

Tragics' grave acts unearth sorrow

I love good stand-up comics, as everyone does, but I think there are enough of them around. What I would like to see is a good stand-up tragic.

Stand-up tragedy is a rare and difficult art, which demands great skill and superb timing. The tragic must feel the audience's mood and use it to heighten their sense of futility and despair.

Becoming a tragic is a long and difficult apprenticeship. Beginners must endure tough one-night stands in cheap mausoleums and two-bit cemeteries. The great tragics all remember terrible nights when the audience sat smiling happily, listening to the entire routine without a whimper or a single heartbroken sigh.

For the lucky and persistent few, there is success, money and fame. There are the long engagements in plush funeral parlors, the screams of hysterical weeping, the cries of grief.

The best of them can turn a crowd of carefree celebrants into a congregation of mourners in only a few minutes. Amos Sober, perhaps the greatest tragic of all, tells about his roughest night as a young novice:

"They were all casually dressed, chuckling merrily and feeling on top of the world," he recalls. "I could see that it would be a hard evening unless I got them depressed right away, so I opened with a devastating little monologue about the imminence of death.

"That subdued their spirits enough to get them ready for the real material. By the time I finished my Hamlet routine, I

was getting snuffles and clenched jaws. From then on, it was downhill all the way and I killed them."

Sober's secret, and the essential attribute of all good tragics, is the ability to seem intimate and close. Bob Hopeless can talk to a hundred people at once, and to each one he sounds natural and convincing, like a bereaved relative telling you about the death of a loved one.

Tragedy is hard to find on television now, but there is one abundant source of new talent, the network talk show *This*

mark kiellbaard
you have my word

Dark Night. Host Andy Guide explains his approach: "I'm no intellectual, and I don't pretend to be one. Rather than try to discuss issues, we just concentrate on pure despair value. The goal of this show is just plain depression."

Guide has launched more successful tragics than anyone else. "You can always recognize genuine ability," he says. "If you feel great, if the world seems bright and encouraging, the true genius can have you feeling trapped and desolated in no time at all."

Cliches get new twist in poet's latest collection

Review by Bill Kohlhaase
Under Cover By Albert Goldbarth (Best Cellar Press)

Last spring, Greg Kuzma added a collection of poems by Albert Goldbarth to his Best Cellar Press Pamphlet Series. The chapbook is entitled *Under Cover* and it further distinguishes Kuzma's excellent series. It is one of a small group of recent books of poetry (which includes Kuzma's own book, *Good News*) that is a joy to read from start to finish.

Technically, the poetry is tight and well-controlled, yet Goldbarth speaks with a witty and easy voice of his own. Goldbarth does not just play with words but instead puts them to work. The result is a job well-done such as this verse from "From The Handyman's How-To-Fix-It Book One. The Heart:"

The remnants must be rearranged
in a functional shape; the famous Valentine
Diagram will suffice, and is often preferred.
But any size or outline; only make sure
the heart is not solid; this is called a rock
and will not do. If the shape appears
as if it could easily break again,
it is a heart.

Goldbarth suggests to us the cliché "a heart of stone" and works it to his advantage.

The next verse provides further example of his imaginative use of clichés as he has some old dogs respond to his wit and come out performing new tricks.

Now merely apply binder.
It is popularly believed that tears
bind best: love is blind the tears
school says. Untrue; love sees
perfectly and can even function in the dark
For this reason some advise semen,
the quickest and most spectacular
binder of all; yet impermanent.

Here, the most obvious reaction to "love is blind" has been discovered by Goldbarth and it works perfectly.

Goldbarth's images are always strong and a bit more than one anticipates from a metaphor. Take this example from "People Are Dropping Out Of Our Lives":

Joplin's voice, edged like a crack
in glass, breaks
out from the window...

Even the point he has chosen to end his lines adds to the metaphor, "breaks" suggesting the cracking of Janis's voice and its carrying outside the room.

These verses reaffirm the value of poetry but, in doing so, never forget that poetry is something to be enjoyed. Copies are available at Nebraska Book Store, in the English Department or from Best Cellar Press, 118 South Boswell Avenue, Crete, Nebr. 68333.

blurbs

Weekend Films presents Sam Peckinpah's *Straw Dogs* tonight and tomorrow night at 7. The film stars Dustin Hoffman and Susan George as a nonviolent mathematician and his childish wife. The film will be shown at Henzlik Hall auditorium.

The UNL orchestra, under the direction of Emanuel Wishnow, will present its fall concert Sunday at 8 p.m. in Kimball Recital Hall.

The first program of the Beethoven Sonata Series is this Sunday at 3 p.m. at Sheldon Art Gallery. Cary Lewis, instructor of piano at Nebraska Wesleyan University, will be featured. The series is free.

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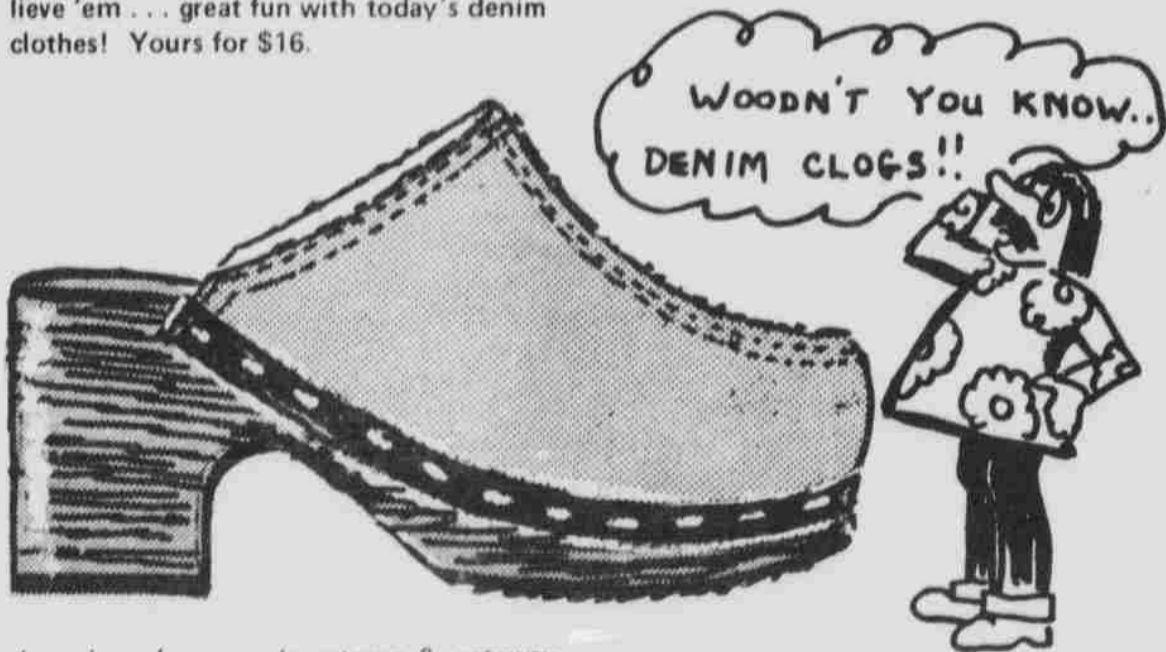
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