

For September 2, 2009

By Doc Heide

The other night actor Chase Stoeger asked me, “How is your little skit coming along?”

He was referring to our world premiere musical comedy “Guys & Does”, opening this weekend at Ephraim Village Hall.

I appreciated his irony. Occasionally patrons call our shows “skits”, a term that those inside the theatre world recognize as a bit inaccurate.

This particular “skit” has been almost two years in the making. Untold hours have been poured into it by the writers, composer, director, set designer, stage manager, lighting/sound designer, music director, cast, managing director, and staff. Working with this fine crew makes joyous a process that could otherwise be, um, doe-lorous.

Lee Becker and I, who co-wrote its book and lyrics, are profoundly grateful to AFT for the faith they’ve showed in the project, including the first commission to our writing team from the Fred Alley New Musical Fund.

Does Guys

We cooked up the story shortly before Thanksgiving in 2007. It involves two Nekoosa paper mill workers (Lee and I) on a hunting trip who meet a swaggering Texas hunter and the magical talking deer he’s pursuing (both played by Doug Mancheski).

The show’s title isn’t just a play on words. There’s much discussion of wives, girlfriends, and does. My character even gets romantic advice from the talking deer.

Composer Paul Libman (“Cheeseheads”) joined us last summer, and by October we had a complete draft. Artistic director Jeff Herbst liked everything

about it except the talking deer. So we made the deer talk funnier and---presto--- the show found its way out of the woods.

Cheers for Deers

All the folks involved with the production are pouring their “harts” into it. The masterful set by Jim Maronek (“Guys on Ice”) includes a tree stand 7 feet tall and a truck that turns into a fireplace. While constructing several structures meant to resemble trees, Stewart Dawson quipped, “I’m making trees from wood.”

Jeff is a fountain of fabulous directorial ideas. One day he offered a rare one that fell flat, then said modestly, “Sometimes my ideas don’t work.” Lee responded, “We know exactly how you feel.”

Stage manager Neen Rock is building exotic costumes and gathering props. One gun she acquired looks like it came from the French Revolution. When she asked the guy who loaned it to us how to make sure it didn’t go off accidentally, he said, “Don’t worry. Nobody has ammunition for it. They might make you some in France.”

And of course there’s our brilliant wordsmith Lee Becker. While we roamed Pen Park trying to write a song. I suggested we use a word I’d just made up, “snowbranch.” Lee seemed skeptical. “It’s a poetic conceit,” I claimed. He responded, “It could be a bit more conceited. It doesn’t have enough self-confidence to be a conceit.”

Lemme tell you, writing a show is a great way to stop being conceited. A musical comedy only gets off the ground with the devotion of a dedicated team.

And starting this weekend, you can decide for yourself whether this show is “skittish”, or if it delivers the big bucks.

“Guys & Does” performs at the Ephraim Village Hall Monday through Saturday at 7:30 PM from September 4 through October 24. On Saturday there is a 4:30 PM

matinee. Advanced and reserved tickets 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 one hour prior to performance.

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