

**July 1, 2009**

**By Doc Heide**

Performing original musical theatre outdoors is not for sluggards.

Sure, it's exhilarating and profoundly rewarding. But it's also harder than herding all the raccoons in Door County up the same hickory tree.

Here's an example. We're lucky to be joined this summer by Colin Wexford, music director for "Cheeseheads" and "Muskie Love". He's also music supervisor for productions of "The Lion King" worldwide and spent the last four years as music director for "Wicked" in Chicago.

Colin tells us that when he teaches the "Lion King" score to a company, it takes him four-and-a-half weeks, six days a week. In approximately the same time frame, we've just finished rehearsing three shows----and two were brand new.

### **Premiering Plays**

"Brand new" means actors can't memorize the score in advance---we add and delete songs throughout. And there's no shortage of music to learn. "Cheeseheads" and "Sunsets & S'mores" have 20 songs each. It's the same with the script, which sometimes changes right up to opening night.

Writing the show while you're rehearsing it certainly has its pleasures. At one rehearsal, playwright Dave Hudson told us to cut the word "well" from a particular line. "I use that word too much", Dave said. Lee Becker responded, "You went to the 'well' once too often."

As fun as this is, it takes a major toll. Many of us have multiple roles. Jeff Herbst acts in "Muskie Love", directs "Sunsets & S'mores", and conducts his

artistic director duties simultaneously. All three authors of “Sunsets” perform in it, which means writing often happens outside “working hours.”

By the time we get home we’re so tuckered out we could sleep on a bed of barbed wire without a blanket.

### **Woodsy Woosies**

Of course, some of those nights we’re rehearsing in a clammy pine forest ‘til midnight. In early June it was cold enough to make the eagle on a silver dollar shiver. Then it turned so hot that birds were picking up their worms with potholders.

One result is that at least half of our troupe---myself included---came down with head and chest colds. Dave Hudson dubbed it “The Pine Flu.”

You can imagine the waves of delight that wash over a performer at the thought of losing your voice in front of an audience of 700. Fortunately, my girlfriend knows every standard remedy, as well as several that seem to have come straight from “Little House on the Prairie.”

Don’t get me wrong. We all love AFT. To perform here, most of us would do almost anything.

We just hope it doesn’t involve herding raccoons.

By the way, we’re thrilled to announce a new AFT amenity: golf carts to transport our customers with special needs from the parking lot to the theatre. No reservation required!

See you under the stars.

AFT performs at the Peninsula State Park Theatre Monday-Saturday through August 29. The world premiere ***Cheeseheads, the Musical*** plays Monday at 8 pm, Wednesday at 6 pm, Thursday at 8 pm and Saturday at 8:30pm. ***Sunsets & S’mores***, a celebration of Peninsula State Park’s 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary, takes the

stage at 8 pm on Tuesday and 6 pm on Saturday. **Muskie Love** returns on Wednesday at 8:30pm and Friday at 8 pm. Advanced and reserved tickets are available at [www.folkloretheatre.com](http://www.folkloretheatre.com), at 854-6117, at the AFT office in the Green Gables Shops in North Ephraim, or at the box office at the theatre one hour prior to each performance. A park sticker is not required in the theatre lot for the show.

*Doc Heide is co-founder, playwright, and performer with American Folklore Theatre.*