



'Liberty Smith' Turns History On Its Ear

by Craig Brockman

Once in a while you have the good fortune of catching a musical in the works that reminds you how wonderful this art form can truly be. Such is the case with the abbreviated concert version of "Liberty Smith" which had two performances at the Beckett Theatre as part of NYMF on September 22.

History was never my strong subject growing up. I always preferred visiting places and learning "hands on" rather than from a textbook. Marc Madnick and Eric R. Cohen, co-writers of the book of "Liberty Smith" made learning fun...and funny. Michael Weiner and Adam Abraham add both pathos and clever wit to the show with their memorable toe-tapping music and lyrics respectively. Joe Calarco provided the swift directing.

So who or what is Liberty Smith? Think Forrest Gump meets 1776. Only not exactly. Cole Porter might have written "Brush Up Your Shakespeare" but the creative team behind "Liberty Smith" want the audience to believe that they don't know the true history of America, because a very important person has been omitted from milestones during the period from when George Washington was born until he took office as president (the 18th Century).

When Benjamin Franklin was flying his kite and needed something to weigh it down, who thought to put the key on the string? Why Liberty Smith, of course! And who was it that actually made the infamous ride shouting "The British Are Coming" while Paul Revere was passed out from a bit too much at the local pub? Liberty Smith! When Thomas Jefferson had writer's block, who helped draft the Declaration of Independence? You guessed it!

The premise is executed with precision weaving this fictional character in and out of history lessons we should know by heart complete with song and dance. And while the audience never knows how Liberty will influence the events at hand, the show isn't just about the device. Madnick and Cohen have brought to life people we know and some we don't against the backdrop of a very exciting period of time in our history. They also weave together a very touching love story the lends itself to some wonderful songs such as "Two Dreams".

The cast included such Broadway notables as Kevin Earley as the title character plus Derrick Baskin (Spelling Bee), Danny Gurwin (Little Women), Diana Kaarina (Les Mis), Stacie Morgain Lewis (Wicked), Mary Stout (Beauty and the Beast), Steve Rosen (Spamalot) among others.

The abbreviated concert version ran about an hour (which flew by faster than recess) but if what was presented at the Beckett is any indication, the show in full is sure to be a crowd pleaser - and educational too!