

INDEPENDENCY

a play with history

by

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

WILLIAM -- William Franklin, Benjamin Franklin's son and the Royal Governor of New Jersey. 30s-40s. He is in his late twenties at the beginning and in his early fifties by the end.

BENJAMIN -- Benjamin Franklin, printer, scientist, statesman, philosopher. 50s-70s. He is in his mid fifties at the play's beginning and in his early eighties by the end.

ELIZABETH/MADAME BRILLON -- A woman in her 20s and 30s, this actor plays William Franklin's frail wife Elizabeth in Act One and the wife of a French aristocrat in Act Two.

DEBORAH/MADAME HELVETIUS -- A woman in her 50s to 60s. During Act One, she plays Deborah Franklin, Benjamin Franklin's wife. During Act Two she plays the French aristocrat, Madame Helvetius, Ben's main ally and romantic interest.

HILLSBOROUGH/CLINTON -- A man in his 40s to 60s, during Act One he plays Lord Hillsborough, British leader of the colonies. In Act Two, he plays General Henry Clinton, commander of British forces during the end of the Revolutionary War.

RAKE -- A man in his 20s-40s who plays many roles.

CONSTABLE -- A man in his 50s-70s who plays many roles.

TIME AND PLACE

The play spans 1762-1785; the years leading up to the American Revolution and the Revolutionary War itself. Scenes take place in London, Philadelphia, Paris, Burlington, Perth Amboy and New York.

Staged Reading

INDEPENDENCY was developed at the Utah Shakespearean Festival as part of the theatre's Plays-in-Progress series. The play evolved during a three-week residency that culminated in staged readings on August 7, 8 and 27, 2003.

Directed by George Judy and advised by Jerry L. Crawford, the staged reading had the following cast:

WILLIAM – Brian Vaughn*

BENJAMIN – Peter Sham*

ELIZABETH/MADAME BRILLON – Melinda Pfundstein

DEBORAH/MADAME HELVETIUS – Anne Newhall*

HILLSBOROUGH/CLINTON – Phil Hubbard

RAKE – Eric J. Stein

CONSTABLE – Jeff Elam

* Member of Actor's Equity Association

Special Thank You

A special thank you to both Walter Isaacson (author *Benjamin Franklin, Einstein, Steve Jobs*) and Sheila L. Skemp (author *William Franklin*), whose criticism and advice helped shape this play.

ACT ONE

(Enter WILLIAM, holding a hangman's noose.)

(BENJAMIN appears before a chess board. He wears a coonskin hat and holds a cane.)

BENJAMIN

You must not, William. Please.

WILLIAM

Must you vex my mind now father?

BENJAMIN

Do not commit this act!

(CONSTABLE pushes on RAKE. RAKE's arms are bound and he has a cloth tied over his eyes.)

RAKE (Huddy)

You hang me for nothing!

CONSTABLE (Lippincott)

Be still, Huddy!

RAKE (Huddy)

You are loyalist fools!

CONSTABLE (Lippincott)

I said be still!

(CONSTABLE punches RAKE.)

WILLIAM

A messy business. But we will save our necks by hanging his.

CONSTABLE (Lippincott)

Yes, we shall.

WILLIAM

That smell of New Jersey oak, I had forgotten. A shame it is night. New Jersey forests are the prettiest in the colonies.

CONSTABLE (Lippincott)

If it were daylight, our adventure would not be successful.

WILLIAM

Keep sharp. When a lantern flashes three times, they have found a tree for our purpose.

BENJAMIN

Is this truly your best move, Billy?

WILLIAM

It shall hold you radicals in check, father. And restore the British will to fight.

RAKE (Huddy)

The British surrendered. The war is over!

WILLIAM

Enough.

RAKE (Huddy)

They say Franklin's made the peace.

WILLIAM

ENOUGH!

CONSTABLE (Lippincott)

Be quiet Huddy!

BENJAMIN

I follow your every move. There are spies within your spies. You shall fail.

WILLIAM

I am regrouping, father. Probing for an open wound.

BENJAMIN

Billy, you must listen to me. Do not execute this man!

WILLIAM

(To CONSTABLE.)

Adventure.

CONSTABLE (Lippincott)

What?

WILLIAM

You called this an adventure. Call it what it is, Lippincott. Desperation. If my father is signing a treaty with the British--

CONSTABLE (Lippincott)

President Franklin, it matters not what your father is doing in France! When we hang brave Huddy here, the rebels will demand retribution. And war will resume.

WILLIAM

Let us hope.

RAKE (Huddy)

One of you is William Franklin? The traitor?

WILLIAM

I am no traitor!

RAKE (Huddy)

Traitor to his country. Traitor to his father!

CONSTABLE (Lippincott)

All who rise against the government are traitors. The British Empire must not be torn apart!

WILLIAM

How I despise this war. Yet here I am trying to prolong it.

BENJAMIN

Many accept my advice, Billy. You should as well.

WILLIAM

I must do what is right!

BENJAMIN

As must I.

RAKE (Huddy)

America is free!

WILLIAM

Free? Free for whom? Not for the thousands who trusted our king. If the British leave, what will happen to us? Will you let us go back to our shops and farms? No. It will all be divided up as spoils of war. That is thievery, sir, not freedom!

BENJAMIN

Take this action and I shall disown you.

WILLIAM

If it stops you radicals, father, Huddy's death will be nothing more than an unpleasant necessity.

BENJAMIN

If the revolution succeeds, I may still win you some quarter.

WILLIAM

Would you do that, father? Truly do that?

BENJAMIN

Make the right move, Billy. Or you will lose much more than your king.

WILLIAM

There's a light.

CONSTABLE (Lippincott)

The signal?

WILLIAM

It is.

CONSTABLE (Lippincott)

Up Huddy. They've found a tree for you to dance under. You enjoy dancing, don't you?

RAKE (Huddy)

Do what you will, Franklin. I die an innocent man.

WILLIAM

What of all the men you hanged?

RAKE (Huddy)

That was war. There is no war now. When they hang you, they will hang a murderer.

BENJAMIN

A murderer. My son. My only son!

CONSTABLE (Lippincott)

Hand me the noose. Sir? The noose, quickly.

WILLIAM

Do not execute him until I order it.

CONSTABLE (Lippincott)

They wait on us, President!

WILLIAM

Huddy is not dead yet. I must... think on it. Go, do as I say!

(RAKE and CONSTABLE exit.)

Have you outplayed me again, father? If you signed a treaty, what we are about to do tonight should render it null and void.

BENJAMIN

Make your choice, Billy. The world shall react as it wants.

(RAKE and CONSTABLE enter.)

RAKE

Though the Mastiff be gentle...

CONSTABLE

...bite him not by the lip.

RAKE

London.

CONSTABLE

1762.

(BENJAMIN becomes younger and sets down his cane. He takes off his coat and coonskin hat. He experiments with several glasses of different sizes. Using a metal rod, he strikes each glass.)
(WILLIAM removes his cloak and becomes younger. He then walks to the chess board and moves a piece.)

BENJAMIN

I know you are there, Billy. I see you in the glass. Just listen to this delicious note!

(Strikes a glass.)

If I could just sustain it somehow...

WILLIAM

(Brightly.)

Congratulations, you are a grandfather! He is a healthy, handsome boy.

(BENJAMIN ignores WILLIAM.)

You should see him.

BENJAMIN

Have you paid its mother?

WILLIAM

You could wear my disguise. Nobody recognized me at the orphanage.

BENJAMIN

Have you paid its mother?

WILLIAM

She promises to use the money to make more of herself.

BENJAMIN

May her reform be a success.

WILLIAM

The boy is the fruit of my last dalliance, father. A life, I promise, that I have left far behind me.

BENJAMIN

I expect nothing less.

WILLIAM

I will not be ashamed of my son. I've named him after myself. William Temple Franklin.

BENJAMIN

An ill-timed birth, we must conceal this child. I have a friend who is willing to discretely care for it.

WILLIAM

You are a hypocrite! What of your own dalliances?

BENJAMIN

I taught you to avoid my mistakes, not repeat them.

WILLIAM

So I am one of your mistakes?

BENJAMIN

Certainly not.

WILLIAM

That is what you imply.

RAKE

William Franklin.

CONSTABLE

Benjamin's only surviving son.

RAKE

Illegitimate.

BENJAMIN

When you were born I was but a poor printer. Such intrigues were almost expected from someone of my past station. But William, you are being considered for royal governor of New Jersey.

WILLIAM

Which I most certainly will not receive.

BENJAMIN

I can think of no one better qualified. With our stand against the Penn family, however, any blemish that our adversaries can find... No, the boy must be kept a secret. From Elizabeth as well.

WILLIAM

Surely not.

BENJAMIN

Believe me, I know what harm an unwelcome child can do to a young marriage.

WILLIAM

How can he stay a secret?

BENJAMIN

My friend's estate is far enough from London. So he is at worst a rumor, at best a snicker.

WILLIAM

I'm sure Elizabeth--

BENJAMIN

Now is not the appropriate time to tell her. She could break off the engagement and the whole affair will be made public. This grows unpleasant. Enough on the child, it is settled. Listen!

BENJAMIN(CONT.)

(Strikes a note on a glass.)

I am certain that I can reproduce every note through glass. And the sound, that impressive sound, it is so melodic, fascinating, haunting! Listen.

WILLIAM

(Returns to chessboard.)

It's your turn.

BENJAMIN

Queen to B7.

WILLIAM

A governorship rarely goes to a colonist.

BENJAMIN

Rare, yes. Not impossible, however. Politics and glass. Both are the same. Strong, but easily shattered.

(BENJAMIN strikes a glass.)

WILLIAM

This is a fantasy.

BENJAMIN

I have let it quietly slip out that if the Penns recommend your governorship, they will buy my silence. Knight to H4. I believe that is checkmate.

WILLIAM

Checkmate, how? It is.

BENJAMIN

Reset the board.

WILLIAM

You have planned this out carefully. As always.

BENJAMIN

We can do much for America, Billy, you and I. Think of it, if every colony has a royal charter, a direct relationship with the king, proprietors like the Penns will no longer create laws that harm the fortunes of us printers, candle makers, silversmiths. And when we leather aprons become wealthy and strong, America and Father Britain shall also become wealthy and strong.

WILLIAM

King George is a great man.

BENJAMIN

He has a young, practical mind. And he will respect suggestions from an equally intelligent and practical governor. That governor could be you, Billy.

(Silence.)

WILLIAM

I will conceal the child until the governorship is decided.

BENJAMIN

Good.

WILLIAM

If I do not receive the appointment, however, I will announce his birth.

BENJAMIN

Do what is most right. That is all I ask.

(BENJAMIN exits.)

WILLIAM

Oh no, father. You always ask much more than that.

(Music. A storm billows outside. Enter ELIZABETH. WILLIAM bows; ELIZABETH curtsies. They dance.)

RAKE (Noble)

We must celebrate, Doctor Franklin! The treaty is signed.

BENJAMIN

Ah!

RAKE (Noble)

The French have given up Canada and their Indians. Quite a fruitful end to the war, I must say.

BENJAMIN

Finally there is peace in Pennsylvania!

ELIZABETH

When will you know, Billy?

WILLIAM

Lord Hillsborough will summon me to a private meeting.

ELIZABETH

These decisions always take so long.

WILLIAM

Would you like being the wife of a royal governor?

ELIZABETH

I want to be a Franklin, Billy. That is adventure enough.

WILLIAM

You play coy!

ELIZABETH

Don't tickle me, Billy! At least not here.

WILLIAM

Then speak the truth. The governorship would seal our match, would it not?

ELIZABETH

Of course it would. Now dance like a gentlemen, please. Many eyes watch.

CONSTABLE (Noble)

Congratulations to you as well, Doctor, on your victory.

BENJAMIN

My victory was modest.

CONSTABLE (Noble)

The Privy Council agreed to the tax on the Penns.

BENJAMIN

Yes, but it will raise barely a hundred thousand pounds. Surely just out of patriotism, the Penns would agree to more tax. How will King George pay for the French war?

RAKE (Noble)

Tax the Canadians!

BENJAMIN

It will be difficult to tax moose. But I digress. Tonight is a most stupendous occasion. To war's end!

RAKE and CONSTABLE (Nobles)

To war's end!

(The music ends. All clap.)

WILLIAM

The next dance, Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH

I'm a bit winded. Punch?

WILLIAM

A glass would be wonderful.

CONSTABLE (Noble)

Ah, there is your son. He is one of the prettiest young gentlemen I have ever met from America.