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## Staged History

Camelot Theatre Company director Genise says an all-male cast for '1776' was a challenge

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Left to right: Paul Jones, David Gabriel and Tyler Ward play Ben Franklin, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, respectively, in Camelot Theatre Company's "1776."

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By **Angela Decker**

for Revels  
Posted: 8:40 AM June 28, 2012

Camelot Theatre Company is doing everything big for its 2012 season.

From the grand production values of "Gypsy," to the showy voices of Steve Lawrence and Eydie Gormé in its recent spotlight. The theater went even bigger with its current production, casting 22 men and two women in "1776," a musical comedy about the country's founding fathers' determination to make the Unites States a working democracy.

"1776" is no dry civics lesson. The song-filled show aims for big laughs, but artistic director Livia Genise did choose the play because of its relevance in an election year, particularly its emphasis on the hard-won compromises these historical giants made to create and sign the Declaration of Independence.

Compromise also is the key to managing a cast of 24, all with conflicting schedules and other demands on their time. "Scheduling rehearsals was definitely a challenge," Genise says. She had all the actors fill out a form listing their schedules and possible conflicts, then worked with the dates to create a rehearsal schedule that accommodated almost everyone.

Still, life often gets in the way of the best-laid plans.

"I lost three or four people just going into rehearsal," Genise says.

One of the lead actors had his son's graduation on the same day as a major tech rehearsal, and another actor had to quit after a job layoff. Fortunately, Genise has experience directing political plays with large casts, such as "All the King's Men" at Camelot.

"I always try to work around the actors' schedules," she says. "It usually works out."

Scheduling wasn't the only hurdle Genise had to overcome.

"One hard thing is having a nearly all-male show," she says. "With 22 men, there is a lot of testosterone in the room, and with a woman director, it can sometimes feel difficult.

"There was some friction happening, and we all had to sit down and talk. I said, 'Camelot is about service. We are in service to each other, then to the audience and community. What happens backstage effects what happens onstage, so remember why you are here.'

"Camelot is unlike any theater I ever worked in 44 years," Genise says. "We are supportive of each other even in difficult times. When we have a problem, we work it out."

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The cast of "1776" is diverse in terms of age and experience, so the lines of communication have to be both open and positive, she adds.

"I have some people who have only been onstage a couple of times, and I have some seasoned actors," Genise says. "I need to communicate what we need in a positive way to everyone."

This is Camelot's second staging of "1776," bringing back a show that was well-received six years ago, with David Gabriel reprising his role as John Adams.

The play runs through Friday, July 22. Curtain is at 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays and 2 p.m. Sundays. A July 4 matinee is set for 2 p.m., and there will be performances at 8 p.m. Mondays, July 2, 9 and 16. Tickets cost \$25, \$23 for seniors and students.

Camelot Theatre is at 101 Talent Ave., Talent. For tickets, see [www.camelottheatre.org](http://www.camelottheatre.org) or call 541-535-5250.

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