

1787 the Musical
– not “a bunch of old dead guys” –
Detailed Synopsis for those considering producing the work

Ages and states are here; please also refer to the characters resources.

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1.0 Prologue opens with a field drum marching cadence, then “British Grenadiers” tune, which is overlapped and overtaken by “Yankee Doodle” tune – the first of numerous variations – very short.

1.1 January, 1787. Arsenal, Springfield, MA. The new nation is falling apart because many states are failing, some seeking independent alliances and trade agreements while over-taxing neighboring states and their own citizens. Overtaxed farmers – many of them unpaid soldiers of the Revolutionary War – are losing their land, so DANIEL SHAYS (39, farmer, leader of rebellion) and JASON PARMENTER (51, reluctant tax-collector) lead marchers in a tragic protest: “**Shays Rebellion**” – 15-20 marchers, mostly men, in a stormy, stylized pitchfork-stomping march-dance production number. Marchers joining along the way share their stories and the refrain, “We all are here for freedom and won’t be put aside....” At the Arsenal a battle erupts and citizens are shot. In the aftermath, MOLLY PITCHER (late 30’s, farmer-widow) brings water to a fallen man and sings sadly of her losses – “I ask of you, my country’s fathers, please bring me ‘**Water from the Well**’” – solo.

1.2 Late winter, 1787. Letters to General Washington. Responding to such uprisings and failures among the nation states, NATHANIEL GORHAM (49, MA, President of the Continental Congress) pleads with GENERAL GEORGE WASHINGTON (55, VA, retired, plantation owner) for Washington’s participation in the upcoming Convention, and in his frustration comments (*deadpan, facing audience*), “We never get anything done in Congress....” In a flashback vignette, RUFUS KING (32, MA, attorney) pleads for court leniency on behalf of Parmenter, who faces the charge of treason and capital punishment. Other delegates join Gorham in goading the General to attend as a means of leveraging greater attendance than at the previous Convention, *and* with hope of a stronger outcome. In “**We Met Last Summer**” – a light-hearted barbershop song and humming underscore – JAMES MADISON (36, VA, studious, quiet), JOHN DICKINSON (55, DE, very frail, “penman of the Revolution”), EDMUND RANDOLPH (34, VA, “slick” governor), ALEXANDER HAMILTON (30, NY, handsome, brash), and GEORGE MASON (62, VA, principled, in simple attire), 4-at-a-time, press Washington to attend “...to revise the Articles of Confederation.” Hamilton contends that the sources of the poor economy will lead to more uprisings like Shays Rebellion. Additional delegates continue the letter campaign, each asking Washington if he will attend, until he eventually agrees, reluctantly but with a grin.

1.3 March, 1787, Madison’s home (VA), Hamiltons’ home (NY), and Payne’s home (future Dolley Madison, Philadelphia, PA). Preparing for the Convention, Madison requests books from Adams and Jefferson, who are serving as ambassadors in Europe. In “**Books**” contrasting songs alternate with glimpses of Madison’s studious drive, aspirations of the future MRS. DOLLEY MADISON (DOLLEY PAYNE, 19, PA, Quaker), and Alexander Hamilton’s high regard for those who will attend the Convention. ELIZA HAMILTON (29, beautiful newlywed) and A Hamilton flirt with one another in their lilting duet, and the young Dolley Payne imagines life with a husband and indulging in prohibited fancy adornments, weaving her lines in musical counterpoint with the Hamiltons. In contrast, Madison’s driven song is interrupted repeatedly by his non-singing, comic servant HENRY (any age), who delivers increasing burdens of books to Madison’s study. Madison, ironically despite his Southern aristocratic background, then argues in soliloquy/solo for a democratically elected government and contemplates the “Great Experiment” with excitement at the prospect of a government given authority by “We the People.”

1.4 May, 1787. Philadelphia street. As **Younger Lions and Older Patriots** – delegates’ appellations of the period – arrive in Philadelphia, the young men are brash and daring as they jockey for position, the old men reserved. JACKSON, THE SLAVE (middle-aged or older, Washington’s valet), appears briefly, delivering Washington’s bags. Washington tells BENJAMIN FRANKLIN (81, PA, genial “host” to travelers, wears homespun) his sad story from 1783, when **“The Soldiers Came to Congress”** – Washington solo ballad – to collect for their services, but the government could not pay them. With concern that rebellions could tear apart the fledgling country, Washington tells Franklin, “...any spark will ignite them again.” GOUVERNEUR MORRIS (35, PA, hedonistic, one-legged ladies’ man) already has made acquaintance with KATIE and PENELOPE (young floozies), and since everyone reveres the General, G Morris boasts of his familiarity with Washington, but, to stifled laughs of his comrades, proves himself not *that* familiar.

A “bowing” song, **“Younger Lions and Older Patriots,”** introduces several delegates arriving (from PA, NY, VA, MA, SC, CT, and DE) – Younger Lions representatives Hamilton, Madison, G Morris, Randolph, King, and CHARLES PINCKNEY (29, SC, effete and elegant aristocrat); and among the Older Patriots GEORGE WYTHE (61, VA, respected law professor), Mason, “JUDGE” JAMES WILSON (45, PA, esteemed legal authority), Dickinson, ROGER SHERMAN (66, CT, covert politician), Gorham, Franklin, and Washington. Washington shares in the friendly atmosphere by dancing a brief jig for the others, dignified and refined, then while many delegates head off to a tavern singing arm-in-arm, Hamilton and the Virginia delegation hang back “...to plan for the start of the Convention.” They invite Virginia’s Governor Randolph to present Madison’s resolutions. In **“A Politician”** – up tempo, comic solo with some mime and dance – Randolph brags of his abilities in sounding supportive to both sides of an issue, confirming that he is the right choice.

1.5 May 25, 1787. Independence Hall. New arrival WILLIAM BLOUNT (43, NC, naysayer) interrupts by entering later than the others, part of what becomes a recurring comic bit of his character – he chronically arrives late and he typically remains indecisive. Delegates representing 8 states meet at Independence Hall and argue passionately for **“We the People”** and **“We the States”** – rights of individuals and those of the state governments – amid alarming reports of states making treaties with other nations, potential for states separating from the Confederation, states taxing their neighbor states, states printing too much money, states fighting over waterways, problems with the Indians, the ever-present threat of being taken over by one or another European country – all compelling arguments toward strengthening a central leadership. The delegates sing/shout their two lines interjected into the chaotic argument with underscore reminiscent of the “Shays Rebellion” refrain. Broad populists want government by popular vote, while narrow elitists want state legislatures to determine a national government. To refocus the delegates’ unproductive atmosphere, “DICTATOR JOHN” RUTLEDGE (48, SC, blustering, demanding) nominates Washington to the Chair, stunning the assembly to silence. With a brief **instrumental processional** using the “Washington’s March” tune, Mason and Rutledge ceremoniously escort Washington to the Chair and Gorham graciously moves to take a seat with his statesmen, all to the unanimous approval of the delegates. The music coda foretells with an instrumental reference to Washington’s later line “We will have no kings again!”

Washington humbly accepts and begs for divine guidance in his responsibility as Chair, then recognizes the **Committee on Rules**. Randolph, unthinking, swats a fly and sheepishly apologizes for his interruption – the setup for what later becomes the “fly” ploy and recurring comic bit. Continuing, Wythe first outlines the structure under which the proceedings will be conducted: maintaining secrecy of discussions, allowing delegates to re-visit issues at any time, and one vote per state, with each state determining their own rules for a quorum. JOHN LANSING, JR. (32, NY, handsome, corrupt) and ROBERT YATES (49, NY, Lansing’s cohort, a distant relative by marriage) – in comic relief – reveal their NY governor’s assignment to overrule Hamilton regardless his position. Yates’ misplaced “I object!” and Lansing’s annoyed reaction become recurring comic elements of the pair. Secretary WILLIAM JACKSON (28, like an attentive aide-de-camp) speaks in nearly every scene at Independence Hall; the role is somewhat un-colorful, necessary, ever

present, and the player must provide unflinching focus with attention to detail. JACOB GOOD (mature, Independence Hall servant, optional separate role), participates in most Convention scenes, but remains silent *most* of the time.

1.6 Next day. Resolves. Wilson is impatient with the lack of progress, but Franklin counsels patience, pointing out Madison's preparedness. Randolph presents the resolutions of the Virginia plan for a central government of the people. Sherman, ELBRIDGE GERRY (43, MA, disagreeable), Lansing, and others contend that "the people" are incapable of making good government choices, while Madison, Wilson, Mason, and others uphold *government by the people*. While many resist such centralization, a deviation from the existing Confederation, Sherman, in support, simplifies the objects of the Union – defense, treaties, and commerce – solutions to which could save the country. Madison then illuminates the concept of embracing numerous and varied interests of the people so that no one faction could dominate, while leaving local issues to the existing state governments, all suggesting a peaceful revolution, a sweeping change from sovereignty of the individual Confederated states. With that proposal on the table, delegate ABRAHAM BALDWIN (33, GA, good-natured) arrives at the end of the scene: "It seems I have arrived just in time."

1.7 Next day. Paterson objects. More delegates are welcomed to the assembly, including Maryland's LUTHER MARTIN (39, slovenly but successful lawyer) and DANIEL ST. THOMAS JENIFER (64, in opulent attire and wig). New arrival WILLIAM PATERSON (41, NJ, short and feisty) objects to the proposed "popular" representation in Congress, which would undermine small states' interests: "...The larger states – Massachusetts, Pennsylvania, and Virginia – will control everything before them!" Considering a central government, Yates adds his "I object!" much to Lansing's frustration, and tardy delegate Blount jolts Franklin awake with the door, then adds that he is "... still deciding," as usual. In light of this potential make-or-break issue, Sherman introduces the notion that the two houses of Congress provide a balance – one representing by number of free inhabitants (power to the people) and one with equal votes for each state (power to the states equitably), then Paterson asks to present an alternate proposal. Adjourning, most delegates depart, leaving the "**Grumbletonians**" – a name used at the time for those resisting change – to continue to grumble in a funny song, sea chantey style, solo lines for a few. Yates and Lansing are especially comical as Mason sarcastically conveys his annoyance in these, his "glorious allies."

1.8 Another day. Wilson briefly compares Madison's Virginia and Paterson's New Jersey plans. Paterson uses the excuse of swatting a fly to interrupt Wilson, and this jerks Franklin awake. Impatient with the continued disagreements, Hamilton, *apparently* rashly, recommends to the assembly that "We ought to be '**More Like the British**'" and, among other things, elect a king – intending to unite the delegates by pushing the assembly *against* his ideas, and together *for* something else. (*Hamilton's intended purpose continues to be argued among historians.*) Hamilton's over-the-top solo using awkwardly set lyrics to the "British Grenadiers" tune and a musical quote of "La Marseillaise" amplifies the mismatch of his proposal. Other delegates boo him to abrupt silence. In response to Hamilton, Pinckney admonishes the others in the room, reminding the delegates of their recently hard-won freedoms and the unique nature of American people – different from people of other countries. "**America, the Miracle**" – a "signature song" of the musical – includes a brief musical quote from "America, the Beautiful." Pinckney sings, "We are like no other people that the world has ever seen" – a direct quote from documented historical record – and the delegates gradually join him, first with a few lines of counterpoint using the later tune of "Americans Are We," in a sign of unity developing among them.

1.9 July 3, 1787. Big states, small states. Sweltering in the summer heat, delegates try to be heard above the street noise. Previously silent, Jacob Good loudly directs those on the street (from offstage) – people *and* dogs – to be quiet, eliciting a laugh from the delegates and audience. The delegates argue next about how power should be

balanced for small states and large states interests. Franklin summarizes: "...small states contend that their liberties are in danger.... and if equality of states, the larger states say *they* will be in danger." With delegates at an impasse, tempers flare and King, a very small man, nearly comes to blows with GUNNING BEDFORD, JR. (40, DE), a very large man. To calm the escalating fight, Franklin calls for daily prayers and Sherman chimes in to second that motion.

1.10 Indian Queen tavern that evening. G Morris, Dickinson, Wilson, Franklin, and Hamilton try to console Madison in his frustration, while Sherman continues to politick, maneuvering his pawns – speaking especially with St. Thomas Jenifer – all amid ale, G Morris' "ladies," and, in a taunt aimed at Madison, a rousing and suggestive chorus of "**Yankee Doodle**" (Sherman, Martin, Lansing, and Yates): "...and with the girls be handy!"

1.11 Ruminations on the future. The "future" Hamiltons, Madisons, and Washington each questions their part in the overall picture and offers a glimpse of their futures in "**Who Are We?/Someday**," a memorable rock tune – solos with full company chorus refrain -- the chorus providing a visual and aural backdrop. Each soloist has something unique for his/her verse or chorus, and with Washington's demand that "We will have no kings agaaaaain," Hamilton stomps out, bringing Act 1 to a close.

Intermission

2.0 Entr'acte – nearly identical to the "Prologue," but in minor mode, suggesting that all is not rosy, very brief.

2.1 After the holiday. Independence Hall. Jackson, the Slave, delivers papers to Washington. Showing those found papers left around for curious outsiders, Washington admonishes the delegates to be more careful in protecting the secrecy of their deliberations. Sherman next maneuvers delegates toward a likely compromise on representation for small and large states: St. Thomas Jenifer exits Independence Hall to "miss" a critical vote and, in a polling of delegates, Georgia surprises all – except Sherman – creating an impasse. With Sherman's intended stalemate, the subject is moved to committee. As votes for committee members are counted by Secretary Jackson, the delegates sing "**Mister Roger Sherman**" – light-hearted "soft-shoe" praising Sherman's political abilities. The votes count in favor of small states' rights, and G Morris encourages Madison to accept the expected compromise, which would require a concession by the large states. As the results of the votes are announced, those comprising the Grand Committee depart to deliberate, then a few remaining delegates question their ability to achieve success.

2.2 Later. Independence Hall. The Grand Committee returns with their report to the delegates, but many are dissatisfied with the results. The subject of "property" (slaves) is broached by the Southern states. Then, when Lansing and Yates discover that Hamilton is gone, they gleefully sing-and-dance "**He's Gone**" – comic duet parody on Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik* (mvt 1, truncated; composed 1787) – before dancing-departing from the Convention, their Governor's mission completed.

2.3 Later. Independence Hall. The delegates settle in to work again. Jackson, the Slave, has accompanied Washington and, as he is leaving, he hangs back to listen to a discussion of slave accounting for the purpose of government representation, allowing each slave to count for three-fifths of a free man. The Southern states hold out for a trade of keeping slavery in exchange for agreeing to Sherman's Compromise allowing small states' rights of government representation. Amidst rancorous debate ranging from challenging slavery entirely to apportioning representation to three-fifths for every slave, Rutledge argues that slaves have as much value as free men and sings of the "**Peculiar Institution**" of slavery, a system the South depends upon and will not concede. The brief, dark solo serves as introduction to Jackson singing in soliloquy "...I'm only '**Three-Fifths of a Man**'" – a show-stopper solo

using the tune of “Deep River” – recounting his wretched life and losses, and suggesting a “...bloody silence and a bad, bad vi'lence...” coming as a result of continued enslavement. Scene-change instrumental music then provides an emotional buffer transitioning to the next scene.

2.4 July 23, 1787. Latecomer JOHN LANGDON (46, NH, self-funded delegate), having missed most of the proceedings, then arrives, full of himself, and in a comic tune asks “**Have I Missed Anything?**” – solo lines for Langdon and many others interwoven with a rousing delegates’ chorus. All in good humor, the assembly reviews for Langdon – and the audience – much of what has transpired already, delivered in a quick listing of issues and decisions.

2.5 Early September, 1787. Hamilton home in NY. The Hamiltons share “**In Philadelphia**” – a sweetly romantic duet about his needing to return to the Convention. E Hamilton supports her husband’s choice, though she clearly would prefer to have him stay home. A Hamilton breaks from the duet into “**They Need Me**” – bravura solo expounding the importance of a sound economy... and of himself. The endearing couple closes with a brief return to the duet, the “Yankee Doodle with a hitch” repeated musical quote providing levity.

2.6 Later. Independence Hall. Welcomed back to the Convention, A Hamilton is allowed to participate, but with Lansing and Yates absent, NY has no quorum and no vote. Next, ratification of the Constitution is determined to require agreement of at least nine state Conventions. Delegates then consider the presidency: four-year term, minimum age 35, natural-born citizen of the United States – Hamilton, originally from Jamaica, provides the joke that there is no record of *where* he was born – no power to declare war, nor sign treaties, nor appoint judges, elected by the people but – Wilson recommends – with electors to balance the power for large states and small states. The delegates eye *Mister Washington* as the probable first president. In “**What Shall Our Presidency Be?**” – like a Latin “Mission Impossible” theme with dialogue interspersed, instrumental underscore, and a few solo and small group lines sung by Madison, Randolph, and others – all sing the refrain-question together, then anticipating success, they join to sing “**We Will Be a Country**” reflecting another turn toward unity of purpose. Washington then appoints the Committee on Style to draft the final document: Madison, Hamilton, Wilson, King, and G Morris.

2.7 Continuing in Independence Hall, “In Committee” (production number) includes solo lines for nearly every delegate. Each featured group sings with some mime and/or dance as part of a string of musical styles referencing tunes from the show, like a light-hearted and abbreviated dance suite (music form), but mostly in song. Opening with a classic barbershop introduction (Mason, Randolph, Dickinson, and Hamilton), Sherman next provides the setup, which is followed by segments for the Committee on Rules (Wythe, Pinckney, Hamilton, *stately*), Grand Committee (Rutledge, Mason, Blount, Baldwin, Gerry, Paterson, Bedford, Martin, Franklin, *grandioso*), Committee of Five for revisions (G Morris, Gorham, Randolph, Rutledge, King, *Islands style*), Committee of Eleven concerned with the census (King, G Morris, Madison, Sherman, Rutledge, Jenifer, Bedford, Blount, Baldwin, Paterson – Yates absent – *misterioso*), Committee of Detail (Wilson, Gorham, Rutledge, Randolph, *march*), instrumental hornpipe (featured dancers and dance soloist Washington), Committee of Style (G Morris, Madison, Wilson, King, Hamilton, *slow waltz*), Committee on Postponed Matters (Langdon, comic, *urgently*), several “loose ends” raised by numerous individuals, and Martin objects and stomps out. All sing together the two-word refrain, “In Committee.”

2.8 Another day. The Committee on Style presents their final document to the delegates. Last-minute edits are made, but Randolph, Mason, and Gerry raise lingering objections, refusing to sign for their individual reasons. Hamilton introduces the “necessary and proper” clause in a “wink” aside directed to the audience. Gerry stomps out, the first of several to leave the room unsatisfied for one or another reason. All are frustrated with some aspect or they assume loss of support for the finished work. With the proceedings virtually falling apart, eventually only Madison and

Franklin remain on stage. Madison laments to Franklin, “**I Have Failed.**” This sad solo serves as introduction to Franklin’s “**Dawning of the Day,**” in which he relates his story about the rising/setting sun image on Washington’s chair and how you sometimes cannot tell the difference. In contrast to “Failed,” “Dawning of the Day” is uplifting – “...it is, indeed, a rising sun.” Consoled by, and concurring with Franklin, Madison joins in at the end of Franklin’s solo, and, transitioning to the next day, other delegates re-enter to sing in support. The song ends with one of the handful of subtle musical and visual references, scattered into the work, paying homage to other standards in the American Musical Theatre genre, an instrumental quote of “Some Enchanted Evening.”

2.9 September 17. Shifting to the next day without pause, the delegates have returned to continue work. Franklin speaks in favor of signing the Constitution, and asks for unanimity of the delegates. With that prospect unlikely, G Morris passes a note to him, and Franklin amends his recommendation to “unanimity of the States present” – much to everyone’s relief. A poll of the States provides the setup for the signing ceremony with a unison humming chorus underscore, “**The Soldiers Have Come to Congress**” (same tune as Washington’s earlier solo). When it seems that Virginia will not agree to the Constitution, Washington provides the necessary Virginia tie-breaking vote, reminding the others that he, too, is a delegate. The instrumental underscore swells as delegates move to strike a brief tableau of the famous Christy painting of the signing of the Constitution. After the last signature, cheers erupt and Washington calls for order, pronouncing the document ready for dissemination and, acknowledging Mason’s reminder, for Ratification *by* the states. All exit except Franklin. Left alone, he gazes upon Washington’s chair again, deciding “...it is indeed a rising sun,” at which point Molly Pitcher enters as the Cleaning Woman. She asks Franklin, “**Do we have a country?**” to which he replies, “Yes... if we can keep it.” As he is leaving, they share a knowing look of approval and a brief duet combining “Dawning” and “Water from the Well.”

2.10 Various states during the following year. Delegates and Parmenter share in the rousing patter song “**Ratification**” – one or two lines each using the “Yankee Doodle” tune – each state reporting progress or lack thereof. Some ratify by only a few votes, others by a large margin, and some are “...still deciding.” One verse is exactly as was used for political sway at the time. The “Younger Lions and Older Patriots” tune returns briefly as underscore, then music tension builds while remaining states announce their results. In a cliff-hanger moment, Lansing reports about NY, critical to geographic continuity, achieving approval *because* Yates uncharacteristically *not* objecting this time, “... said nothing.” With “We have a country!” proclaimed, the field drum segues to the *finale*.

2.11 Finale. “Americans Are We” begins with a trio for A Hamilton, Madison, and Washington using the tune of “America the Miracle”: “We have us now a nation...” Other groups are added, singing other tunes from the musical in counterpoint – “Americans Are We” is second, then “Dawning of the Day,” and culminating with another parody on “Yankee Doodle” – each tune entry made clear, all four tunes in additive synthesis layers of musical counterpoint. Entering by groups, the players sing and march on stage using something like a marching band drill to match the music layering and texture, then finishing in a full company front for the grand ending, “Ame- ri- cans Are- - We- -!” The premiere production *finale* had the audience in a standing ovation every night *before* the end!

Bows. Instrumental sequence of tunes is offered, with option to re-order or edit as needed.

Exit music optionally *may* include a short sing-along for the audience using a shortened version of “Americans Are We” in patriotic celebration.