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THEATER/FINE ARTS

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On Stage: 'Declaration' is irreverent and unruly

By JOE ADCOCK
 P-I THEATER CRITIC

Watching this show is like seeing a talented skateboarder in action -- except he's drunk. The cast is clever. They bring off some impressive pirouettes of wit. But, oh, the painful, out-of-control sprawls.

THEATER REVIEW

THE DECLARATION

CREATORS: Devised and performed by the Wing-It Productions Company

WHERE: Historic University Theatre, 5510 University Way N.E.

WHEN: Through Sept. 21

TICKETS: \$9.99; 206-325-6500

or ticketwindowonline.com

Wing-It Productions specializes in wild improv comedy supposedly tamed by fixed scenarios. The scenario of the current show, "The Declaration," is a unique version of what happened in Independence Hall on July 3 and 4, 1776.

Any accuracy that finds its way into the show is an accident. Historical detail is limited to the names of characters. Yes, there really was a John Hancock and a John Adams and a Thomas Jefferson and so on. But nowhere does the record show that the founding fathers were bizarrely vain about their legs, nor is there any evidence that they settled personal difference by engaging in something called "leg wrestling" (like arm wrestling, only more body contact).

Yes, they certainly did exclude women. The assembly was all male. But "The Declaration's" declarations of homosexual intrigue come as a surprise. Also surprising is Abigail Adam's sexual frustration with her husband, John, and her wanton coming on to his fellow worthies.

Anachronism is big. At a recent performance, audience members suggested that colonists' grievances against King George III of England should include issues involving seat belts, trans fats and female underwear.

The show's humor is based on irreverence. Since reverence toward history and politics is not a major factor in contemporary American life, a satire of even the most hallowed moment of America's political history is not automatically pungent.

Redeeming "The Declaration's" trip-ups and awkward sprawls are its likable performers. They tend to shout and step on one another's lines, but much of their physical clowning and verbal wit do get the job done -- the job being to elicit laughter.

As John Adams, Jeremy Brown is vehement but clueless. Jeannine Clarke is an effete Thomas Jefferson. Nick Edwards goes from stuffy to frenzied as the resident parliamentarian. Conor McNassar as Hancock, Colin Murphy as Charles Thompson (of Pennsylvania) and

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Anna Dufault as Abigail Adams all bounce back and forth between rigid dignity and unglued shamelessness.



Suggestion: If you would like to wear a golden crown encrusted with gleaming jewel-type objects, sit in the front row. You may be picked to play George III.

P-I theater critic Joe Adcock can be reached at 206-448-8369 or joadcock@seattlepi.com.

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