



# NAPOLEON SPECTACLE-PLUS

*Napoleon*, the UNL School of Music's winter opera, the only opera premiere on a university campus this year, came about as a cooperative effort of the School of Music and multiple University resources.

Originally a creative dissertation for a Ph.D. in English for Centennial College Fellow Bill Wallis, the idea expanded into grand opera co-authored with Dean Tschetter, Designer in Residence for the School of Music. Robert Beadell, also of the School of Music, joined with them to compose the score.

*Napoleon*, first scheduled to be produced during the Weekend With Music program with one performance became the winter opera when planners decided the enterprise would be a better investment with more than one performance, according to Music School Chairman John Moran.

The large scope of the production has involved willing cooperation from every department in the School of Music, according to Moran.

Moran said the University is an ideal situation for the premiere of a new opera.

"Any established opera is a large undertaking and expense for a company. Professional groups can't take the risk of failure that a premiere involves," Moran said.

"Today, the only place to do a premiere is in a unique situation such as ours. It takes the resources and staff of our school along with the encouragement we have received from the whole University," Moran said.

Among those resources is a rapidly-developing opera program under the direction of John Zei and Richard Grace. The program has served as a training ground for members of the *Napoleon* cast.

Interest of the University community has helped in research and funding. The University Research Council granted Beadell a semester's stipend to write the score and provided funds for a person to copy manuscripts.

A proposal to the Nebraska Arts Council brought about a \$5,000 grant for videotaping a performance.

## SCRIPTING THE PARADOX WITH MUSIC

Napoleon.

The name instantly brings to mind a man of power and enormous strength. But history will have it that he was a man, also. His love for Josephine, his temper and moodiness testify to that.

**It is this curious paradox and synthesis that the opera *Napoleon*, premiering Feb. 2 at Kimball Recital Hall, explores.**

In writing the libretto, Dean Tschetter and Bill Wallis used qualities of lyric drama and grand opera with plans for multi-media electronic effects in presenting Napoleon's emotions.

All this grew from their first idea, what Tschetter termed a "tight Brechtian production," a small, intimate show exploring Napoleon as a classical hero.

"When we got the script done we realized that Napoleon without spectacle would be like Patton without World War II. Our first intention was not to write a multi-media opera but things seemed to suggest themselves being done that way," Tschetter said.

Even the orchestra grew from the original idea.

"(Composer Robert) Beadell felt a brass and percussion orchestra was too limited so we added strings. From there it

was only a step to a full orchestra and chorus. And then two choruses..." Tschetter said.

As Tschetter and Wallis explored the libretto possibilities, composer Beadell expressed the paradox in the musical score. As moods shift onstage, so does the music, changing from melodic to dissonant, he said.

**The three found visual spectacle to come from Napoleon's life itself. Much of the libretto is taken from what Napoleon said.**

The visual spectacle serves to heighten the emotions projected to the audience, Tschetter said.

Wallis said their opera is a psychological study of a great mind under pressure, with the intent of showing the audience Napoleon's emotions.

"It's not something an audience will relax and enjoy. Nor will it exhaust all there is to see in one viewing. Here, his whole life is compressed into eight hours after the Battle of Borodino and those eight hours into two and one-half hours of stage time," Wallis said.

The attempt to communicate Napoleon's complex paradox to the audience, forced *Napoleon* to grow into a

mammoth undertaking.

"If I were a director looking at the script for the first time, I'd say the demands on the singers, the large cast and technical demands would make it impossible to do," Tschetter said.

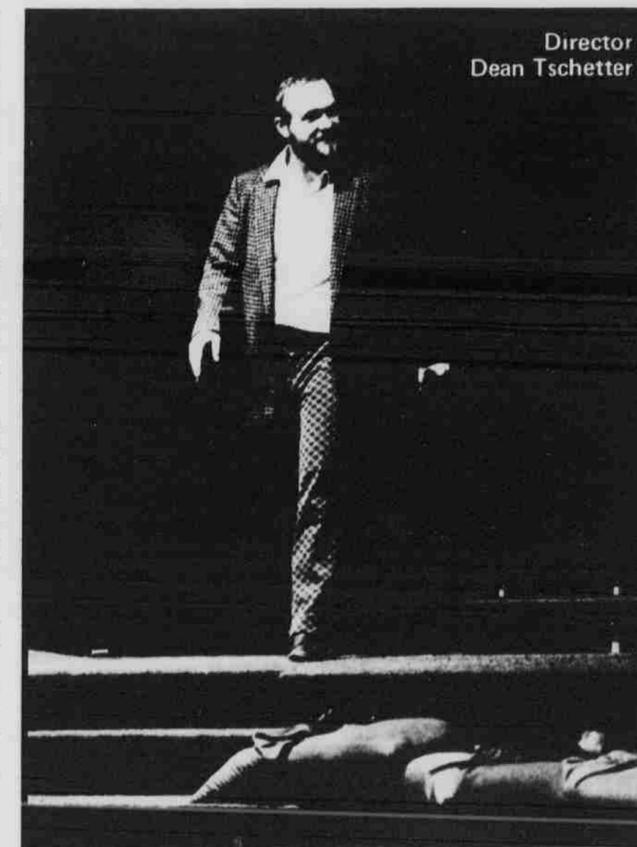
Librettists Tschetter and Wallis and composer Beadell have had their hands in the staging of *Napoleon* also. Tschetter is directing, Wallis performing and Beadell advising.

As an actor in the opera, Wallis must adjust to another framework. "I can't have two stances at once. While performing I can't look at the hundred different things I do as a writer. So, I've entered the production fully as a performer, bringing the work to life," Wallis said.

Bringing a new opera to life involves rewriting, as stage scenes don't work as well as they did on paper.

"It's much different to be on the conducting side of a premiere with the composer and librettists around. It means a lot of late music and rewrites to take in stride, but in every case they have improved character development and timing in the show," conductor Richard Grace said.

### STORIES BY CAROLYN HULL



Director  
Dean Tschetter