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# Fringe review: '1814! The War of 1812 Rock Opera'



Eldon W. Baldwin; Courtesy Rock 1814 Productions - From left to right: Laura Komatinsky (Dolley Madison); Corey Hennessey (George Armistead); Moira Horowitz (Mary Pickersgill); Gaines Johnston (Narrator) in the production "1814! The War of 1812 Rock Opera," presented by Rock 1814 Productions.

By Stephanie Merry, Published: July 12 [E-mail the writer](#)

One glimpse of Dolley Madison, portrayed by Laura Komatinsky in a zebra-print miniskirt and fishnet stockings, and it's clear that the group behind "1814! The War of 1812 Rock Opera" has taken a few liberties with history.

There may not have been much learning going on inside the sweltering Baldacchino tent (unless Satan was, in fact, present during the Battle of Baltimore), but on opening night of the Capital Fringe Festival there was a lot of foot-tapping and head-bobbing.

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The rock opera, conceived by David Dudley and Dave Israel, recounts the weeks leading up to the Battle of Baltimore, including the burning of the White House and Mary Pickersgill's creation of the Star-Spangled Banner. While the story's narrator sings soft strains and one ditty about war hawks sounds delightfully down-home, the majority of the music is loud and hard, inspired by the likes of AC/DC and other headbangers from the 1970s and '80s.

The mood is tongue-in-cheek, with Dolley crooning "I'm No Cupcake" as she rescues George Washington's portrait and George Armistead requesting Pickersgill sew a "big ass flag."

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George Cockburn's British henchmen look hilariously maniacal, releasing cartoonish laughter, and Cockburn's final showdown with American hero Samuel Smith is essentially a sing-off.

This being Fringe, there were some technical issues with the sound: The instrumental music often overwhelmed the singers. Luckily, the group's programs contained the hard-to-discern lyrics. There is some sense that the talented crew behind "1814!" would have been better served by a

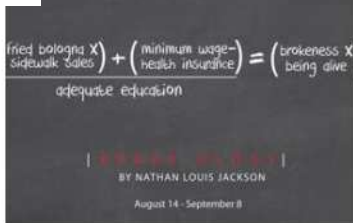
different venue. Their music, moves and impressive voices sometimes seemed too big for the tent.

A lot of Fringe productions have a work-in-progress feel, and "1814!" is no exception. Some dance moves need to be honed, some transitions could be smoother. Regardless, the production's strobe lights, fog machine and costume changes indicate that perhaps the group hasn't merely outgrown a venue: Maybe it's on its way to outgrowing Fringe.

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