

arts & entertainment

Comedy collapses through weak humor, worn out plot

By R. A. Weigel

What makes a celebrity? Someone with a well-known face or accomplishments, probably. Then Bob Denver, starring in the play *The Button* at the Lincoln Community Playhouse could be considered a celebrity. But are all celebrity shows of a professional caliber? Not all of them.

theatre review

The Button is a badly written play by Ben Starr containing too many old television situation comedy plots. It concerns a middle-aged man (Bob Denver) who has lost his wife through divorce and has finally reached the limit of his endurance by the payment of incredibly high alimony. He decides to kill himself, but not until he kills the divorce lawyer who made it all possible.

In the office of this lawyer, his secretary (Dreama Peery, Denver's wife) is discussing with her boss (Don O'Neill) how he should get rid of his wife to continue their relationship. Denver enters and makes his threats to the lawyer creating the comic situation.

Denver won't find his revenge fulfilling unless his ex-wife can hear the gun shots over the phone. This is the secretary's job. Through waiting and attempts to get help they eventually get the additional company of the lawyers' wife (Shelly Lahman) who doesn't want anything to happen to her husband because it would spoil her political career.

Because of the tense situation each person present finds out things about each other that causes them to go to the limit, and the little man inside (that's how they say it in the show) pushes the button that enables one to do anything that they want, including killing someone.

If this sounds like a good vehicle for comedy, it is. But it's still weak in con-

ception and lines such as "She doesn't need a telephone—she's already a ding-a-ling." or "She hasn't cried like that since they passed medicare," speak for themselves.

Denver as the actor and as the director, tries to put the laughs into the show. Every time he shoots the gun some plaster falls from the ceiling or a spittoon explodes or something else where the actors can do a double take. There is the traditional black-out where the gun gets passed from person to person in the dark.

There are the common sexual implications, such as threatening to shoot the lawyer in places other than the head. Then with make believe telephones, green lighting for the 'little man inside', ridiculous

monologues, and constantly changing sides of defense, one has the show in a nutshell.

Denver looks the same as one would imagine him to look but maybe a little older. His hair is still in his eyes which might be all right for television but it is not so good on the stage. If he used his eyes to convey emotions, it was missed. He was fast paced and perhaps too loud for the stage at the playhouse. Vocal variety was non-existent and all facts considered, he is probably a better television actor.

Dreama Peery as the secretary was very sexy and had the most energy of all the performers on the stage. It's obvious that she's done the show many times and her actions are clean and often humorous, but not hilarious.

As the lawyer, Don O'Neill was convincing and looked good in the role. He had trouble with his lines and also could not quite keep up with the pace set by the two pros.

Lucille Morgan as the wife was a bit wooden in her interpretation. She has nice moments when she had the comic lines, but reactions were not as well defined.

When one has had as much experience as Denver and his wife obviously had, it's hard not to be disappointed by their performance. It's surprising that of all the plays that Denver and his wife, Dreama, could have done together, they would pick this one. The Lincoln Community Playhouse, and the community itself deserve better.



Photo by Bob Pearson

Neither Bob Denver or his wife, Dreama Peery, could raise the caliber of the low-quality comedy, *The Button*.

Jazz singer's staccato, lingering notes captivate emotions

By Mary Jane Winquest

Emotion wells up from within 48-year-old jazz singer Betty Carter every time she scats and pours forth love ballads. Almost always grinning a wide, toothy smile, she gave the 350 concert goers at Kimball Recital Hall Monday night the harshest and most staccato treatment of notes they've experienced in a long time.

concert review

She raises her shoulders, lurches forward and arches her back with exacting movement every scat session, producing a plethora of Ba Do Da Do's and Bebops. (Scat is a type of jazz singing in which meaningless syllables are improvised or repeated.)

Calling New York her home base, Carter, with the John Hicks Trio, is on a short tour coming from the University of Massachusetts on their way to Northwestern University. Hicks has played with Carter four years now, but she has been performing more than thirty.

"Before you kids were born I recorded an album with Ray Charles," Carter announced. She promptly delved into a moody piece from the album, using the deepest and richness of her voice.

Accompanying this deepness, oddly enough, is an airy quality in her voice. Combined with this airiness is unmistakable lingering characteristic she attaches to notes, like one hangs on to a lazy day.

Clinging emotion

As if yawning, Carter clings to notes while dropping them a half-step. Her hour-long performance Monday was a combination of her techniques, swirling from staccato to lingering notes as she smoothly flowed from song to song.

She likewise swirled back and forth

from audience to the backup band as she clicked her fingers and rocked her body in a captivating combination of movement and emotion.

"Everything I Have Is Yours," an old standard, was the evening's most convincingly emotional song. Just like every song, she sang the lyrics with meaning.

But as is her style, she picked the rhythm up at the song's conclusion and gave the notes a thorough workout in the scat duet she performed with each of the three Trio members.

Carter is obviously proud of the John Hick's Trio. They preceded her performance with a solid 30 minutes of crowd pleasing improvisation, each of the musicians getting a chance to solo on their instrument.

A totally acoustic band, the trio alternated, like the singer they preceded, from soft sounds to a rush of dynamic sounds. Pianist John Hick's and bassist Cameron Brown's fingers flew. The crisp performance by drummer Kenny Washington in-

cluded a drum solo where his drumsticks became only a blur.

Carter announced the Trio's members names no less than three times during her performance as she graciously recognized their abilities by stepping back during instrumental portions of the songs.

Warnings spice evening

Songs like "Most gentlemen don't like love, they just kick it around," really spiced up the evening's performance with lyrics warning women of their man's intentions.

"Pounce in the clover and when it's over he'll say 'what's your name,'" was typical of the song's lyrics.

After the concert, Hicks said the Trio and Carter still rehearse some together, but get most of their practice by constantly performing.

Their adeptness at taking cues from each other proves they have spent hours together on stage. Carter's career is still predominantly touring and playing clubs.

Film disguises angry cry behind laughter

Firemans Ball, the Academy Award nominated Czechoslovakian film will be shown this Thursday and Friday at the Sheldon Film Theatre.

entertainment notes

In this satirical comedy, Milos Forman, director of *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, took his cameras into a small Czech town where the local fire company was holding its annual ball.

"It isn't photography; it's deep X-ray," said film critic A. J. Liehm of *Firemans Ball*. "And even while they're laughing (because the movie is hilariously funny

from start to finish), the people in the audience know that the satirist's angry cry is meant for them."

Screenings are at 7 and 9 p.m. with a Friday matinee at 3 p.m.

Two of UNL's School of Music's Jazz Lab Bands will present a free public concert at 8 p.m. tonight in Kimball Recital Hall.

Lab Band 1, directed by graduate assistant Tom Larson, will play compositions by Toshiko Akyoshi written for the Akyoshi-Lew Tabakin big band, plus arrangements by Sammy Nestico and Larson. Featured soloists will be Barry McVinney, Bob Reigle and Brian Grasmick.

Lab Band 2 will be directed by Beth Teller, a student from Hastings. The group

Hicks said they often perform six consecutive nights when playing clubs. Weekend dates and one-night performances, like their stop in Lincoln, are also the group's forte.

Hicks said they perform year round with sporadic breaks. January is Carter's and the Trio's next rest.

Carter has not only performed in prestigious clubs but her credits include a European tour and performances at the Newport Jazz Festival and on NBC's *Saturday Night Live*.

Although not widely known, Carter has been considered one of the best pure jazz singers.

She appeared on stage Monday wearing a multi-colored turban, black skirt and sparkling gold top. The black singer's dress was as individualistic as her style.

The audience appreciation was obvious as the second concert in a series sponsored by the Lincoln Jazz Society came to a close with a standing ovation.

Other events sponsored by the School of Music this week: Today: Student recitals—Joy Werner (junior, flute, 3:30 p.m. Sheldon Gallery Auditorium; Beth Kerl (senior, voice), Joe Swenson (senior, trumpet), 4:30 p.m. Kimball Hall.

Thursday: Concert Band (directed by Jack Snider), 8 p.m. Kimball Hall.

Friday: Student Chamber Music, 8 p.m., Kimball Hall.

Sunday: George Frederick Handel's *Messiah* (Harold Evans, conductor), 2:30 p.m., Kimball Hall.