

Theater: 'JFK' Recalled

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By HOWARD THOMPSON

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The real beauty of "JFK" is that this one-man "show" shares even more than it projects the image of John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Without an iota of theater razzle-dazzle, on Sunday's opening at the Circle in the Square made its point with quiet, uncommon persuasion. Reading the predominantly on-the-record utterances of President Kennedy for the 90-minute program, a young actor named Jeremiah Collins has also visually slipped into his skin.

The image most of us knew from photographs, television and radio now traverses a rectangle of gray carpet holding two lecterns, an office desk and a rocker. Occasionally he steps before a skeletal White House facade at the rear.

This is not a cozy evening of homey memories, Kennedy-style. An easy pitfall has been avoided. Rather, we are generally alone with the man and his public utterances, starting with his first Presidential press conference, as a cluster of "reporters" fires questions from the audience. This device, used frequently, works surprisingly well.

And so it should for the technical device of the evening, a background of un-stereotyped pictures flashed on a rear screen, a contemporary sound-track and even a ticking clock, is tastefully effective. Here is a man to remember, whether making his inaugural address, happily reading letters from children, confidently addressing Congress and the United Nations or wryly squelching a woman reporter. Except for one casual reference to his wife, no mention is made of the President's immediate family.

The evening clips off with a pistol shot and briefly, sounds of the funeral procession. We are spared "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," mercifully and tastefully.

The program's "writing and adaptation" are credited to Mr. Collins and Mark Williams, the latter sharing the staging with Walt DeFaria. David F. Segal handled the scenery and lighting and Ken Howard the still photographs.

"JFK" is not drama. Nor is it a show. But to see and hear it, with tightening throat, is to face what we had, what we lost and perhaps what we were.