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'1776' opens at Camelot Theatre

The musical comedy takes a look at American independence

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Left to right: Paul Jones, David Gabriel and Tyler Ward play Benjamin Franklin, John Adams and Thomas Jefferson, respectively, in the Camelot Theatre production of "1776."

Photo courtesy of Steve Sutfin

By John Darling

for the Mail Tribune

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Steeped in American history and set during a time when the country's founding fathers were striving in earnest to get the Declaration of Independence signed and create the world's first working democracy, "1776" is a musical comedy that combines all of the dry stuff of textbooks with "brilliantly funny humor," says the show's director, Livia Genise.

"The show is true to historical fact and thrusts the audience into a time in America when the government wasn't doing so well," Genise says. "It's something that audiences need to hear during an election year. We've lost something since the Declaration of Independence was signed."

"1776" opened on Broadway in 1969 and ran for three years, capturing a Tony Award for best musical and a Drama Desk Award for outstanding book of a musical.

Camelot Theatre's production will preview at 8 p.m. Wednesday and Thursday, June 20-21. Tickets to the June 20 preview cost \$25, and proceeds will benefit Arc of Jackson County. Tickets to the June 21 preview cost \$12.

The show opens Friday, June 22, and runs through July 22. Curtain is at 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays and 2 p.m. Sundays. A pay-what-you-can performance is set for 8 p.m. Wednesday, June 27. 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. Regular tickets cost \$25, \$23 for students and seniors.

Camelot Theatre is at 101 Talent Ave., Talent.

While meetings at Independence Hall in Philadelphia would ordinarily be rather monotonous affairs, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and other founding fathers would have been executed if their Declaration of Independence had been deemed treasonous.

"But the whole thing comes off funny, informative and inspiring," says David Gabriel, who plays the irascible and unpopular Adams of Massachusetts. "Adams is the central champion of independence, and he's giving his all to persuade anxious, fearful delegates to the cause."

"Adams is a hero to me, actually," Gabriel says, who played the same role when Camelot did the

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production six years ago. "I have a strong idea he was inspired by something within him — that the separation from England had to happen."

It's an all-guy cast, except for the wives of Adams and Jefferson. Presila Quinby plays Abigail Adams, a woman who is her husband's counterpart, running the farm while he's gone for long periods.

"They're a great team," Quinby says. "She's very smart and stubborn."

John and Abigail are deeply and affectionately committed to each other, a theme reflected and enlarged in their commitment to help form the United States of America.

The musical's songs are based on actual love letters between the couple, Genise says.

The musical shows the same sort of brutal and far-reaching machinations and tradeoffs that Congress grapples with today, but in 1776, it was about molasses, rum, slavery. Americans profited by exporting the two commodities across the Atlantic and importing slaves.

Tickets are available at www.camelottheatre.org or by calling 541-535-5250.

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