

For October 14, 2009

By Doc Heide

This has been The Autumn of Smiles.

In the first song of our fall AFT musical “Guys & Does”, the character I play (Fritz Dingleheimer) is sitting in his old Chevy truck driving. He has a big grin as he heads out from his paper mill job to “where whitetails leap in snow so deep”.

The song is called “Up Nort”. We wrote it to evoke the feelings of any Midwesterner who’s been lucky enough to light out for the great pine forests of upper Wisconsin.

Truth is, I feel a lot like Fritz. This fall I get to be on sabbatical from my academic post in San Francisco and perform 6 nights a week with my good pals at AFT.

Sunny Sabbatical

Normally at this time of year, I’m lecturing graduate students on cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy. It’s hardly slaving in a mill, but I’d trade the car exhaust on the Bay Bridge for the aroma of yellow maple leaves any day.

Although they call it a sabbatical, I’m still doing most of my job. Much of it involves reading dense technical theses to give students feedback. Fortunately, I read just as well under an apple tree near Baileys Harbor.

I’m not the only one smiling this fall. The folks in the AFT office are thrilled that “Guys & Does” is selling out every show, often days in advance.

It’s doing so well that we’re investigating a run in Green Bay as early as December, when the show’s Christmas themes should resonate strongly.

This week a theatre in the lake country of Minnesota asked if the show was available. Lee Becker and I are both smiling at that. As he once quipped while we were writing it, "This show should have legs---four of them."

And it seems I can barely leave the house without running into somebody smiling about it.

Pumped-up Patrons

Last Sunday my girlfriend Jody and I went to Pen Players, who have their own very fun show onstage ("Around the World in 80 Days"). The patrons near us had just seen "Guys", and couldn't contain their enthusiasm. An elderly lady said, "We all stood up at the end----and at our age, that really means something."

Yesterday in Ellison Bay a woman told me it might be her favorite show ever except for "Phantom of the Opera". She laughed almost nonstop through it, but also cried a couple of times. We're really glad people are responding to the show's deeper themes about mortality and male bonding as well as the lighter stuff.

Today at the Y, a gal said she loved it, then asked a random guy passing if he'd seen it. "Twice," he responded.

"Guys & Does" centers on Fritz, a fellow who doesn't smile much anymore. The only times he's truly happy are the short scenes at the top and very end. But then, the show explores how we regain our sense of vitality through contact with Nature and our fellow humans.

Just knowing that so many people are lifted by this story is enough to make all of us at AFT grin from ear to ear.

"Guys & Does", by Frederick Heide, Lee Becker, and Paul Libman is on stage at Ephraim Village Hall, Monday through Saturday at 7:30 pm and Saturday matinees at 4:30 pm through October 24. Advance reserved tickets are strongly

recommended and are available at 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 45 minutes prior to each show.