



BWW Review: AMERICAN REVOLUTION at The Kennedy Center

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When I entered the theater for the opening performance of Chicago Theater Unspeakable's *American Revolution*, I quietly breathed a thanks that I had just returned from Disney and was still in "kids" mode, mentally-speaking. Given that the performance was ostensibly for kids, I wanted to be sure I could review it fairly.

As it turns out, though, *American Revolution*, which plays in the Kennedy Center's Family

Theater as part of the Performances for Young Audiences series, is not just for kids. However, that's not in the typical way of children's performers throwing in jokes for the adults to stave off boredom. Instead, *American Revolution* does something unique: it creates a show that is genuinely enjoyable for all ages, never talking down to children or talking over their heads to the adults.

The performance sets itself up for an ambitious feat: seven actors on a 21-square foot platform set out to tell the story of George Washington and the American Revolution, using only their bodies and voices. And yet, the cast is so talented and charismatic, that the performance space instantly feels bigger as soon as the troop begins their tale. **Jeffery Owen Freelon, Jr.** is a particular standout as George Washington, and Devin Sanclemente and Sonja Lynn Mata are delightful as mad King George and rabble rouser **Sam Adams**, respectively. But most impressive is the troop's cohesion and fluidity as

they move about the stage, and their charming presentation of history.

Also notable is the history itself. While most people are familiar with the story of the Revolution (or, at the very least, the *Hamilton* soundtrack), we usually are treated to the broader arcs with an eye toward the underdog triumph. Theater Unspeakable, however, provides a surprisingly detailed overview, including Washington's early military failures, the mistakes (and misfires) made by both sets of troops, and the status of slaves, women, and natives. From Washington's opening monologue, in which he cites owning 21 slaves, the show makes it clear that it won't shy away from or play down the realities of the time period, but it never once felt like a lecture. Instead, the inclusion of these details made for a more rounded presentation that left me thoroughly impressed. The show is clearly well-researched and sourced - it cites John and **Abigail Adams'** letters, early drafts of the Declaration of Independence, and even Paul Revere's actual wording for his famous ride. It also strives to highlight people who are often left out of the spotlight, or at the very least shift the spotlight to give us a better view of the humanity of the figures we only know as heroic victors or dastardly villains. And yet, even with taking a deeper look into this history, the show always manages to keep a light, almost comedic tone that keeps the whole experience enjoyable.

Theater Unspeakable's *American Revolution* is unique, entertaining, and powerful, and my only disappointment is that it's only playing for a limited run.

Theater Unspeakable's American Revolution is playing at the Kennedy Center October 12-14.

Photo Courtesy of the Kennedy Center.

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