

Around the Hill

rollcall.com/ath | News and personalities in the Capitol community



Courtesy T. Charles Erickson



Courtesy Scott Suchman

Fictional Founding Father Sings New Version of History

BY MACKENZIE WEINGER

George Washington never claimed he couldn't tell a lie. Benjamin Franklin didn't fly a kite during his famous lightning experiment. And Paul Revere drank too much to make the famous midnight ride himself.

But there's another revolutionary who does take credit for some pivotal moments in the country's history. Even better, he sings about them.

Meet Liberty Smith, the forgotten Founding Father and fictional hero of a new musical of the same name at Ford's Theatre.

"There's something so exciting about seeing George Washington, Betsy Ross, Benedict Arnold, Benjamin Franklin and Paul Revere live on the stage," lyricist Adam Abraham said. "That's a fun way to literally animate history. The story is seen through the eyes of our character, Liberty Smith, as he meets and influences these historical characters."

But don't expect a typical history lesson. Liberty Smith, played by Geoff Packard, dreams of becoming a legendary hero like Don Quixote or Odysseus as he embarks on his adventures through American history.

"He thinks if he can be one of those guys, he can

escape the life of being a lowly planter in Virginia in the 18th century," Packard said. "He's also in love with one of the prettiest girls in town, who gives him an unattainable task — to rid the colonies of the British. She tells him, 'If you can do that, I'll marry you,' so he sets out on his quest."



Courtesy T. Charles Erickson

Geoff Packard as Liberty Smith and Kelly Karbacz as Emily Andrews star in the Ford's Theatre world premiere of "Liberty Smith."

Smith soon finds himself at the center of the Revolution. He discovers electricity with Franklin, gets caught up in the Boston Tea Party and even writes the Declaration of Independence with Thomas Jefferson.

"I like to think of it as an American fairy tale," Packard said. "We took a lot of liberties — no pun intended — with American history in the hopes that it captures people's imaginations in a different way with some of these major players in American history. Especially in Revolutionary history, these characters can feel like portraits on a wall or faces on dollar bills. Hopefully, and especially with younger audiences, this can portray these guys as something larger than that in a fun way."

"Liberty Smith" — which had gone through previous incarnations as a film script and animated movie before settling onto the stage — runs through May 21 at Ford's Theatre. The theater discovered the piece in 2006, inviting the creators to host a workshop for the production. Soon, the plan was in place for the musical to make its world premiere at the famous site.

"I think people at the theater and my collaborators and I thought it was a good match — doing a birth-of-a-

nation story here in our nation's capital seemed perfect," Abraham said.

Packard, who previously starred in D.C.'s Shakespeare Theatre Company's production of "Candide," said the District's connection to American history makes it an ideal place for the musical's debut.

"It's sort of strange. You walk out of rehearsal and you see the Washington Monument," Packard noted. "You're constantly reminded in Washington of these historical giants that are a huge part of 'Liberty Smith.'"

Abraham said he hopes the production's mix of fiction and truth inspires audience members to delve into the history of the American Revolution.

"The Founders never go out of style," Abraham said. "Taking a look at them in a somewhat comical and skewed way may be helpful as our country approaches 300 years."

And, Abraham added, the production offers those who work inside the Beltway a fun — and song-filled — political reminder.

"What's fascinating about seeing this piece in Washington, D.C., in 2011 is that we are re-creating a time that precedes the partisan politics of the present," Abraham said. "There was no division of left and right — all of that came later. What we are creating was when the only us vs. them was us, the colonists, against the rulers in Great Britain. Our characters didn't always see eye to eye, but they were unified by a vision of what was right for the people."

Tickets for "Liberty Smith" can be purchased at the Ford's Theatre box office or at ticketmaster.com.