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# Schmeckfest ‘Tradition’

## ‘Fiddler On The Roof’ Dances Its Way Onto The Freeman Stage

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FREEMAN — Bob Sneller credits the musical “Fiddler On The Roof” with helping win his wife’s hand in marriage.

“I proposed to my wife in 1979 after seeing ‘Fiddler On The Roof’ at Sioux Falls College (now the University of Sioux Falls),” he said. “It was only our third date. But she was the girl I was looking for, and she was looking for a guy like me. That was 33 years ago, and we were married Sept. 6, 1980.”

More than three decades later, the Snellers are experiencing the musical in a different way — as cast members for the upcoming Schmeckfest production of “Fiddler.” Bob will play Lazar the butcher, while Janelle will play a villager.

“Fiddler” takes to the stage March 15-16 and 21-23 at Pioneer Hall on the Freeman Academy campus. The musical plays a major role in the annual Schmeckfest “tasting festival” that raises funds for the academy, a Mennonite-affiliated school for grades 1-12.

The March 21 performance stands alone, as no other Schmeckfest activities will be held that day.

Bob Sneller, a Parker businessman, knew he wanted a role in this year’s Schmeckfest musical, but he also wanted his wife to participate.

“She’s such a ‘widow’ much of the time when I’m with my music at church and with our praise team. I told her, ‘I will do (‘Fiddler’) if you’re part of it,” he said. “I asked the director, is there a part for her? Would you have room for one more person? So he made her a villager.”

Sneller is making his third Schmeckfest appearance. He has previously performed in “The Sound of Music” and “Joseph And The Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat.”

Sneller sought the role of Lazar in the upcoming “Fiddler” production.

“I wanted to be a guy that wasn’t liked, who wasn’t warm and fuzzy,” he said. “But (Lazar) also has a comical side, especially when he interacts with Tevye. Tevye is a free spirit, kind of a ‘waffler’ who sees it one way, then another. There is a lot of open dialogue with Tevye.”

The Snellers are just one example of the strong family ties among the Schmeckfest cast and crew. The musical typically brings together veterans of past productions passing the torch to the next generations. The musicals, along with the ethnic food and pioneer demonstrations, continually draw visitors to the festival, now in its 55th year.

Or, to quote the opening song title from “Fiddler,” it’s “Tradition!”

### GIVING DIRECTION

The director, John Koch, knows about the tradition. “Fiddler” marks his 11th Schmeckfest production, the most of any director in the festival’s history. He has directed “Kiss Me Kate” twice; “Guys and Dolls”; “Hello, Dolly!”; “Music Man”; “Secret Garden”; “Anything Goes”; “Brigadoon”; “Pajama Game”; “Oklahoma!”; and “Fiddler On The Roof.”

Koch was introduced to Schmeckfest when he met his future wife, with Freeman ties, while attending the University of South Dakota in Vermillion.

“I didn’t know anything about Schmeckfest, but they were looking for a director,” Koch said. “It ended up with me being brought in for ‘Brigadoon’ as my first show, and I have been back ever since. I don’t remember, but I think it’s been 30 years — it’s a long time ago.”

“Fiddler On The Roof” will be performed at Schmeckfest for the third time, Koch said. The musical — set in a Jewish village during czarist Russia — could strike a chord with Mennonites in the Freeman area whose German-Russian ancestors faced persecution, he said.

“It’s a pretty darn appropriate show for Freeman. You could almost substitute ‘Mennonite’ for ‘Jewish’ and you would have some of the very same things that happened with Russia,” Koch said. “In reality, many of the people sitting in your (Schmeckfest) audience had a father or grandfathers that could have



KELLY HERTZ/P&D  
Tevye (Mark Ortman) confronts his daughter Chava (Emily Schrag) who has decided she wants to marry outside of their Jewish faith, in a scene from the Schmeckfest production of “Fiddler on the Roof.” The classic musical will be presented at Pioneer Hall in Freeman for two weekends starting March 15. To see or purchase images from this event, visit [spotted.yankton.net](http://spotted.yankton.net).

had some of the same type of experiences.”

“Fiddler On the Roof” remains popular because it offers a good message and blends comedy and serious themes, Koch said.

“The first act is light and comfortable,” he said. “During the second act, there’s real challenges to the people. They are told to leave by the authorities. The children are growing into young adults, and many are not part of the tradition with the matchmakers. One of them even marries outside the faith.”

The Schmeckfest cast seeks to produce a familiar show in a new way, Koch said.

“They understand, you don’t want to do just the very same show. For goodness sake, what fun is that?” he said. “At the same time, this show is so well recognized by people that, heavens, you can’t go too far away from it on a tangent.”

Freeman Academy High School produced “Fiddler” in recent years, which helped in locating costumes for the Schmeckfest version, Koch said. And Landon Miller, who plays Motel in the upcoming musical, played Tevye in the Freeman Academy production.

Koch tries to ease the stress on his cast, orchestra and crew. Rehearsals are held three nights a week — twice for the full cast, an additional night for the major roles — until shifting to nightly practices during the home stretch.

Despite such allowances, the schedule remains intense for the main characters, particularly Mark Ortman as Tevye and Sonja Waltner as Golde, Koch said.

“You have the two elder daughters and the two elder beaus, and Golde, who have a good balance in their number of lines, but they are the secondary layer,” he said. “Tevye, absolutely, by a factor of three, has the most lines. He is literally on stage for nearly all of the scenes. It’s a very demanding role.”

### TAKING THE LEAD (ROLES)

Ortman, a farmer, has performed in Schmeckfest productions. His last major role came as Bill Sykes in “Oliver” in 2003. His son played the title role in that production.

This time around, Ortman welcomes the chal-

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Shaindel (Becky Waltner) shares a rumor with other villagers in a scene from “Fiddler on the Roof.” The musical is being presented in Freeman as part of the community’s annual Schmeckfest celebration. (Kelly Hertz/P&D)

*Welcome to the World*

The following babies were born at Avera Sacred Heart Hospital in February 2013:

ABIGAIL	EISLYN	KARSTEN	NELSON
ALEXANDER	ELISE	KIMORA	PERSAIS
AVA	ELISE	KRISTOPHER	PHOENIX
BENNETT	EMMETT	LILIANA	SARAH
BRAXTON	ESTIE	LYLIANNA	SKYLAR
BREEANNA	GABRIELLA	MAKENZIE	SOPHIA
BROOKS	HADLEY	MASON	TATUM
CALLEN	JAMIE	MORRISON	TAVIAN
DANIKA	JASE	MYLES	ZANDER
DEVONNA	KANZI	NASH	

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