



Performers in "Some Sunny Night", (cq) front from left, Rolf Stang, Robert Kerr, Finn Bendixen, Chris O'Connor and Samantha Bowyer perform during a dress rehearsal of the musical at the Sorg Opera House in Middletown, Ohio, Tuesday Sept. 26, 2006. Photo by Pat Auckerman, courtesy Middletown Journal.

I am writing from Middletown, Ohio, where "Midffest International" takes place annually at the end of September. Each year, Midffest features a different country; Norway was the star in 1997. Here for the third time to perform, I find myself, very happily, involved in a Musical/Opera called "Some Sunny Nigh," written by an exceptionally talented Norwegian composer and singer, a young man named Thomas Stanghelle. His mother is the singer, Turid Stanghelle, whom New Yorkers very likely know of or have heard.

"Some Sunny Night" has to do with the innovative, distinctly robust and, therefore, initially controversial therapeutic work done in treating Ketil Moe, by the composer's father, Dr. Johan Stanghelle, with his two colleagues, Dr. Skyberg (my role) and the physiotherapist Finn Bendixen. I'm sure you've read about Ketil in the pages of Norway Times. He was inspiring news in all the New York papers in the '80s and '90s, as he ran the marathon 14 times.

Ketil Moe suffered, survived and conquered in a longer-than-expected life -- for a person plagued by Cystic Fibrosis. Moe's journey to that longer life (he was born in 1966 and, amazingly, lived until a week before his thirty-third birthday in 1999) was one that led to his being a world-renowned marathon runner. In Stanghelle's piece, his painful, but ascendant journey is deeply experienced by the audience. There is a second theme in addition to

the narrative about Moe. It is another person, a remarkable Chinese fellow named Mark (Jiapeng) Wang, who was crippled in an airplane crash at age 12 and diagnosed as "probably going to die, in any case, destined never to walk again." His story brings another dimension in terms of how we think of "The Handicapped." We see Mark Wang progress in the show and, then, actually begin to walk with crutches. Today, he is alive, well and thriving, living half the year in his native China and the other half-year in his adopted Norway. [As a result of the connection made between the Norwegian doctor/therapists and Sunnaas Rehabilitation Hospital in Norway and the rehabilitation center in China where Mark was treated, there is a strong, continuing link between the two institutions and countries.] Mark Wang received a scholarship to study at the United World College in Norway from Queen Sonja when she visited China to observe the Norwegian initiative there in rehabilitation practice.

Mark Wang is here at Midffest walking amongst us. He will be in the theater for the performance on Thursday evening. Because he will walk out on stage to introduce himself and actually begin the performance, the impact of positive attitude and the idea of never giving up hope that permeates this work will resound loudly in one's soul. No less than two irresistible role models are also woven in as a part of this very persuasive narrative fabric: two more

# American Premier of "Some Sunny Night"

By Rolf Stang

Norwegians of note, nine-time N.Y. marathon winner Grete Waitz and four-time Olympic Gold Medal winner Johan Olav Koss. In the production, the "Greek chorus" comments all along the way with gorgeous tone and sparkling theatrical versatility and, at one strategic point, sings an upbeat paean to Grete Waitz, as "The Queen of New York."

The young cast of principal singers

assembled by conductor Jeff Powell is of the highest professional quality, bringing each character and each song and aria to a high, expressive level. The conductor, Powell, has the work fluidly and firmly in hand. The American premier of "Some Sunny Night" on Sept. 28, is expected to light up the stage of Middletown's Sorg Opera House and rank as a highlight in the 26-year history of Midffest.