

FREEWHEELING FRANKLIN

An imaginative, lively look at iconic figure

By JANE HOLAHAN
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Everyone has an idea about who Ben Franklin was.

Diplomat, inventor, writer, working man patriot, flirt, good citizen, humorist, philosopher, founding father — all these words fit perfectly.

Yet none of them can fully encompass the amazing man whose 300th birthday is being celebrated this year all across the country.

Here in Lancaster, everyone has been getting into the act, from the North Museum to the Lancaster County Historical Society to — quite naturally — Franklin & Marshall College.

And now, the Fulton will put its spin on Franklin in two productions. In two weeks, "Lightning Rod," a new play about Franklin and his troubled relationship with his son, will have its world premiere.

And on Saturday, the Fulton Family Theatre Ensemble will present "Currently Franklin: The Story of a Paper Boy," for two performances.

The show, which has been touring schools since February, was originally produced at F&M in January.

The college commissioned Philadelphia performance artist Sebastienne Mundheim to write the show.

But what you'll see at the Fulton is a lot different than what you might have seen at F&M.

While "Currently Franklin" uses much of the imagery and most of the words of Mundheim's original, the Fulton ensemble has given it plenty of kid-friendly, free-wheeling silliness.

When Mundheim got the commission to write the show, she was a bit resistant.

"I live in Center City Philadelphia and Franklin is everywhere. He's such an icon," she explained. "But I was thrilled to have the commission."

And the more she read about Franklin, the more intrigued she became with him. Ideas began flowing.

"I began thinking about the metaphor of water," Mundheim explains. "I liked the possibilities water offered. Franklin started as a young boy who wants to be a sailor, but his father won't let him go to sea. (Instead)



Photos by Richard Hertzler/New Era

The cast of "Currently Franklin" includes, from left, Chris York, Brian Martin, Kaci M. Fannin, Charlie DelMarcelle and Julianne Homokay. Playwright Sebastienne Mundheim is at right. Above, is a scene from the show, with DelMarcelle handling the Franklin puppet, and Martin playing Franklin's brother, James, a printer in Boston.



he observes the water, sees how it changes shape, where it can take him. He learns the benefit of being flexible and fluid."

She also began thinking about possibilities of movement in the show and Franklin's career as a printer took center stage.

"I explored the possibility of what performers could do with moving paper and the mechanics of the print shop," Mundheim says. "The mechanics of the show wouldn't be hidden."

And the printing press was a strong symbol of Franklin. As the play says, it moved currents of ideas that could change the world.

The Fulton show's set features iconic props, like an oversized key, a pair of bifocals and a kite, that instantly bring Franklin to mind.

It also features lots of hanging paper, which serves as a screen for the projections that come from several overhead projectors just like the ones you had back in school.

Much of the staging is clever and highly inventive. And the cast is irreverent without losing sight of Franklin's genius.

The show does an excellent job of retelling the many facets of Franklin's life in a brief period of time, from his growing up in Boston, where he was apprenticed to his brother's print shop, to his arrival in Philadelphia and all the civic improvements he made, including the first library and the

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THAT'S THE TICKET
"Currently Franklin:
The Story of a Paper Boy"
Sat. 1 and 4 p.m. \$10
Fulton Opera House
12 N. Prince St., 397-7425
www.thefulton.org

Franklin

Continued from 10

first fire brigade.

"Currently Franklin" also explores his science experiments and his clever inventions.

The cast, comprised of Julianne Homokay, Charlie DelMarcelle, Brian Martin, Kaci M. Fannin and Chris York, has pumped up the volume of Mundheim's original, replacing the quiet moments of contemplation that the author had intended for a more free-spirited, accessible look at the man.

Nobody in the cast actually plays Franklin. Instead, he is portrayed by several puppets who, thanks to the magic of theater, make America's most original founding father into a flesh-and-blood person. One kids will enjoy getting to know.