

arts & entertainment



Innovative dancers bring 'art of motion' to UNL

By Michael Zangari

Elaborate costumes, 26 slide projectors, elastic and prismatic mirror props and unusual lighting effects set the Nikolais Dance Theatre apart from other modern dance troupes.

Dance theatre members are on the UNL campus today through Wednesday, performing and speaking.

Nikolais has been the major innovator in dance in America in the past 25 years. He has a working background in music, dance, theatre and puppetry, which has led to his integrated medium approach to dance theatre.

Nikolais' basic philosophy is that the dancer should not be separated from his environment.

This is shown by the use of lights and slide projections. Often his dancers are indistinguishable from the environment because the light design projected on the backcloth also is on the dancer.

Costumes vary

This concept also involves costuming for the dancers. Sometimes two dancers share one stretchy bag for a costume. At other times, the dancers' costumes becomes part of the props.

Nikolais' Dance Theatre uses electronic sounds during the show. The sound geared specifically to the movement of the dancers, rather than the traditional dancers geared to pre-patterned music.

Nikolais, the man behind the production, acts as choreographer, set designer, costume and make-up designer, and also is responsible for the lighting and musical concept.

One European critic called him the "first international creative artist to emerge from the United States."

Of his own work, Nikolais has said: "Futuristic? That's nonsense. What I've done is a reaction against the Freudian concept of the libido responsible for all behavior of man."

'Not dehumanizing'

He said this approach does not dehumanize his subjects.

"I've searched for stavistic (ancestral) impulses and gone into asexuality in order to save ourselves from the environment of the mores of masculinity and femininity. When I have a male dancer on stage I want neither a fag nor truck driver. I want somebody who knows how to dance, dance being the art of motion."

A free public lecture by Nikolais will be at 8 tonight in the Womens Physical Education Bldg. dance studio.

Nikolais will speak about *Technical Change in Arts of Theatre* and how dance theatre evolved.

Performances by the company are scheduled at 8 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday in Kimball Recital Hall.

Tickets still are available at the Kimball box office. Tickets are \$2.50 for students and \$4 for general admission.

The residency is supported partially by grants from the Nebraska Fine Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts, coordinated by the Mid-America Arts Alliance.

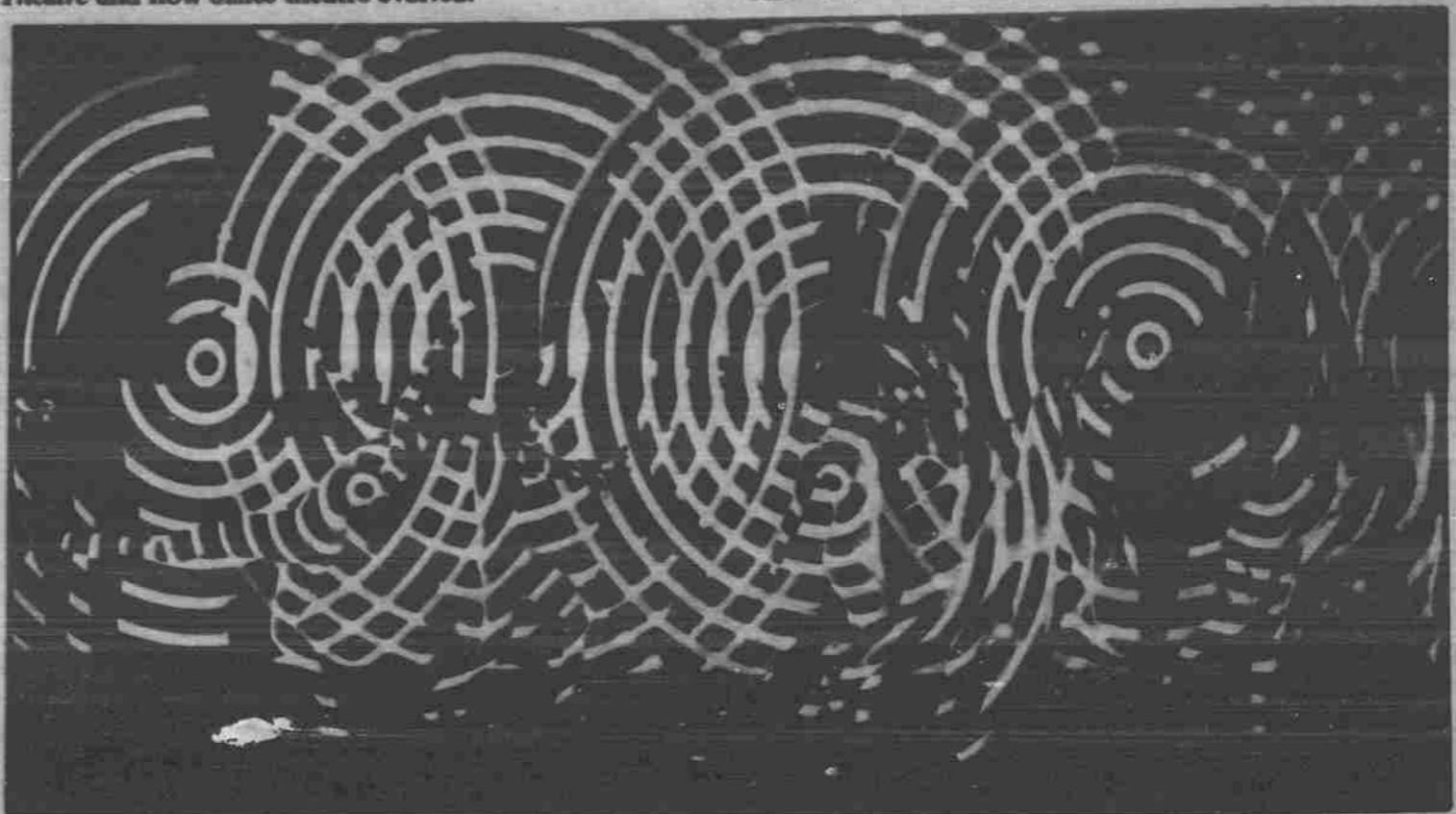


Photo courtesy of Omega

The Nikolais Dance Theatre uses a multi-media approach to modern dance. The group is in residence at UNL through Wednesday.

Big Bird and alter ego keep their rules separate

By Carja Engstrom

When Carol Spinney puts on a costume of bright yellow feathers, striped stockings and a beak, he automatically is Big Bird, a *Sesame Street* regular.

Big Bird made an appearance with the Lincoln Symphony Orchestra Sunday at

the UNL Sports Complex. He talked with members of the audience and autographed postcards of himself for children. He also conducted the symphony.

After he's in costume, all resemblance of Spinney is gone; he's Big Bird and never breaks character.

Big Bird was asked how much he made and he replied he works "just for bird seed; I can't imagine anything I'd want more."

Yet, there's a serious side to the 43-year-old actor. Spinney has been "into puppets" since he was eight years old. The voice of Big Bird developed from a dog (puppet) that Spinney invented.

Spinney, a gray-haired man with a goatee, is not new to the business. He had his own puppet show 21 years ago on a local television station in Las Vegas. At the time, he was making \$10 a week.

A giant puppet

The character of Big Bird was developed by Jim Henson, the producer of *Sesame Street*. Big Bird is one of the Muppets and is technically a giant puppet, Spinney said.

His character was developed to fulfill childhood fantasies on a street setting on *Sesame Street*, according to Spinney.

Big Bird is intriguing to children and adults because, "he's a big innocent-looking child," David Holman, assistant producer, said.

"Children immediately identify with him. He's the only character that represents children. He's a child (himself)," Holman said.

The other characters on *Sesame Street* teach children. Big Bird doesn't do that. He makes mistakes and experiences things for children, Holman said.

Monitor strapped to chest

Spinney has a monitor strapped on his chest, along with cue cards underneath his costume. Spinney said he has a basic script to work with, but he ad libs a lot and tries to do on-the-spot humor.

"I've done a number of symphonies with the Boston Pops and they were very successful," Spinney remarked.

Because of the success of Big Bird's appearance with the Boston Pops, other symphonies have asked Big Bird to appear with them.

"It's a nice way to see Big Bird and get the children interested in music," Spinney said.

During the next week, Big Bird and other *Sesame Street* characters will perform at a party First Lady Betty Ford is giving for children of various Washington ambassadors.

Each feather of Big Bird's costume is individually dyed and hand-glued, according to Holman. Spinney doesn't put his costume on until the last minute, because it's tiring to wear.

"We have to be careful with timing, and space our energy for the show in segments," Spinney said.

One of Spinney's hands must be straight over his head at all times because it holds up the costume's head. His other hand is free to move as Big Bird's arm.

The costume is made of two basic parts, the yellow body of Big Bird, which must be put on by someone other than Spinney, and his colored stockings that are supported by suspenders.

Big Bird will never grow any older. He started at four and has advanced only to the age of six.

Spinney has been with *Sesame Street* since it started eight seasons ago. And Spinney has played the part of Big Bird from the beginning.

Nuke bomb, power is topic

Nuclear energy and the atomic bomb are the topics of a double-feature program at the Sheldon Film Theatre today through Saturday.

Lovejoy's Nuclear War, a 1975 release, presents a cross section of points of view about nuclear power, civil disobedience and the politics of energy.

The film describes Samuel Lovejoy's act of sabotage and subsequent trial. Lovejoy toppled a 500-foot steel weather tower in Montague, Mass. The tower had been erected by a local utility company as part of its project to construct one of the largest nuclear power plants.

Interviews with industry and utility representatives are juxtaposed with state-

ments by Lovejoy and other nuclear opponents to capitalize the debate between pro- and anti-nuclear forces.

Crossroads, the second feature is based on government footage of the first underwater A-bomb test, July 25, 1946, at Bikini Atoll in the Pacific Ocean.

The film was made by Bruce Conner, a noted San Francisco painter and filmmaker. Stanley Eichelbaum of the *San Francisco Examiner* calls the film "Conner's most eccentrically imaginative work... richly atmospheric, even brutally beautiful."

The showings are at 7 and 9 p.m. There will be afternoon showings at 3, Friday and Saturday. Admission is \$2.



Photo by Kevin Higley

Sesame Street's Big Bird, looking a bit ruffled, joined the Lincoln Symphony Orchestra for a Sunday concert in the UNL Sports Complex.