

Leisure World News – Seal Beach

*“1776” a revival of the musical, music and lyrics by Sherman Edwards and book by Peter Stone. Now being presented by Musical Theatre West at the Carpenter Performing Arts Center, 6200 Atherton, Long Beach, through July 25, 562-856-1999 x4, [www.musical.org](http://www.musical.org) Ticket prices: \$30-\$80*

#### PATRIOTIC “1776” LANDS TRIUMPHANTLY AT MUSICAL THEATRE WEST IN LONG BEACH

“You see we piddle, twiddle, and resolve, not one damn thing do we solve. Piddle twiddle, and resolve, nothing’s ever solved, in fowl, fetid, fuming, foggy, filthy, Philadelphia.” Those lyrics are sung by John Adams in the opening sequence of the musical, “1776”, now being presented by Musical Theatre West. The lyrics are profound, as we quickly learn that though the musical is set in the year 1776, it is clear that there are similarities to this Continental Congress and all the ones that were to follow it for over 200 years.

On the surface “1776” is the retelling of the struggle of our founding Fathers in doing something never before accomplished in the world’s history. The upstart thirteen colonies were actually proposing a breakage with Mother England, or a revolution. “1776” shows us the conflicts between the various members of Congress as they debate whether or not they should declare their independence from England. Most of the historical figures are here for our viewing: John Adams (Steven Glaudini), Benjamin Franklin (Steve Vinovich), Thomas Jefferson (John Bison), John Hancock (Tom Shelton), John Dickinson (Andy Umberger), and Edward Rutledge (Robert J. Townsend).

“1776” is more than just a retelling of the days leading to the Declaration of Independence. Creators Sherman Edwards, a historian, and Peter Stone have given us a musical that presents the founding Fathers as historical figures, but also as human beings with the same problems that we in the audience have and can relate to over 200 years later. We learn about Franklin’s lascivious ways with women and his battle with the gout. We see that Jefferson was frustrated regarding the absence of his young wife and learn about his playing of the violin. All are humans first with human faults and historical figures secondly.

And then there is John Adams, who is “obnoxious and disliked”. Adams is the thorn in this rose bush. He stubbornly rants and raves about independency to the other members of Congress. He is tenacious in his cause. He was so tenacious that for years he was one of the least understood and honored of the founding Fathers. But “1776” and subsequent television serials and novels have put Adams in a better light, and he is now regarded as one of our most honest politicians and Presidents in our illustrious history.

The production we are given here is typical of the quality we have come to expect from Musical Theatre West. As Adams, Steve Glaudini goes full throttle in the “obnoxious and disliked” portions of the script, but also balances it with the tender moments provided by the creators, especially in the letters exchanged between Adams and his wife Abigail (the always reliable

Tami Tappan Damiano). Glaudini's is an outstanding performance that walks that line between drama and comedy, continually stepping on one side or the other, without losing the balance required or stepping too far in either direction.

"1776" is not all fun and games. The serious side of war is also poignantly revealed. A highlight in any production of "1776" is the tear jerking anti-war song, "Momma, Look Sharp". The song is delivered by a courier (Michael Kean) who describes a mother searching after a battle for her dead son. Kean delivers a knock out punch and got a deserved rousing response from the opening night audience.

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize and Best Musical Tony Award in 1969, "1776" still receives terrific responses from audiences. It sometimes seems that our contemporary congressional members "piddle, twiddle, and resolve" and don't seem to fix our problems. However, as "1776" continually points out, the system we have is better than the alternatives. Go see "1776". It will put a jolt into your pride and patriotism for living in the greatest country that history has ever seen. - *Larry Blake*