

**National Public Radio**

**Day to Day**

September 10, 2004

**Analysis: Re-enactment of Robert Kennedy's visit to eastern Kentucky**

Edition: 4:00-5:00 PM

Estimated printed pages: 3

Article Text:

ALEX CHADWICK, host:

This is DAY TO DAY. I'm Alex Chadwick.

In 1968, Robert F. Kennedy traveled deep into eastern Kentucky. It was for work. He was a Democratic senator from New York and chairman of a subcommittee that watched over President Lyndon Johnson's war on poverty. In the town of Prestonsburg, he talked with citizens in a room at the courthouse.

(Soundbite of 1968 audiotape)

Senator ROBERT F. KENNEDY: It's unacceptable in this country in 1968 that we should have this kind of poverty, and I pledge to you that while I'm in the Senate of the United States that I'm going to work to ensure that everybody has a decent living here in eastern Kentucky.

(Soundbite of applause)

CHADWICK: Robert Kennedy's trip was in February of 1968. One month later he would announce he was running for president. Four months later he would be assassinated. This week in Kentucky, the RFK fact-finding trip is being re-created as performance art. Theater director John Malpede, who likes to work with real history and real people, has pulled all this together and this morning from the town of Whitesburg, he spoke with DAY TO DAY's Noah Adams.

NOAH ADAMS reporting:

John Malpede, tell us how you came to this idea of re-creating this RFK tour.

Mr. JOHN MALPEDE (Theater Director): I'm very interested in the notion of citizens having a voice. And in this case, what Kennedy did is he used his senatorial position and celebrity to provide a platform for people here to talk about what was important to them here. So now this provides a platform for people who--citizens of today to have that and also to reflect on the words of engaged citizens of 34 years ago.

ADAMS: And this morning, you're in Whitesburg, Kentucky, at a pancake breakfast and styling party. What is the styling party?

Mr. MALPEDE: We've acquired an overwhelming quantity of old clothes that! are '60s and we have the Whitesburg Beauty School. Also some folks are over there getting serious beehives. Because the concept is about using that moment as a mirror to the current moment, it's carrying over to the styling. So some people will be watching the whole thing attired in 2004 and some people will be involved and/or in the audience as 1968.

ADAMS: You are using an actor to play RFK named Jack Faust, local fellow. How's he doing?

Mr. MALPEDE: He's doing fabulously. In reality he's a lawyer and that doesn't hurt.

ADAMS: Also I want to speak with Nell Fields, who's helping you. Can we speak with her on the phone?

Mr. MALPEDE: Absolutely.

ADAMS: Thank you.

Mr. MALPEDE: Thank you.

Ms. NELL FIELDS: Hello.

ADAMS: Hi, Ms. Fields.

Ms. FIELDS: Hi.

ADAMS: It's Noah Adams in Los Angeles. Now you were there when RFK came in 1968?

Ms. FIELDS: Yes. I was born and raised in Letcher County and my father drove my sister and myself and a friend to Neon to the Senate hearings even though he was a Republican and didn't go into the building. He sat in the truck so that we could go and take part.

ADAMS: He wouldn't go in the building because he...

Ms. FIELDS: No. He stayed in the truck.

ADAMS: Oh, goodness. What's been the response there this time to this re-creation?

Ms. FIELDS: I think the response this time is as powerful as what was happening in '68, when the throngs of people were in the streets to welcome him and were so excited about it. And in my work here of trying to organize this, it's been such an easy process to get people involved because they're as excited and eager about having this come, just to go back to that. And, you know, well, Kennedy left a wonderful legacy that we're

just seeing come back to life a little bit now where people are able to go back and look at it again. So...

ADAMS: It sounds like fun there.

Ms. FIELDS: It's a lot of fun here. And, you k! now, the excitement of being dressed in period dress and going back to being a 16-year-old again with your friends is really fun.

ADAMS: What are you wearing?

Ms. FIELDS: Well, I didn't get to do that. I have to be Ms. Ann Raider, who's a little bit older than that.

ADAMS: Oh, I see.

Ms. FIELDS: And I'm wearing a very nice-looking suit. Ann Raider was the court reporter who transcribed the Senate hearing, so that's my job today. I have to be a little bit more dignified, you know.

ADAMS: I understand.

Ms. FIELDS: Yeah.

ADAMS: Thank you, Nell Fields, for talking with us and give our thanks to John Malpede as well.

Ms. FIELDS: Thank you very much.

ADAMS: Nell Fields and John Malpede talking with us from Whitesburg, Kentucky.

They're helping organize the RFK in EKY re-creation tour, re-creating Robert Kennedy's 1968 tour of eastern Kentucky.

CHADWICK: DAY TO DAY's Noah Adams.

Copyright ©2004 National Public Radio®. All rights reserved. No quotes from the materials contained herein may be used in any media without attribution to National Public Radio. This transcript may not be reproduced in whole or in part without prior written permission. For further information, please contact NPR's Permissions Coordinator at (202) 513-2030.

Record Number: 200409101604