

'Sunshine Boys' a disappointment

By Ryan Scott

If you are feeling buried under an increasing college work load and need a brief respite, don't turn to *The Sunshine Boys*, (Douglas 2, 1300 P St.) with the expectation of forgetting your troubles in an evening of uproarious laughter.

Neil Simon's *The Sunshine Boys*, the film adaptation of his recent Broadway bomb, is a perfect example of film mediocrity. It rates neither a high recommendation nor labeling as a disaster. At best it is a disappointment.

The movie stars Walter Matthau and George Burns as retired vaudevillian comedians Willy Clark and Al Lewis. Richard Benjamin co-stars as Willy Clark's nephew-agent.

The story concerns a television special on the history of comedy. Clark and Lewis, after not speaking for twelve years, are to be reunited in their famous doctor sketch on the program.

The twist is that Clark despises Lewis, a hate supposedly stemming from Lewis' annoying way of "purposefully" spitting a hard T in front of words like typewriter, and because he poked Clark repeatedly in the chest during comedy routines.

The truth is Clark resents Lewis' retirement after 43 years as a team. Clark is lost without his partner, although he refuses to admit it even to himself. Instead of letting bygones be forgotten, the television reunion only brings the duo back to arguing about their past.



Script bogs down

The story is simple. It suffers from being stretched to 110 minutes.

Many of Simon's writing elements are present in the film. Stereotyped characters, cute one-liners and comebacks, a touch of seriousness and a sprinkling of social comment are in the film. Sadly, these elements are ineffective by a script that bogs down almost from the offset.

The script has a hard time progressing. The hateful quips between Lewis and Clark are amusing, but tiring after a few minutes. It is easy to get fidgety anticipating

a big laugh or expecting the tempo to liven up. Relief never comes and fidgeting is replaced with restlessness.

It would be impossible to pin the film's mediocrity on poor acting. Matthau's performance as Clark is polished in every respect. His characterization is strikingly real, and some senior citizens might be embarrassed by it. I am amazed by Matthau's repeated ability to play septuagenarian roles so deftly. (He was nominated for an Oscar three years ago for "Kotch").

His excellence makes it hard to believe he is playing a character several years older. His performance may garner a favorable response among Academy members when Oscar nominating ballots are cast this month. He certainly would be an acceptable choice.

A delightful pair

Burns' performance is fine too, though he may be more of a natural in the role. He is a complete professional and does not appear lost on screen without his customary cigar.

Burns and Matthau make a delightful pair, a duo I am

sorry to see limited to this one movie.

I find it hard to pinpoint the exact fault of the film. Maybe the problem is partly my own, with my inability to find vaudevillian humor amusing. Older members of the audience seemed to enjoy the film's humor more than I. Maybe I am too used to the present era of sophisticated humor.

Simon also may have deliberately chosen a subtle writing style to present the characters in greater depth, and with greater compassion. Simon is unsuccessful in this regard as evidenced by the total unconcern and uninvolved one feels when Clark suffers a heart attack after a rehearsal for the television special.

In comparison with other Simon works, *The Sunshine Boys* is definitely below par. It isn't a bad film, just not what one has come to expect from Simon. I guess I have been spoiled by Simon's usual standards of excellence.

Save for Matthau's acting, I find the mediocrity of *The Sunshine Boys* to be, frankly, boring.

UNL ensemble dances tonight

The UNL Dance Ensemble will give its first performance this year tonight at 8 in Kimball Recital Hall. Tickets for the performance, which will feature a variety of dance styles, are \$1.50.

Richard Croskey, assistant professor of dance, came to UNL last fall from Southern Methodist University (SMU) and organized UNL's first dance company. Three dancers have been added to the company of 12 women and four men to form the ensemble.

For the performance Croskey choreographed *Rhapsody*,

a classical ballet, *Night Moves*, a jazz work, and *Entertainers*, which he called a "theater piece."

"There's nothing else to call it," Croskey said of *Entertainers*. "It's not really ballet, it's not really modern, it's not really jazz. It's about clowns."

A Russian folk dance, *Hopak*, was choreographed by Dorothy Hughes, UNL assistant professor of dance. *Allegro* and *Mindspell*, two modern works, were choreographed by UNL dance instructor Barbara Mason. Another modern work, *In No Other Time*, was choreographed by Bob Beard, SMU assistant professor of dance.

NYC Opera star leads Manon cast

Patricia Brooks of the New York City Opera will sing the title role in *Manon* at 8 p.m. Thursday and Saturday at Omaha's Orpheum Theater.

Brooks was a dancer and then actress before devoting herself to opera. She made her first appearance with the New York City Opera in 1960 and now is one of its brightest stars.

Other *Manon* cast members from the New York City

Opera include tenors John Stewart and Joseph Frank. The Omaha Opera Company will contribute baritone Joseph Galiano, bass Tom Fox and sopranos Diane Jones and Duane Mahy. Elizabeth Lamkin, this year's artist-in-residence at the Omaha Public Schools, also will perform.

James de Blasis is stage director for the Omaha production of *Manon*. Jonathan Dudley will conduct.

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