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BLOODY BILL RIDES: A bloody good show worthy of a statewide tour

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Musical Civil War re-enactment should take to the road

COLUMBIA, 2/20/13 (Review) -- A clever spin on the Civil War Re-enactment that played in Columbia three weeks ago ought to go on the road: St. Louis, Kansas City, Springfield, [Thespian Hall in Boonville](#), and given its educational content, the [Miller Performing Arts Center](#) in Jefferson City.

And so on, to towns and cities big and small.

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Part of this year's [University Concert Series](#), "[Bloody Bill Rides: The True Story About The Man Who Led The Outlaw Josey Wales and Started the Missouri-Kansas Border War](#)," blended three performing arts motifs -- narration, music, and film -- to bring alive a re-enactment of the Border War that helped start the Civil War and the Kansas man behind much of it, [Bill Anderson](#).

[At the Missouri Theatre Feb. 1](#), Master of Ceremony [Richard Hauschild](#) introduced each motif: narrators [Jim Robertson](#) and [Noel Crowson](#), who moved the years-long story from town to town and battle to battle; softer moments through instrumental ballads and songs from [Cathy Barton](#) and [Dave Para](#); rousing battle and flight scenes accompanied by [The Blood Brother Band's](#) heavy metal and rock music; all played live against filmed re-enactments on a screen across the stage.

The brainchild of [James Chris Edwards](#), the packed-house performance revealed, with some surprising subtlety, that the Civil War wasn't just about slavery.

It was also about anti-big government sentiment, and the nagging fear that soldiers from wherever might imprison or kill your women, your children, your grandparents, your kinfolk just as the greatest freedom in history -- the nation's westward expansion -- was in full flower.

The war (and the show) was about confusing and shifting loyalties -- Bill Anderson started out in anti-slavery Kansas, for instance. It was about known outlaws who took to the battlefield for economic gain. It was about how easily lawlessness can explode across a nation, and its devastating impact on the human soul.

The conflict over slavery, the show suggested, was co-opted by power-hungry politicians and greedy opportunists on both the Union and Confederate sides. These lawless types couldn't have cared less about Lincoln's moral imperatives, the abolitionist movement, or the fight to end a national scourge. To them, the battle to end slavery was an opportunity to pillage and plunder.

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Set in Kansas and Missouri, the story centers on "Bloody Bill" Anderson's Civil War experience, coming home to Boone County with the **Centralia Train Massacre and Battle** on September 27, 1864. Early members of Anderson's armed guerilla fighters, Frank and Jesse James were as much local heroes as national outlaws. After Anderson was killed in 1864, surviving members of his group created the equally notorious Younger Gang.

Decidedly pro-Mo, the show never apologizes for Anderson's misdeeds or the terrible violence that erupted in his wake. It simply plays out the tragedy of brother agin brother, gradually revealing that many victims were common men and women, caught in a war of allegiances crumbling all around.

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