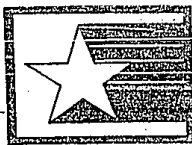


Entertainment

Ethel Simmons editor/644-1100



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Actress repeats role in 'Quilters'

By Victor Swanson
special writer

IT'S THE SECOND time around appearing in a production of "Quilters" for actress-singer-musician Nancy Krebs.

The performer from Baltimore, Maryland, is one of the cast members in the Meadow Brook Theatre production of the musical, which continues its metropolitan-Detroit premiere engagement through Sunday, April 23.

She first played in "Quilters" about three years ago when she was hired by director Robert Spencer for a production at the Tolem Pole Playhouse in Fayetteville, Pa.

After the show closed, Krebs went back to teaching and performing. Recently, Terence Kilburn, artistic director at Meadow Brook, told Spencer he was going to present "Quilters," and Spencer recommended hiring Krebs.

INTERVIEWED the day after the show opened at Meadow Brook, Krebs described the plotline, saying, "Quilters" is a musical based on a series of books that were written about women — pioneer women — going out West, and how quilts figured very heavily in their lives and

'I didn't want to teach, and here I am teaching. It always works out that way, doesn't it?'

— Nancy Krebs

the art of quilt making and, not only their lives but, in extension, the lives of their men. It's a very powerful show, a very powerful show."

Written by Molly Newman and Barbara Dameshek, "Quilters" was first performed a number of years ago at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts.

Krebs is one of seven performers in the production, but she is the only one who is acting and playing two unique musical instruments — a mandolin and a violin, which is much more than the standard violin, the instrument on which she started her musical career in seventh grade.

Both instruments were made by Mac Barnes III, a craftsman who is in his 30s. Her violin is a string instrument patterned after a Kullfanger, which was popular in the mid-1800s. There are a several reasons why it's special, besides the

tone. It has five strings; a standard violin only has four strings. Fifth string on Krebs' instrument is a C-string. Krebs' instrument has a lot of intricate carving in the wood, such as a carving of a head. The instrument also is special because it's the first one crafted by Barnes.

Krebs obtained the violin several years ago when her when she and her husband, Pete Baden, a professional studio musician, were visiting his close friend, violinmaker Kenzie Lamb in Baton Rouge, La.

SHE BOUGHT the violin from Lamb, fell in love with the instrument, and later bought a mandolin from him. The mandolin is the second one Barnes handcrafted. Krebs and Lamb believe when historians write about the violin makers of the 20th century, Barnes' name will be high on the list.

Krebs plays the instruments at the opening of act two, which is like a hoodown — loud and loaded with dancing and fun, and at the end of the production.

Raised in Baltimore, Krebs was trained in classical violin. One day she switched to fiddle-type music. "I had more fun playing the bass fiddle

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STEPHEN CANTRELL/staff photographer

Nancy Krebs strums a mandolin, one of two unique, handcrafted instruments she plays in the musical "Quilters." The mandolin and vio-

lin are both owned by Krebs and were handcrafted by Mac Barnes III.

'Quilters' recaptures spirit of pioneer women

Performances of the Meadow Brook Theatre production of "Quilters" continue through Sunday, April 23, on the Oakland University campus in Rochester Hills. For ticket information, call 877-3300.



Cathle Breidenbach

By Cathle Breidenbach
special writer

The musical "Quilters" stitches together vignettes from the lives of pioneer women who settled the American heartland. In word, dance and song, Meadow Brook Theatre's high-

energy production recreates the vast horizons and cozy fires of the pioneer life.

The cast of seven women portrays a panoply of characters who survived the hardships of cold-to-the-

bone winters in sod houses and raging prairie fires in their good-old-fashioned days. To balance the pain of hardships, "Quilters" shines with the comedy of cowboys, the highkicks of children and some fine toe-tapping fiddle music.

Authors Molly Newman and Barbara Dameshek use motifs of traditional quilt designs — Log Cabin, Windmill and the Tree of Life to name a few — and mingle old folk songs and new melodies to piece together the scraps and remnants of ordinary women's lives into a patchwork musical of pioneer history.

They tell their tales from women's points of view and celebrate history through a woman's art form — quilting. Like a good quilt design, the vignettes in Meadow Brook Theatre's production combine in an entertaining show that's greater and more

moving than the sum of its separate parts.

DIRECTOR ROBERT Spencer's lively direction of the excellent cast falters only when he emphasizes stereotypes and clichés in the script. Why would a play that celebrates the strength of women fall back on backneyed sexist clichés and have the lone boy in the schoolhouse scene pull the girls' pigtails and harass them with a spiky comb?

In scenes recreating childhood memories, why must the cast resort to the silly, shrill voices used only by make-believe children from the land

of stereotype? And why must Shirleyann Kalandjian overplay the big-eyed, innocent effervescence of her characters?

Despite her indisputable cuteness, an overdose of irrepressible pertness cloy like Pollyanna's optimism or Bella's goody-goodness in "Little Women." Thankfully, clichés can't undermine the feisty honesty of the musical. For the most part, "Quilters" remains true to the harsh

issues and real characters, realists who tamed it.

Robert Spencer's creative staging

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