

Celebrate '1776' with South Valley Community Theater

Gilroy Dispatch

Posted: Thursday, September 7, 2006 12:00 am

by *Kat Teraji*

"Off goes the hair, on comes the air!"

Discourse on virtue and they pass by in droves. Whistle and dance the shimmy, and you've got an audience. – Diogenes (404-323 B.C.E.)

Though much of the writing in the Declaration of Independence is Thomas Jefferson's, much of the contribution is Benjamin Franklin's. Our nation's ideas of independence owe much to the man who invented both swim fins and bifocals.

While variations of many of his aphorisms have become part of our culture ("Haste makes waste," "A penny saved is a penny earned"), some of his lesser known advice is just as wise, such as "Keep your eyes wide open before marriage, half shut afterwards," "Love your neighbor; yet don't pull down your hedge," and "Beware of the young doctor and the old barber."

Franklin was famous for his observations and inventions and for creating and printing in his own newspaper (the Pennsylvania Gazette) the first political cartoon ever published in the Colonies (May 10, 1754). "The greatest monarch on the proudest throne, is oblig'd to sit upon his own arse," Franklin said as he worked on the committee of five that helped to draft the Declaration of our Independence in 1776.

Part of this story of how our nation came to be is portrayed in the 1969 Tony Award Winner for Best Musical, "1776," which is coming Sept. 15 to the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse for a four-week run.

The South Valley Civic Theatre troupe of actors has spent many weekends building a set that transforms the Playhouse into what is known as Independence Hall in Philadelphia, the place where the Declaration of Independence was signed, and the Liberty Bell first rang out so loud and clear that the sound reached the shores of England.

Written by a history teacher, "1776" is lively, comical, and very musical. Each voice in the show seems stronger than the last as the debate rages in the Second Continental Congress over whether all 13 colonies should indeed adopt the resolution on independence. If only more history classes were this entertaining!

When local thespian Charles Krahenbuhl found out he would be reprising the role of Franklin, whom he first portrayed in the 1976 production of "1776," he also knew that Rev. Alison Berry of Gilroy's United Methodist Church was in need of a new furnace before winter. Since he

would be required to shave his beard for the role of Benjamin Franklin, why not kill two birds with one stone by making his beard-shearing into a fund-raiser for the much-needed furnace?

The fundraiser fits perfectly with the interests of Franklin when you consider that he was also the inventor of the first heat-efficient iron furnace stove (called the Franklin), which warmed homes less dangerously and with less wood than the conventional fireplaces used for heating at the time. Because he had invented the stove to help improve society, he refused to take out a patent on his design.

On Sunday, Aug. 27, a crowd gathered to watch 30 years worth of Charles Krahenbuhl's beard fall to the floor. Pledges in the furnace drive so far have reached \$800, with more still coming in. "Off goes the hair, on comes the air!" Mrs. Krahenbuhl quipped.

Come spend an evening in song and dance with our nation's founders as you've never seen them! Show dates are Sept. 15, 16, 22, 23, 29, 30, and Oct. 6 and 7, all at 8pm. There are also two Saturday matinees, Sept. 23 and 30, at 2pm. Prices are \$15, with students and seniors admitted for \$12. For more information, visit www.svct.org, or call (408) 683-2817.

There will be a preview of "1776" Sept. 14 in Gilroy at the United Methodist Church on 7600 Church St. It will be performed by the Honorable Benjamin Franklin and Honorable John Adams at 1pm. Four tickets to the production in Morgan Hill will be given away at the preview, and tickets will also be available for advance purchase. For further information, call Eunice Coates (408) 779-3003 or Jan Paterson (408) 842-3737.

A Backstage Visit With South Valley Civic Theatre

Gilroy Dispatch

Posted: Thursday, September 21, 2006 12:00 am

by *Kat Teraji*

"If you wou'd not be forgotten As soon as you are dead and rotten,

Either write things worth reading, Or do things worth the writing." – Benjamin Franklin (signer of the Declaration of Independence, 1776)

In the old Kelly Moore Paint warehouse off of Monterey Street, 28 actors move about, shuffling script pages, eating snacks, and blocking out the steps they will make as they speak their lines. They are dressed in jeans, cutoffs, and sweat jackets, but soon they will be fitted with the costumes and wigs they will wear in the musical they are rehearsing, which is called "1776."

Abigail Adams (Tammy Piper) seems to already know all of her lines as she works her way through a scene, and Michael Lund appears to be channeling Thomas Jefferson as he practices his lines, his long face and red hair already lending credence to his Jeffersonian resemblance even without wig or costume.

When Peter Mandel (John Adams), Bill Heiser (Richard Henry Lee), Charles Krahenbuhl (Benjamin Franklin), and Tammy Piper (Abigail Adams) gave an afternoon preview of the play on Sept. 14, they generated a lot of laughter and applause from the Uvas Valley Chapter of the California Retired Teachers Association.

As "1776" producer Kathy Tom balanced her grandchild on one arm and signaled the actors to come in for the next scene with the other, it was clear what a family affair this production is. Her daughter, Colleen Chipman is directing the musical, her husband Larry is the set construction manager as well as an actor in the show, and daughter Nicole is a producer as well.

"We love doing it as a family," Kathy Tom says. "My husband and I met in choir, and we discovered we both have a joy of theater. This way we're all together. The laundry may not get done, but we have so much fun together as a family."

It seems everyone in the cast wears more than one hat in bringing this story to life. The show has been in the planning stages for more than a year now, and for the last couple of months, the actors have been working every weekend to build the set, not to mention three nights a week of rehearsal.

At the end of one of the rehearsals, director Colleen Chipman reminded the actors, "Those of you who don't have hair yet need to stay." The show's requirement of such a large volume of wigs adds significantly to the cost for this non-profit group of players. They are getting the wigs from a place called "Alladin's Lamp" in Willow Glen. Some of the actors have pitched in to help with the cost, while others are growing their own hair and using extensions.

When it came time to move the set from the paint warehouse to the theatre in Morgan Hill, about twenty of these hard-working actors showed up to take it apart. They unscrewed the walls and carefully laid all the parts in the bed of a small semi and the trucks they'd brought to the parking lot. The pieces were all numbered like a jigsaw and then bolted tightly back together and braced when they were set up at the theatre.

They recycled as much material as possible from previous plays as they recreated the old State House (now known as Independence Hall) in Philadelphia.

For more than 35 years, South Valley Civic Theatre has been committed to enriching the arts scene and entertaining our community with quality productions like "1776." Come on out and see their latest creation at the Morgan Hill Community Playhouse at 17000 Monterey Road.

Show dates are Sept. 22, 23, 29, 30, and Oct. 6 and 7, all at 8pm. There are also two Saturday matinees, Sept. 23 and 30, at 2pm. Prices are \$15, with students and seniors admitted for \$12. For more information, visit www.svct.org or call (408) 683-2817.

1776: America's History on Stage

Morgan Hill Times

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From left, Michael Lund, Bruce Bowman and Charles Krahenbuhl, play the rolls of Thomas Jefferson, Roger Sherman and Benjamin Franklin in the scene 'But, Mr. Adams...' during final dress rehearsals for the play 1776, put on by the South Valley Civic Theatre at the Morgan Hill Playhouse Thursday night.



Lora Schraft

Manuel Silva, 17, gets help doing his hair from Director Colleen Chipman, for his role as Samuel Chase."

A Stirring 1776 at South Valley Civic Theatre

With our country divided over issues like the Iraq conflict and foreign and domestic policies, the musical *1776* proves a potent reminder that this nation has always been split between rival factions and ideologies. In June and July of 1776, it was North and South, freedom or slavery, independence from England or bowing to the king. Now it's too many issues to name, but all as deadly serious now as it was then. The answer then, as it will be now, is compromise to achieve a shared vision. And sometimes, as with the issue of slavery, compromise means shaking hands with the devil.

The show tells the story of the wranglings of the Continental Congress in the hot, Philadelphia summer of 1776 as representatives of the 13 fractious colonies debate declaring independence from Great Britain. The well-known icons of American history — John Adams (a splendidly peevish **Peter Mandel**), Thomas Jefferson

(**Michael Lund**, who with his laconic delivery, lanky frame and reddish hair, is ideally cast),

Benjamin Franklin (a gleefully arch **Charles**

Krahenbuhl reprising a role he first created 30 years ago) — are all

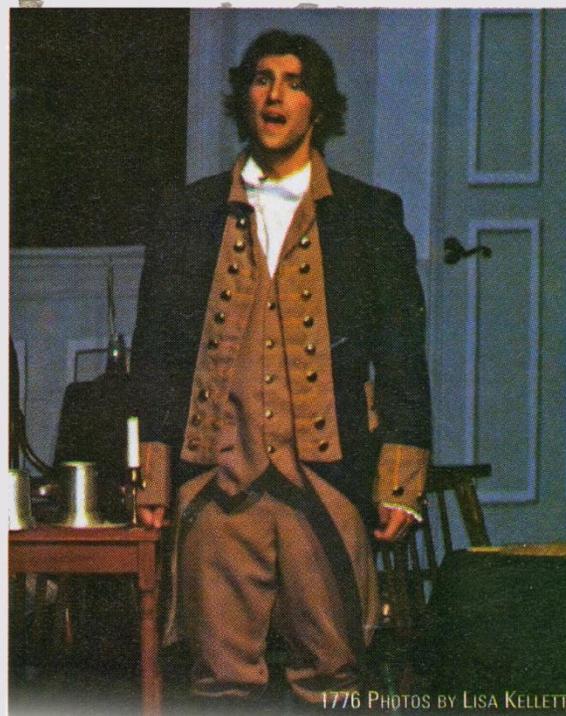
there as well as the lesser known Rutledge (an aristocratic **James Chipman**) of

South Carolina and Richard Henry Lee (the amazingly tall and exuberant **Bill Heiser**) among others.

In the two female roles, **Tami Piper** as the tart-tongued Abigail Adams and **Ariane Borgia** as the randy Martha Jefferson, bring a refreshing breeze of femininity to the male dominated cast.

The best moment of the evening belongs to **Antonio Silva** as George Washington's courier when he sings the touching lament "Momma Look Sharp" about a young man dying in the earliest violent exchanges between the British Army and the rebellious colonists.

With *1776* South Valley Civic Theatre presents an ambitious and accomplished staging of the 1969 musical filled with humor and music. It's also an especially moving reminder of what it means to be an American, when, at the end, each of the delegates bravely steps up to sign the Declaration thereby risking their lives, their fortunes and their sacred honor. *1776* runs through Oct. 7 at the Morgan Hill Playhouse.



1776 PHOTOS BY LISA KELLETT