

Highly recommended!!!!



1776

Music and Lyrics by Sherman Edwards: Book by Peter Stone: Based on concept by Sherman Edwards

Sung in English with English Super Titles

Family Information: For all ages over 6! Moderate language. 1776 brings the founding fathers powerfully to life—a wonderful artistic and educational experience about the founding of our nation. The music captures the emotions and tensions of the colonists before America was established as an independent country.

Story in Two Acts

ACT ONE

Scene 1

It is May 8, 1776. In Philadelphia, it is swelteringly hot and humid and incubating horseflies in the stables next to the congressional hall. The Second continental Congress begins its business with John Adams, the representative from Massachusetts, energetically complaining about their ineffectiveness in declaring independence; citing America's grievances against King George III. The other delegates, irritated by his constant arguments, insist he sit down. Frustrated by the seemingly insurmountable, Congressional inertia, Adams escapes the chamber and reads a letter from his wife, Abigail. She asks him to finish his business in Philadelphia and return home to her and their sick children. As if his imagination has brought her before him, John asks Abigail if she has organized the women of Boston to make saltpeter (a substance needed for making gunpowder). She tells him, first, he has not told her how to make saltpeter and, second, the women will not make it until he procures dressmaker's pins for them. They end their conversation by pledging themselves to each other. Adams goes off to find Benjamin Franklin.

Scene 2

Adams finds Franklin having his portrait painted. Adams complains that his arguments for independence have not prevailed, Franklin reminds him no colony has ever broken away from its parent country, and points out that Adams is obnoxious and disliked by congress and perhaps independence might be accepted if someone else proposes it. Richard Henry Lee, a delegate from Virginia, arrives and offers to obtain a proposal from the Virginia legislature himself. When Adams questions Lee's ability to accomplish this, Lee explains that his family history makes him the perfect person for the job.

Scene 3

On June 7, 1776, Dr. Lyman Hall, a new delegate from Georgia, arrives in the Congressional Chamber and is greeted by McNair, the congressional custodian. McNair introduces him to the entering delegates, each of whom asks about Georgia's stand on independence. He informs them he believes himself free to keep his personal convictions - personal. Franklin, who suffers from gout, enters limping and is soon followed by Adams. Adams, who has been silent in the congress while waiting for Lee to return with the resolution from the Virginia legislature, is teased by the other delegates as John Hancock, the president of congress, and Charles Thomson, the secretary to the congress, take their places. Hancock gavels the 380th meeting of Congress to order. His first order of business closes off the stores of rum to Stephen Hopkins, delegate from Rhode Island, and introduces Hall to the other delegates. When Thomson notes all members are present except for the New Jersey delegation, Hancock asks Franklin if he knows the reason for their absence. Franklin, whose son William is the royal governor of New Jersey, informs the Congress he and his son have stopped communicating due to their differences over independence. Hancock next asks Thomas Jefferson for the weather report. After reporting the temperature is 87 very humid degrees, he announces he is leaving that night for home.

A courier enters and gives Thomson a communiqué from George Washington, the commander of the Army of the United Colonies. Washington's letter speaks of his fear that his exhausted and under-equipped troops will be unable to stop a large force of British soldiers from attacking New York. If the attack is successful and New York captured, New England will be separated from the other colonies. Colonel Thomas McKean, a delegate from Delaware, complains that Washington's letters are always gloomy and depressing. Hancock asks for new resolutions and as Josiah Bartlett of New Hampshire reads a resolution discouraging extravagance, Richard Henry Lee steps into the chamber. Lee reads the resolution for independence and it is seconded by Adams. As Hancock calls for debate on the resolution, John Dickinson of Pennsylvania makes a motion to indefinitely postpone the question of independence. The motion is seconded by George Read of Delaware, and the entire Congress votes on Dickinson's motion. New York abstains; New Hampshire, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Delaware and Virginias vote to begin debate, while Pennsylvania, North Carolina, South Carolina, Maryland and Georgia vote to post- pone debate; thus leaving the deciding vote to Stephen Hopkins of Rhode Island momentarily outside of the hall. He returns in time to vote for debating the question of Independence. The debate opens and the most vocal delegates state their positions: Dickinson is in favor of petitioning King George III on the colonists' grievances and he is against cutting ties to England through revolt and revolution. Adams and Franklin argue that England has not granted the colonists the full rights of Englishmen and it is too late to reconcile with England; it is a full year since the battles of Lexington and Concord. The delegates from North and South Carolina worry about the power of the individual colonies in any new federation.

As the argument between Dickinson and Adams grows more heated, Caesar Rodney of Delaware, who suffers from cancer, collapses. Col. McKean offers to take him back home. Seeing that the voting majority will go his way, Edward Rutledge of South Carolina moves to vote on independence. To stall the motion, Franklin asks that the resolution be read aloud again. As Thomson is reading it, the New Jersey delegation, led by Reverend John Witherspoon, arrives. Witherspoon informs Congress the New Jersey delegation has been authorized to vote for Independence. Now it looks like the vote will be six for independence, six against (with New York abstaining—as usual) and Adams reminds Hancock that the President of the Congress has the deciding vote in all ties. Dickinson, worried the resolution

might pass, moves that any vote for independence must be passed unanimously. His motion is seconded; the vote produces a tie, which Hancock breaks by voting for a unanimous decision. The vote for independence is called again. Adams now calls for a postponement for time to write a declaration defining the reasons for independence. This motion is seconded; the vote produces another tie, which Hancock breaks by voting for the postponement. He chooses Adams, Franklin, Lee, Roger Sherman of Connecticut and Robert Livingston of New York to write the declaration, announcing it must be written, debated and passed by the beginning of July three weeks away. Lee declines and Hancock appoints Jefferson in his place. Hancock adjourns the session as Jefferson complains he must go home to visit his wife.

All the members of the Declaration Committee dispute who should write it. Franklin suggests Adams, but Adams declines, saying he is too disliked by the other delegates. Adams suggests Franklin, but Franklin declines, saying he is more skilled writing lighter material. Adams turns next to Sherman, who declines by saying he is not a writer at all. Livingston declines, saying he must return to New York to visit his wife and newborn son. Adams turns to Jefferson, who tries to decline by saying that he intends to visit his wife in Virginia. Adams praises Jefferson's writing and quotes his earlier essay, "The Necessity for Taking up Arms." When Jefferson still tries to decline, Adams threatens to use physical force on him, and he thrusts a quill pen in Jefferson's hand. Adams and the others leave as Jefferson walks back to his quarters with the pen.

Scene 4

When Adams and Franklin visit Jefferson a week later to check on his progress, they find him lonely, depressed and uninspired having made no progress. Adams sends for Martha, Jefferson's wife. When she arrives Adams and Franklin ask Martha how a man as quiet as Jefferson won her love. She tells them he plays the violin. Adams again exchanges letters with his wife, Abigail. She asks why he has not sent for her. When he asks her to come to Philadelphia, she tells him she cannot; their children have the measles. They speak of their love and promise to see each other soon. Jefferson is able to complete the first draft of the document, which Adams and Franklin pronounce a work of genius!

Scene 5

It is now June 22 and the Congress is back in session. Delegates read, talk, eat and sleep in the chamber as various committees are formed to deal with congressional correspondence, counterfeit money, and military defeat in Canada. Adams argues with Chase as the courier enters with a message from General Washington. He reports on the poor state of his troops and asks the Congress to send a War Committee to New Jersey to boost morale. As the War Committee (Adams, Franklin and Chase) leave for New Jersey, the other delegates in favor of independence also, leave. Dickinson and the Conservatives dance a minuet and sing of their caution and desire to hold onto their wealth as the courier delivers another message from Washington: the British have taken control of New York Harbor and he fears they may next move on to Philadelphia. The delegates all depart, leaving McNair, the Courier, and another workman in the chamber. The Courier tells them about his two best friends who were killed on the same day.

ACT TWO

Scene 6

Jefferson is waiting outside the chamber as Hancock orders Thomson to read the declaration. Adams and Franklin approach Jefferson to congratulate him on the excellence of the document. Franklin compares the creation of the new country to an egg, which leads the trio to discuss which bird should be the symbol for America. After considering the dove (Jefferson's choice), the turkey (Franklin's choice); they settle on the eagle (Adams's choice).

Scene 7

Thomson completes his reading of the Declaration of Independence as the Congress is in session on June 28; Hancock asks if any delegates want to offer amendments, deletions or alterations. McKean suggests the removal of the word "Scottish" from a sentence referring to the foreign mercenaries used by the British. Reverend Witherspoon suggests the addition of a reference to "Divine Providence." The debate over the changes gets more heated as the days pass: Bartlett wants to confine the complaints against the British to disagreements with King George III, while Sherman wants to remove all mention of Parliament. Jefferson agrees to all these changes, but when Dickinson wants him to remove a reference to King George III as a tyrant, Jefferson refuses. As Hancock is about to call for a vote on the Declaration, Rutledge objects to Jefferson's denunciation of slavery and the slave trade in his list of complaints against King George III. Rutledge defends slavery as a way of life in South Carolina and affirms his belief that slaves are property and not people. He also pointedly mentions that Jefferson himself is a slaveholder. Jefferson announces he has decided to free his slaves, as Hopkins also denounces the slave trade. Rutledge accuses the northern colonies of hypocrisy and describes how northern shippers and merchants get rich on the slave trade. Rutledge, Hewes of North Carolina, and Hall of Georgia angrily leave the chamber. Without the south, the Declaration cannot be adopted.

Chase enters the congressional chamber and happily reports that the Maryland Assembly has approved the Virginia resolution as Dickinson and four other delegates leave the chamber. Faced with almost certain defeat, Adams desperately tries to rally his forces. He sends McKean to Delaware to bring back the ailing Rodney. Franklin then insists that Adams agree to the removal of the slavery clause in order to get the votes of the Carolinas and Georgia. Adams calls on his wife for help and advice. As they speak, McNair delivers two kegs of saltpeter made by Abigail and the women of Boston. Adams, his faith in the cause renewed, tells Jefferson and Franklin to talk to all the wavering delegates - they must get every vote. Thomson reads a message from a discouraged Washington asking for a reply to his last 15 messages. He and Hancock leave Adams alone in the chamber. Adams looks at the dispatch from Washington, which warns of impending doom and disaster. Discouraged but determined, Adams gives voice to his vision of the new country.

Hall re-enters the chamber and tells Adams he has decided to vote for independence. The other Delegates, including Caesar Rodney, return and Hancock calls for the vote on the Virginia resolution. The delegates are silent as Thomson calls on each for his vote. New York abstains and Pennsylvania passes on the first call, but the entire northern and middle colonies vote "Yea." When South Carolina is called, Rutledge demands the removal of the slavery clause as the condition for the votes of South and North Carolina. Franklin again implores Adams to agree to the removal. Adams asks for Jefferson's opinion and Jefferson removes the clause, scratching it out himself. South Carolina, North Carolina and Georgia vote "Yea." When Pennsylvania's vote is called again, the three delegates are unable to agree, so Franklin asks Hancock to poll each of them. Franklin votes "Yea" and Dickinson votes "Nay," leaving the deciding vote to Wilson, who usually votes whichever way Dickinson does. This time, however, worried his name will go down in history as the man who prevented American Independence, he votes "Yea." Hancock insists that only those who sign their names to the Declaration of Independence be allowed to sit in Congress. Dickinson, still hoping for reconciliation with England, announces he cannot in good conscience sign the Declaration, but tells Congress he will join the Army and fight to protect the new country. Adams leads the Congress in a salute to Dickinson as he leaves the chamber.

As Hancock leads the delegates in signing the Declaration, the Courier enters with another dispatch from Washington. It reports that preparations are almost complete for the battle of New York, simultaneously expressing worry about America's badly outnumbered and under trained troops.

On the evening of July 4, 1776, the Liberty Bell rings in the background as Thomson calls each of the delegates to sign their names to the Declaration of Independence.

Musical numbers:

1. **But Mr. Adams**
2. **Cool, Cool, Considerate Men**
3. **The Egg**
4. **He Plays the Violin**
5. **Is Anybody There?**
6. **The Lees Of Old Virginia**
7. **Molasses To Rum**
8. **Momma Look Sharp**
9. **Piddle, Twiddle and Resolve**
10. **Sit Down, John**
11. **Till Then**
12. **Yours, Yours, Yours**

Educational and Artistic Value of 1776
By Pamela Gee

Opera by Children Education Associate

Critics of the first performance of **1776**, March 16, 1969, stated the production put history in “style, humanity, wit, and passion” and “Enchanted . . . regard for human frailties” as the creators explored the founding fathers and the events that led to the creation of the Declaration of Independence (Clive Barnes, *The New York Times*, March 17, 1969; John Chapman, *Daily News*, March 17, 1969). Sherman Edwards took ten years to create it, the music and his own book. It was not until the last few years in his decade of creation that Peter Stone came on board to adapt the book into the now famed libretto. The themes of humanity, sacrifice and determination are revealed and deeply delved into, and through it all, it is credible and historically accurate.

Edwards was a history professor by trade, until he left to focus on his music and create the musical **1776** which combined his two passions. With his research background and interest in history he developed an accurate depiction of the events that led to America’s independence. No history book can speculate on the intentions of the players in the cause for America’s freedom, but as a theatre piece exploration could be delved into deeply. The musical, clearly quite true to our history, spurred many viewers to ask Stone and Edwards if it was really true. This question led them to create a historical note with which to answer it. They began by saying, “Yes.” What follows is a brief summary of the essay, **1776** (Edwards, Peter Stone and Sherman. New York: Penguin Books, 1976. pp. 158-172.)

Edwards and Stone admit to very limited manipulation of history, because art condenses time and space, so some deletion from history was necessary and some supposition of truth was made from facts available—ample information on the most influential members of congress. Those members who little is known of were deleted from the staging of the events for the sake of audience understanding and limitations of theatre. It would never do, for instance, to accurately depict the signing of the document itself as it took several months for all the members to sign it. The poignant signing at the end of the production is metaphorical and represents the solemnity, exhilaration, personal sacrifice, and courage of each of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

Additions, though few, were also chosen for dramatic effect. To demonstrate the times, sacrifices and personal lives of the characters and the American population outside of congressional walls, many artistic choices were made. Most congressmen were away from home and family for long periods of time. They were in no way perfect and they are not romanticized in this depiction, but are shown as human in their day-to-day choices, yet, forward thinking men. The convention to have Adams’ wife come to him through letters vivid in his mind, along side his daily tasks, reveals the human nature of

his character as well as the opportunity to show what the women sacrificed for America's freedom (Women's rights along with the political unrest prevalent in the 1960's when creating the piece would surely have played into this decision). The trip to New Brunswick, New Jersey to inspect the troops by Adams, Franklin and Chase brings a fictional connection with congress to the armed forces, something that Americans in the 1960's felt their leaders were lacking—more like the 15 messages from Washington that go unanswered. The moment when the young courier of George Washington comes and shares the human emotion of family sacrifice and grief at the loss of his friends brings the world of war outside congressional walls inside and contrasts the petty disagreement and personal political maneuvering.

Historical statements, letters and communiqués were combined and manipulated for dramatic effect and flow. Some events were rearranged and some quotes were changed for the mere fact an audience might not believe the actual statement. An example of this is the slavery issue. There is no record that Edward Rutledge debated and demanded the removal of the clause to abolish slavery, but his consistent voting record stands as evidence that he led the charge. In response to the omission of this clause in a compromise for independence by a lesser known congressman, Sam Adams, a character cut from the production and represented through his cousin John Adams, is recorded to have said, "If we give in on this issue, there will be trouble a hundred years hence; posterity will never forgive us." But in the musical John says in scene 7, "Mark me Franklin, if we give in on this issue, posterity will never forgive us." Sam's actual quote was too astonishingly near the date when their posterity did come to blows over that very issue. The creators believed that no audience would think it was not a political statement made by them. Though they chose to adapt into song John Adams' own prediction of how Independence Day would be celebrated in the future. The results of their speculations create an entertaining way to experience the history of our country; a way to remember and more fully understand the sacrifices made for all of us.

Great Books to read:

Pulitzer Prize winner David McCullough's *1776*

Willard Sterne Randall's *Thomas Jefferson—A Life* and *George Washington—A life*

Cokie Roberts' *Founding Mothers—The Women Who Raised Our Nation*