

Theatre

Gingerbread Lady characters kneaded companions

Review By Carla Engstrom

Neil Simon and comedy have always been good companions. Yet when Simon decided to combine laughter with a more serious side of life, the result was realistic theatre in his play *The Gingerbread Lady*.

The Lincoln Community Playhouse production runs April 7 through 9, curtain time is 8 p.m.

A New York City apartment is the setting for a script involving lines on subjects such as alcoholism, aging, homosexuality, and love with the traditional satirical Simon comic ability.

The plot concerns Evy Meara (Patsy Davidson), a 43-year-old divorcee and alcoholic, who is returning to her apartment after taking the "cure."

In so far as Simon's script is part of realistic theatre, the heroine is a struggling one. Davidson portrays a woman in need of companionship, who still drinks. She presents an honest character that keeps the audience involved throughout the three-act play.

Refreshing

It is refreshing to see a believable family experience about an alcoholic mother. Evy's daughter Polly comes to live with her mother in hopes that she will stay "cured."

Ann Sandin plays Polly. Through her character she creates a well developed understanding of Evy's problem.

Polly is only 17, yet she can accept her mother's love affairs and friends without any stigmatism. Sandin has the audience's sympathy from start to finish. She makes the audience feel her conflict of having an alcoholic mother.

Evy's friends include an aging beauty queen who has just turned 40 and whose husband wants a divorce, an aging homosexual actor who can't get work and a 33-year-old guitar player who is Evy's lover.

The pretense in the script is that these

characters stick together because they are not strong enough to stand on their own.

Conflicts

Director John Wilson takes Simon's script and lets the audience enjoy and understand these characters conflicts through laughter. Wilson's staging allows for the timing needed in Simon's script.

Through Wilson's directing and the character development of Jimmy Perry, the aging homosexual, the audience sees a non-stereotyped man that cannot obtain his career goals. Perry is played by Lee Schoonover, who takes the audience inside a man that needs friends and affection regardless of his sexual persuasion.

Schoonover is excellent and his performance adds to the overall enjoyment of the play.

Barbara Wilson plays Toby Landau, the aging beauty queen. Her portrayal of the traditional woman's role is satirically funny. Toby uses enough make-up to keep Helena Rubinstein in business. Through excellent character development, Toby realizes she has more to offer than physical beauty.

It has been traditional in theatre for directors to tell actors that there are no small parts, only small actors. The truth in that statement is demonstrated by the minor characters Manuel and Lou Tanner.

Manuel (John Thew) is a delivery boy. Yet his Chicano character kept the audience entertained and his minor role is memorable.

Tanner, played by Rod McCullough, is Evy's ex-lover. He is on stage for one scene, yet through his character the audience understands how desperately Evy needs love. McCullough presents a crude musician needing to publish his work. Considering this kind of crudeness, he is curiously a captivating character.

The most exciting element in *The Gingerbread Lady* is the overall artistic energy that brings the play alive.



Original concept courtesy of Lincoln Community Playhouse.

arts and entertainment

Chairwoman: Lincoln playhouse is 'middle-of-the-road' theatre

By Charlie Krig

This year's goal in choosing the 1977-78 bill of plays for the Lincoln Community Playhouse (LCP) was to get a balanced season, according to Terry Faulkner, chairwoman of the playhouse play-reading committee.

"You have to understand it's a community playhouse," Faulkner said during a telephone interview. "A community playhouse is kind of a middle-of-the-road theatre because you have to make money. You can't do experimental theatre like the university can."

However, Faulkner said the Playhouse can afford to do one show that has narrow box office appeal if it makes up for it with other shows, especially musicals.

The playhouse play-reading committee meets six months of the year, but Faulkner said it might become a year-round operation. She said this would allow the committee to look at plays that become available during the times the committee currently is not in session.

This year's committee read 65 plays, Faulkner said. It then met with LCP managing director John Wilson to get his ideas and recommendations about the plays. After that the committee makes a tentative list of six plays, which must be approved by the Playhouse board of directors.

Paid to direct

The major difference between the Playhouse and UNL's theatre, according to Faulkner, is that Wilson is paid to direct the shows the board of directors chooses. Wilson participates in the decision making but it is not only his decision.

The committee is made up of people chosen by the president of the LCP board of directors and the chairperson of the play-reading committee. Anyone who is interested in the committee is considered for invitation, Faulkner said.

In addition, she said one meeting is open to the public each year for theatre patrons to express opinions.

Faulkner said the committee avoids choosing what it considers controversial plays. Instead it chooses "shows

that the average theatre-goer will enjoy." In order to see what the audience likes, the committee takes audience surveys. Faulkner said Lincolinites "tend to like comedy."

She said the committee tries for balance in two ways: in the type and nature of shows. For instance, out of the six yearly productions three are musicals (*Camelot*, *Jacques Brel* and *Jesus Christ Superstar*), two are comedies (*Mister Roberts* and *God's Favorite*) and one is a drama (*Veronica's Room*). The nature of the show involves looking for plays that are heavy in neither male nor female roles and that will not cost too much to produce.

Yearly budget

With a yearly budget of \$125,000 Faulkner said "we don't worry about royalties. We've got the money to get whatever play we want."

That does not mean other production costs are not watched. She said the Playhouse can afford to do one big production a year "but with three musicals you have to have one lower budget musical." Faulkner said *Camelot* will be the big production next year while *Jacques Brel* can be done with less expensive sets and costumes.

That leaves the third musical, *Jesus Christ Superstar*, as a bumper that can be done either elaborately or simply, she said. As a result, the Playhouse breaks even every year after ticket sales are set, she said.

Even with all that planning there is still one play that is not decided a year in advance. The celebrity show is chosen by Wilson and the board of directors after the availability of the "star" is known.

The biggest thing the playhouse has to do is "remember the audience," according to Wilson.

"The university can and does do plays we'd never do because they're an educational institution," said Wilson, listing Shakespearean and Restoration pieces as examples.

"We have to appeal to our audience," Wilson said, "and appeal to the people who are going to produce the play."

Sheldon displays 'Nebraska folk art'

An exhibit of Nebraska folk art is on display at Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery.

The exhibits are components of the festival of Nebraska folklife and folklore during Plains Week. The festival is supported in part by an \$8,000 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts.

A wide variety of traditional skills and arts will be taught during the festival, according to Roger Welsch, director of the project and UNL English and Anthropology assistant professor.

The traditional crafts included in the festival are Native American beadworking, blacksmithing, quilting, saddlery, musical instrument construction and juggling.

The afternoon workshops include: Albert Fahlbusch, builder and player of the hammered dulcimer, April 11 and 12; Trinity Methodist Quilting Circle, April 12 and 13; Elizabeth Stabler, Omaha beadworker, April 12 and 13; L.A. Jorgensen, blacksmith, April 13 and 14; Wesley Fuesner, saddler, April 14 and 15 and Jek Kelly, juggler, April 14 and 15.

up and coming

Sheldon Art Gallery

Paintings by Dan Howard
Photographs by Steve Cromwell
Paintings by Nicholas Africano (Art Shop)
Bead Fair, today

Films and TV

UPC Foreign Films: *XALA*, 7 and 9 p.m. today and Tuesday
Film Study Class: *Even Dwarves Started Small*, 10 a.m. and 1:30 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday
Shakespeare Films: *King Lear*, 7 and 9 p.m. Thursday and Friday

Kimball Recital Hall

Faculty Recital Rometo, percussion, 8 p.m.
Saxophone Ensemble/Percussion Ensemble, 8 p.m. Tuesday
Brass Ensemble/Brass Choir, 8 p.m. Friday
Union Program Council
"New Directions in Prints"—Old Bergan Art Guild, Union Main Lounge, Tuesday through Friday.
Lincoln Community Playhouse
The Gingerbread Lady, 8 p.m. Thursday and Friday