built. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1906.

According to the Nobel Prize's website, Roosevelt got the award for "successful mediation to end the Russo-Japanese war and for his interest in arbitration, having provided the Hague arbitration court with its very first case."

"He was a freak of nature," Evans said. "In many ways, he exemplified what I see as the core



Evans

of what it means to be an American."

The first book Evans read about Roosevelt was Henry Pringle's 1931 biography about Roosevelt, which won the 1932 Pulitzer Prize for biography and autobiography.

"He's got a wonderful scene in this book where Roosevelt, who was at the time the youngest man ever elected to the New York Assembly, (Pringle) describes Roosevelt's first day as a New York state legislator and described an avalanche of questions," Evans said. "He wanted to know everything. He wanted to know about procedures, personal histories of the other legislators. ... It just grabbed me."

Evans, a professional actor for more than 30 years, coupled that expertise with his newfound knowledge of Roosevelt into a show that has led him to venues around the country.

In the nearly 20 years of his act as Roosevelt, he's performed in more than 500 shows, including Oshkosh's The Grand Opera House and the White House Visitor Center in Washington, D.C.

On average, Evans performs about 50 times per year.

The show's title, Evans said, comes from a speech Roosevelt made in Paris in 1910.

In his lifetime, Roosevelt wrote hundreds of letters — a quarter-million to be exact, Evans said. Evans will read some of those letters and talk about Roosevelt, talking like Roosevelt, looking like Roosevelt.

"I've found (the feedback) is fascinating," Evans said. "I do questions after the show and people will stay for hours. He was an attractive character."

"We're living out his legacy whether we know it or not," he added.

## Zevon's 'Excitable Boy' shows an artist at work

I celebrated a birthday recently (Yay! I'm older!) and a gift from my sister- and brother-in-law made me smile. It was a simple gray T-shirt bearing three words:

"Lawyers, Guns & Money."

I can't believe Warren Zevon has been gone more than 14 years. He died Sept. 3, 2003, with a form of cancer affecting the lungs. He was 56.

Zevon was born in Chicago, raised in California, and by his late teens had quit high school and moved to New York to be a musician. He toured as the Everly Brothers' keyboard player in the early 1970s, but by mid-decade was back in Los Angeles, hanging with a clique of singer-songwriters on the cusp of stardom — Jackson Browne, Linda Ronstadt, the Eagles, Bonnie Raitt, and Fleetwood Mac's Mick Fleetwood and John McVie.

But Zevon's music was darker. Instead of the Eagles' sunny cheerfulness ("Take It Easy") and Fleetwood Mac's bouncy pop ("Don't Stop"), Zevon wrote brutally honest songs about misfits, sociopaths and tough guys. Where much of L.A. rock in the '70s could be charitably described as "soft," Zevon had an edge. A witty edge.

He became a rock and roll star with the release of his third album, "Excitable Boy," in 1978. The album is filled with dark humor — the "boy" of the title track rapes and kills his prom date, then 10 years later, after "they let him out of the home," he digs her up and builds a cage out

of her bones. All this and a doo-wop chorus — it sounds macabre, but it's a rocker.

And "Roland the Headless Thompson Gunner," which Zevon wrote after meeting a mercenary who fought in Africa. Zevon's Roland is a fighter betrayed by a fellow mercenary, who blows off his head. Roland, now headless, gets his revenge — again and again — in conflicts around the world. The bad guys "heard the burst of Roland's Thompson gun and bought it."

"Werewolves of London," off the same album, was a pop hit with more dark humor and an opening line BBC2 listeners rated "best ever": "I saw a werewolf with a Chinese menu in his hand / Walking through the streets of Soho in the rain." And later, "I saw a werewolf drinking a pina colada at Trader Vic's / His hair was perfect."

The album has the song that is the source for the lines on my T-shirt, too.

Is the singer in "Lawyers, Guns & Money" paranoid or are they really out to get him? In the opening verse, we can't tell:

"I went home with a waitress /



KEN MERRILL

### MUSIC FOR GROWNUPS



The way I always do. / But how was I to know? / She was with the Russians too."

Then his plight becomes clearer:

"I was gambling in Havana / I took a little risk. / Send lawyers, guns and money / Dad get me out of this."

And in case you didn't get the absurdity of it all, the inner sleeve of the album — or on the little booklet that comes with the CD — features a Smith & Wesson .44 revolver lying across a plate of home cooking. Zevon's dead serious — with a wink. He's trenchant and sardonic but clever and funny, too. Oh, and he rocks like mad.

I read the biography written by his ex-wife, Crystal Zevon, "I'll Sleep When I'm Dead: The Dirty Life and Times of Warren Zevon," and it's not a pretty picture. Dropped by his record company in the early '80s, he became an alcoholic and druggie. And he was an ugly drunk — abusing those closest to him in mean, nasty ways. I've seen the YouTube clips, too — Zevon so drunk in concert that he has to be carried from the stage in a stupor.

But he sobered up. By the late

'80s, he was back in form with the release of "Sentimental Hygiene," then collaborated with the guitarist, bassist and drummer from R.E.M. on a project they called "Hindu Love Gods," with an album of the same name in 1990.

He put out an album every couple of years through the '90s and early 2000s — "Mr. Bad Example," "Life'll Kill Ya" and My Ride's Here" stand out.

Then he got sick. He was a frequent guest on David Letterman's late-night show and filled in for bandleader Paul Shaffer 20 times. Zevon once said Letterman was the best friend his music ever had. In an especially poignant telecast, Letterman devoted a whole show to Zevon on Oct. 2, 2002, 11 months before his death.

He played some music and sounded great — Letterman requested "Roland" and it's beautiful. Both men knew Zevon was dying but that didn't blunt their honesty. Letterman asked Zevon if he'd learned anything about life and death, given his condition.

"Enjoy every sandwich" was Zevon's simple reply.

Would you pay to sit in Picasso's studio and watch him paint? Would you want to look over Walt Whitman's shoulder while he writes "Leaves of Grass"? Of course you would. Track down a copy of "Excitable Boy." It's an artist at work.

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## MOVIE BUZZ

### MOVIES

#### Opening Friday

"The Great Wall" (PG-13): The great Zhang Yimou directs Matt Damon in this epic-scale adventure about mercenaries defending the Great Wall of China from monsters.

"A Cure for Wellness" (R): Director Gore Verbinski takes a break from the "Pirates of the Caribbean" franchise with this thriller about a man (Dane DeHaan) being treated at a strange health spa in the Swiss Alps.

"Fist Fight" (R): Charlie Day plays a teacher challenged to an after-school fight by a former colleague (Ice Cube) he accidentally got fired.

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### HOME VIDEO

#### In stores Tuesday

"Billy Lynn's Long Half-time Walk" (DVD/Blu-ray/4K): Ang Lee directs newcomer Joe Alwyn in this drama about an Iraq war veteran being celebrated during a Super Bowl game in 2004 Dallas.

"Arrival" (DVD/Blu-ray/4K): Amy Adams and Jeremy Renner are the scientists trying to communicate with aliens that have touched down on Earth in this Oscar-nominated sci-fi adventure.

"Almost Christmas" (DVD/Blu-ray): Gabrielle Union, Omar Epps and Danny Glover are among the members of a dysfunctional family trying to survive the holidays while living under the same roof.

"The Edge of Seventeen" (DVD/Blu-ray): A teenage girl (Hailee Steinfeld) navigates the treacherous waters of adolescence in this affectionate homage to the 1980s high school comedies by John Hughes.

"Bleed for This" (DVD/Blu-ray): Miles Teller stars as Vinnie Pazienza in this biopic based on the life of the world champion boxer.

"King Cobra" (DVD/Blu-ray): Christian Slater is the online porn impresario murdered by ambitious rivals (including James Franco) in this fact-based drama.

— Tribune News Service

## INBRIEF

### Former Heisman Trophy winner coming to Milwaukee for 'Chicago'

Eddie George, who played nine years in the NFL after winning the Heisman Trophy in 1995, will make his touring debut in the Tony Award-winning show, "Chicago," April 25-30 at the Marcus Center in Milwaukee.

George will play the role of Billy Flynn. Tickets went on sale Friday.

In 2012, George created the theatrical troupe, Actors by George.

"Chicago" won six Tony Awards in 1997, including Best Musical Revival and also won the Grammy Award for Best Musical Cast Recording.

For more information, visit [www.chicagothemusical.com](http://www.chicagothemusical.com).



George

### First Stage Young Company to premiere 'TXT U L8R'

First Stage Young Company, a training program for advanced high school actors and actresses, will present "TXT U L8R" from March 10-19 at the Milwaukee Youth Arts Center, 325 W. Walnut St., Milwaukee.

According to a news release, "Set in a high school, the story explores communication in the digital age and questions what happens when our reliance on texting and the ease of non face-to-face communication is put to the test."

The cast includes Hubertus' Grace Becker and Germantown's Hope Riesterer.

For more information or to get tickets, visit [www.firststage.org](http://www.firststage.org) or call 414-267-2961.

### Milwaukee theater to host veterans-themed showcase

Several military veteran performers and artists will showcase their skill at Veterans Light Up the Arts on March 2 at the Milwaukee County War Memorial Center.

In addition, the Milwaukee Repertory Theater presents "Grounded," by George Brant from Feb. 22-April 2.

According to a news release, in "Grounded," an ace fighter pilot finds herself grounded when an unexpected pregnancy puts her career on hold. When she returns to the pilot's seat, she finds that she's now part of the "chair force," flying drones over Afghanistan from the comfort of a trailer in Nevada.

For more information or tickets call 414-224-9490 or visit [www.MilwaukeeRep.com](http://www.MilwaukeeRep.com).