

Community Production Brings Norway's Charm to Mt. Horeb

By ELIZABETH GOULD
(Of The State Journal Staff)

"Just pretend you're in Bergen. It rains every day there," said the smiling woman in Norwegian peasant costume who was taking tickets for "Song of Norway," Mt. Horeb's festival musical, at Tyrol Basin Saturday night.

The rain, which had necessitated an indoor performance in the elementary school auditorium on opening night June 24, had begun to splatter down again on the crowd assembling for the second Saturday night's presentation. But the brief showers that fell intermittently throughout the play did nothing to dampen the spirits of the cast on their uncovered stage, or the 250 or more enthusiastic onlookers who sat on blankets or folding chairs, huddled under umbrellas on the hillside, and watched this lovely, colorful production.

"SONG OF NORWAY" is a musical based on the life and music of the famous Norwegian composer Edvard Grieg, whose fishmonger father was disgusted with him for preferring music to the fish business because "not everyone wants music, but everybody eats fish!" The storyline deals with

Grieg's love for his hometown sweetheart Nina Hagerup, his friendship with the poet Rickard Nordraak, his rise to fame as the protege of the opera star-concert singer Louisa Giovanni, and his rejection of the glittering life she would have chosen for him, to return to his beloved Norway and marriage with Nina in Bergen.

Bits of Norwegian folklore and customs, analyses of the Norwegian character, and descriptions of the Norwegian countryside are woven skillfully into the narrative.

NANCY STEARNS, the production director, and Louis Sherman, the music director, have drilled their large cast so well that their absorption in their roles keeps the audience's interest at high pitch.

Dennis Hirschbein, playing Grieg, is as able an actor as he is a singer and pianist. Monona Rossol, with her effortless soprano voice, is appealing as Nina, and Moselle Sherman, whose voice is also excellent, has a professional grace and assurance as Louisa, the high-handed opera singer. Both Ron Forsmo, as the poet Rikard Nordraak, and Eleanor Arneson, as the forthright Mother Grieg, have fine singing voices,

and Forest Johnson, as the long-suffering Count Peppi Lailoup, and Dick Peterson as the fiddler and dancer, Freddy, have their moments to shine.

The exquisite costumes designed by Oljanna Cunneen of Blue Mounds — costumes that range from those of Norwegian peasants to the elaborate, hooped ball gowns of ladies of the 1860s — contribute almost as much as the acting, singing, and dancing to the success of the production.

SUSAN KOLLER and Dick Peterson of Mt. Horeb are responsible for the delightful dance scenes. E. Corso as set designer, Gladys Board as stage director, and James Engeseth as light and sound director are all from Mt. Horeb, and all deserve mention. Mike Kenny of Madison, on the organ, provides fine accompaniment.

The natural setting is lovely, with a small pond behind the stage, and the green, wooded hills rising as a background for both stage and audience.

"Song of Norway," as a community effort and a tribute to the Norwegian heritage of many of Mt. Horeb's citizens, is a beautiful production of which the town may well be proud.

It will be presented every Saturday night through July.

★ Television ★
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