

Premier of West Orange County Playwright's Historical Drama in Fullerton

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Seal Beach playwright Arthur Kraft's historical play Philadelphia Lawyer, is receiving its world premiere at STAGES theatre in Fullerton. The performances, which opened on July 10, continue through August 9. The play depicts actual historical events in pre-Revolutionary New York.

The play dramatizes the true story of attorney Andrew Hamilton's defense of newspaper printer John Peter Zenger, who was accused of printing seditious libel about William Cosby, tyrannical Governor of the Colony of New York. Upon Cosby's 1733 arrival to assume the king's top post, the new governor demands complete loyalty from the colonists, and as you might imagine, that is not exactly what he gets.

Your Editors reached playwright Kraft at his Seal Beach home on Tuesday, July 28. He explained the first part of the play deals with the period just before the trial and convincing the top lawyer attorney Andrew Hamilton to take the case. Since at that time, it was a three days journey to New York and since Hamilton was, in his own view, an old man of 59, getting him to take the case is a major issue for the first act. Kraft said "people confuse Andrew Hamilton with Alexander Hamilton, who was 50 years later." He indicated the two historical figures were not related.

Kraft said he was able to get much of the dialogue from Zenger's own notes of the trial. Kraft, who has written other historical dramatizations, read an account of the trial and decided to write a play about it. The playwright made a few insignificant changes to the historical facts, but "It sticks very closely to the actual events."

Your Editors ask Kraft about learning history from a dramatization and he was very enthusiastic about it. "I love it, it's great. I hate that so much of what happens in school is just memorizing dates and facts without a feel for the real people involved and what they were going through." He said the play is good for all ages, but "it might go over the heads of the younger children." This is only because of the legalistic nature of the play, there is no vulgarity or anything X rated. he said the strongest word is "damn."

Because there are thousands of new plays chasing each production opportunity, landing a full production is a major triumph for Kraft. Most new plays are relegated to readings, or if the playwright is lucky, maybe a workshop production. Philadelphia Lawyer is Kraft's second full production of his original writing for the stage. He said he mails his work to theaters all over the country and it was just a coincidence that the production was within driving distance. "It could have been in Mississippi."

After Kraft retired as Senior Psychologist from the Long Beach Unified School District, he turned his full attention to writing. His first produced full-length play was The Switch, staged at the Berubians in Anaheim in 2003; it then moved to the Next Stage in Los Angeles. "The Switch" was a comedy about a high school psychologist and band director who disguise themselves as each other and trade jobs. Philadelphia Lawyer is his second production. The playwright "lives in Seal Beach and lays claim to one wife, three children, five grandchildren, and two dogs."

STAGES theatre
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July 10 – August 9



World premiere of Arthur Kraft's historical drama, Philadelphia Lawyer, at STAGES theatre in Fullerton. The play depicts the true story of the 1735 freedom of the press trial of newspaper printer John Peter Zenger.

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