

AISLE SAY San Francisco

AROUND THE WORLD IN 80 DAYS

Adapted by Mark Brown from Jules Verne's novel

Presented by San Jose Repertory Theatre

Directed by Michael Butler

At San Jose Repertory Theatre

101 Paseo de San Antonio, San Jose, CA / (408) 367-7255

Reviewed by [Judy Richter](#)

San Jose Repertory Theatre's production of "**Around the World in 80 Days**" is sheer delight. It's not your usual holiday fare, yet it's upbeat and joyful enough to blend into the spirit of the holidays. Playwright **Mark Brown** based his adaptation on the novel by **Jules Verne**. The novel also inspired a popular 1958 movie starring **David Niven**. I recently watched a tape of it and was grateful for the fast-forward function to get through the seemingly endless scenes involving various forms of transportation and scenery.

Brown's adaptation and San Jose Rep's production do away with that excess of reality and instead rely on the audience's imagination, the actors' skill and director **Michael Butler's** ingenious staging. This version uses only five actors, with three of them creating an array of characters. Only **Matthew Floyd Miller** as the central character, Phileas Fogg, and **Gendell Hernandez** as his servant, Jean Passepartout, maintain their identities throughout the two-act play.

Butler's clever staging is facilitated by **Kelly Tighe's** set, which features a turntable operated by stage hands, red curtains on the side, gears atop a proscenium, four desk chairs and large numbers 7, 6, 5, 4, 3 and 2 arranged in a semicircle downstage. During the course of Fogg and Passepartout's journey, these numbers convert into props and set pieces like an elephant and train. **Todd Roehrman** outfits all of the actors in unisex jump suits accented with stripes. These costumes serve as a base for additions that allow the actors to quickly change character. **Kurt Landisman's** lighting and **Jeff Mockus'** sound complement the stage magic.

Miller is a wonderfully precise, sure-of-himself Fogg, who bets several members of the Reform Club that he can go around the world in 80 days, quite a feat in 1872. However, he also reveals the transformation that Fogg gradually undergoes because of the experiences he has and the people he meets. Hernandez has the physical skills needed for the resourceful, cheerfully naive Passepartout. **Mark Farrell** and **Howard Swain** both create a panoply of characters. Swain's main one is Detective Fix of Scotland Yard, who trails Fogg and Passepartout on the mistaken belief that Fogg has robbed the Bank of England. **Anna Bullard** also creates several characters, primarily Aouda, the Indian woman rescued from immolation by Passepartout and Fogg. She joins their little band and helps with Fogg's transformation.

The overall result is a rewarding evening of entertainment with lots of laughter, thanks to Butler et al.

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