

■ GUEST COLUMN

Thistle Theatre prepares for the Sault

BRIAN BROWN



PRODUCTION OF FIDDLER ON THE ROOF WILL TAKE PLACE AT THEATRE ONTARIO FESTIVAL 2004

Fiddler on the Roof, Embro's Thistle Theatre entry in the Western Ontario Drama League (WODL) Festival, which was hosted by Theatre Woodstock during March Break, has been well received by both audiences and adjudicators.

Indeed, the production has already won six major awards and hopes to continue its success at the approaching Theatre Ontario Festival 2004 in Sault Ste. Marie, May 18 to 23. At this festival, Thistle Theatre will proudly represent Embro, Zorra Township, Oxford County and Western Ontario in a competition that involves the top plays in com-

munity theatre from five regions across Ontario.

At the WODL Festival awards banquet, Fiddler on the Roof won awards for best production in festival, best director, outstanding ensemble (that's the entire cast), special adjudicator's award for pre-show, best visual production and outstanding performance by an actor 18 and under.

Director Keith Garner knew exactly what to say when he accepted the awards: "The awards belong to every single member of our company. This is one of the finest ensembles of actors and crew I have ever had the privilege of directing."

Embro, a tiny village with enormous talent in the heart of Oxford County's farm land, has had more than 170 of its 603 citizens involved in Fiddler for more than a year, first in the initial production at Embro's Town Hall, next in the WODL Festival in March and now in the community effort to raise \$24,000 to send the cast of 33 and the core crew of 46 to the Sault.

After a full year, the production has developed its own legends. Yes, it's true. Embro farmer Hank Hazeleger really does entertain his dairy herd by practising his lines and lyrics to their bovine delight. And yes, milk production has actually gone up over the last year.

It's also true that Woodstock General Hospital emergency room physician, Dr. Andy Brockway, who plays the lead role of Tevye, has been observed quietly humming a few bars of If I Were a Rich Man and occasionally burst-

ing into a full-voice version of Tradition while administering to his patients.

A less well-known legend has developed around Jen Prole, the 18-year-old high school drama student who plays Tevye's daughter, Chava. She was seriously ill with flu during the WODL Festival in Woodstock. During her initial entrance in act one, she not only threw up three times, she did so right on the shoes of the adjudicator. That's one way to be noticed.

Remarkably, the young actor composed herself behind the sets, willing herself to return to the stage to earn the award for outstanding performance by an actor 18 and under. The show must go on and it did.

To prepare for the Sault, Thistle Theatre is rehearsing evenings at the Woodstock Collegiate Institute auditorium, thanks to the wholehearted support of principal Chris Stewart and the Thames Valley District School Board. The company will perform two benefit shows at WCI, Friday, May 14 and Saturday, May 15. Curtain time is 7 p.m. with doors opening at 6:30 p.m. for general seating.

Tickets are available in Woodstock at Merrifield Book Shop, 471 Dundas St. (539-4220) and Deborah's Chocolates, 384 Dundas St. (533-0683) and in Embro at Workshop Supply (475-6212). Ticket prices are \$15 with a special price of \$8 for children under 12.

The benefit shows will help to cover the costs of moving 79 cast and crew to Sault Ste. Marie for the Theatre Ontario

Festival. In addition, community sponsors are answering the call for donations. General donations in any amount are gratefully accepted. Those donating \$100 or more will receive two tickets to one of the benefit performances, \$300 or more (the estimated cost to get one person to the Sault) will receive four tickets and our corporate sponsors donating \$1,000 or more will receive 10 tickets.

Another way to show community support and to be part of the excitement is to join Thistle Theatre in The Sault. There are some seats available on the coaches for family, friends, and fans of Fiddler on the Roof. Coaches leave at 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. Wednesday, May 19. One bus returns May 21, the other May 23. Supporters are welcome to travel with us at \$100 per round trip. Call 539-8876 to book your space.

Arrangements are well underway to move sets, props, costumes and people to Sault Ste. Marie by a combination of coaches, camper vans, family cars, airplanes and transport truck. Evening rehearsals continue at an increasingly rapid pace. Lights are hanging. Sets are modified and re-painted. Costumes are pressed. Makeup is purchased. Beards are growing. Crew members are hyped. Actors are ready. Please join me in telling the entire Thistle Theatre company: Break a leg in the Sault.

Brian Brown, a resident of Woodstock, is a member of Thistle Theatre and the house manager of Fiddler on the Roof. 2003 or 4