

***Cheeseheads* makes the move from outdoors to in**

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By Jeffrey Herbst

“Cheeseheads, The Musical” will find a new home indoors for the first time since it premiered at American Folklore Theatre in 2009.

This has meant a re-imagining of the scenic design in order to replicate some of the architectural levels and playing areas that are permanent structures at its previous home in the amphitheater at Peninsula State Park. Michael Christman’s scenic design will be melded with additional elements provided by Stephen Hudson-Mairet.

This was all just a plan on paper until building, painting and the put-in happened the last weekend of August. Normally we have an overlap of a week between the summer and fall seasons, and the transfer can happen gradually throughout this period. But this year, we had a single day to close out the summer season at the amphitheater and make the switch to Door Community Auditorium.

We found ourselves doing the massive park strike in a very lovely but persistent rain that lasted all day. Our intrepid crew shinnied up shining, wet ladders, 20 feet in the air, to unfasten fixtures, then lowered them to wet waiting hands below to be either dried and stored or packed and traveled. Costumes found their way from the park dressing room to cedar-lined storage and props were packed and put away.

We did have one week of rehearsal for “Cheeseheads” that overlapped with our summer season. Trevor Rees, who played Gizmo this summer, is off to grad school, and Lee Becker, who played Doc Muenster, headed to Houston with his wife Sara, where they will eagerly await the birth of their first baby in early October.

Our replacements for them are Tom Conry and Norman Moses, respectively. In order to give both of these very game performers a chance to learn the show and

work with the remaining five actors, we had afternoon rehearsals in the park leading up to tech week in the auditorium.

Colin Welford was on hand to inject his usual rigorous oversight as music director. I've no doubt the ensemble will continue to sparkle with Colin leading them from the auditorium pit as conductor. This cast really has developed a robust, exciting choral sound.

Our natural cyclorama (background, or "cyc" in theater speak) at the park is an astonishing sky replete with sylvan foliage and shifting clouds reflecting light that gracefully wanes as darkness sets in and stage lights almost imperceptibly take over. It's one of my favorite elements to experience when watching an AFT show in the park.

But the magic of an indoor cyc can be just as beguiling as a natural one, and the nuance of controlled lighting within total blackness can be incredibly gratifying. David Alley will take on this challenge as he tweaks his outdoor design to satisfy the indoor requirements.

"Cheeseheads" is a homegrown, heartfelt Wisconsin musical and I've no doubt that, with a little theatrical lift, its charms will translate seamlessly from outdoors to in.

"Cheeseheads, the Musical" runs through Oct. 14 at Door Community Auditorium in Fish Creek. Also this fall, "And If Elected" plays from Oct. 4-14 at Ephraim Village Hall. For tickets or more information, call (920) 854-6117 or go to www.folkloretheatre.com.



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