

# arts & entertainment

## Undergraduate cynicism clouds Christmas season fun

By Peg Sheldrick

Deck the halls with boughs of holly  
Fa la la la la la la la  
Now we pay for last month's folly  
Fa la la la la la la la . . .

Deep in the midst of my post-midterm, pre-final, ain't-got-no-research-done blues, the last thing I need now is to be told what a swell time of year this is. Term papers and finals loom ominously on the academic horizon for those of us who followed the teachings of the grasshopper instead of the ant.

### humor

Is it any wonder I contemplate murder when I hear the woman across the room whining, "Well, I'm on page 24 of my paper (of course this is only the third draft) and I'm wondering if he'll accept a six page bibliography. . ."

It isn't just the pile-up of work that depresses me. I can remember the time when this season was a real pleasure for me. I baked cookies, handmade cards, and sang songs. . . I think that was last year.

#### Christmas cynic

None of the trappings around town seem to help. Strange that a light-up blue conical abstraction of an evergreen doesn't arouse even the faintest "ho ho ho" in me. With four years of carefully cultivated undergraduate cynicism to my credit, it's going to take more than *Jingle Bell Rock* over the loudspeakers to get me into the

spirit of the season. Somehow it's hard not to sneer at the commercialism of cards that say, "Especially for You at Christmas" and come 500 to a box.

As if everything else isn't enough, the weather would send Nanook of the North scurrying for his down coat. The ice palace effects are pretty, but I'm tired of doing my Hans Brinker routine on the way to school each day. I'm generally fond of snow, but the novelty wore off after the first three inches. Jack Frost isn't nipping—he's gnawing.

#### Soon to be skinless

It all makes me feel so old. Gad, according to the ads, I only have three years of decent skin left. After that it's "skin over twenty-five," which evidently resembles shoe leather unless it gets moisturized nightly. If the weather keeps, mine won't even last through the winter. I've already shed enough dry skin to reupholster Kate Smith. Old and cold and soon to be skinless. Fine way to feel. It's enough to bring out the, "Bah! Humbug!" in anybody.

That's just how I felt—until a couple of days ago. I was coming up 13th Street. There was the usual Salvation Army Tree of Lights booth. I looked around to see who was ringing the bell. It was a little old lady, stoop-shouldered and so tiny it looked like the sub-zero wind could have carried her away. She was standing there in her old blue coat, cheeks aglow, holding her bucket in one ungloved hand and jingling a rhythm with the bell in the other. She had to be over eighty. And she was smiling. I got to thinking about it and—

You'll have to excuse me. I can't finish this now. Gotta take the cookies out of the oven.

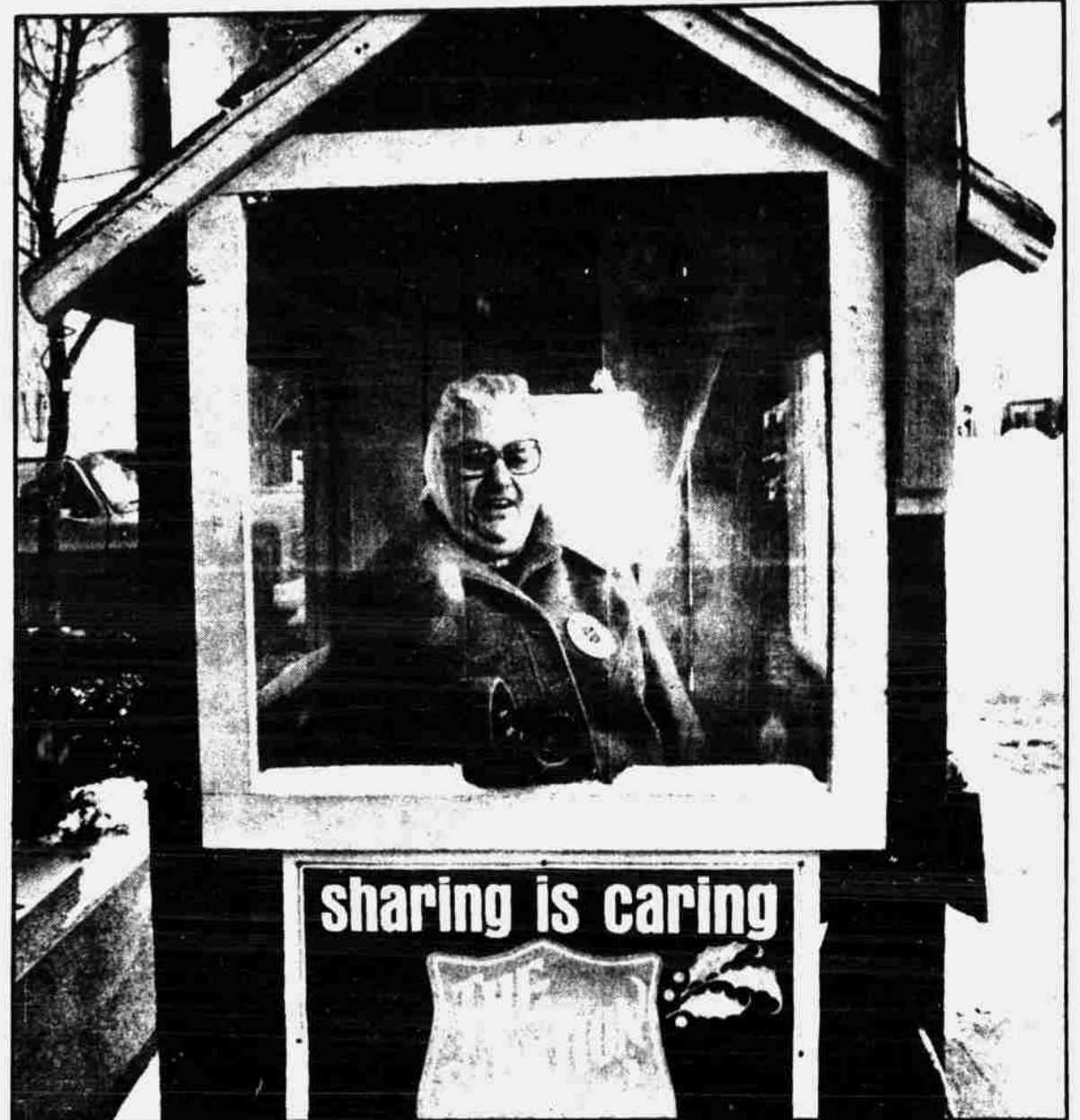


Photo by Mark Billingsley

This woman, collecting donations for the Salvation Army despite the cold weather, reminds passers-by of the true spirit of Christmas.

## 'Sea Gull' shows Chekhov's talent and students' shortcomings

By R.A. Weigel

It is seldom that one of the four major plays by Anton Chekhov are done with the infinite detail, unifying mood, and clearly delineated characters so discretely written into the often misunderstood plays. They contain some of the most subtle and beautifully written theatre in existence, a challenge for any theatre company and regrettably, beyond the capabilities of the UNL theatre department.

This is not to say that the present production of *The Sea Gull* at Howell Theatre is not worthy of consideration as an artistic achievement. But it is to say that perhaps the difficulty of the intricacy of "Chekhovian" rhythmic diction and the total fulfillment of the characterizations is beyond most college actors.

#### Key to success

Konstantin (Joe McNeely) a young poet and the son of Irina, (Patricia Raun) a somewhat passe actress, is in love with Nina (Judith Radcliff) a young girl with theatrical aspirations. Nina, however, prefers the middle-aged author Trigorin, (Steve Houser) Irina's lover.

Directing is the key to the success of a Chekhov play. The plays are marvelously orchestrated with what seems like trios, duets, solos, and then back into ensemble acting. Director Rex McGraw, is aware of the difficulty of the show and has asked Professor Bruce Kochis of the Modern Languages and Literature Department to read the play in Russian and to help with the translation and word-choice used in this particular production.

#### Form mixed

Disregarding the trappings of Stanislavsky and the naturalistic rhetoric that Chekhov supposedly did not like in the

production of *The Sea Gull*; and looking only at the work done by McGraw in his attempt, the form is too mixed. McGraw has his own style of blocking that often omits the facial expressions of a character when the reactions would be of great con-

### theatre review

cern to us. Also, there seems to be a lack of concerted effort to bring out the important characters in the staging. He seems satisfied to make pretty pictures.

In addition, it seems almost rude to the audience that the intermissions were filled with action continuing on the stage. Is one supposed to sit and watch what is happening or does one miss something if one takes the intermission in a normal way? Why add the additional lines to the play? Doesn't the genius of Chekhov stand by itself?

#### Daring idea

Like other things that McGraw has done, the show is an adventurous idea that does not completely come to fruition. Bravo for being daring, but not all dares are successful.

Some extremely fine acting takes place in *Sea Gull* and a few people who have delighted Lincoln audiences before do their best again.

Judith Radcliff was stunning as Nina, the young aspiring actress. Her warmth and sincerity was touching and it was a pleasure to see her grow somewhat bitter and confused by the last scenes. She has a combination of talents in voice and body that make her stand out as a special actress.

In a scene where Trigorin comes face to face with himself as seen by the eyes of the young Nina, Steve Houser shows the versatility and insight to his character.

#### Difficult characters

Konstantin has difficult psychological changes during the course of the show. Joe McNeely was convincing most of the time but seems to have a tendency to turn off and on depending on whether he has the line or not.

Another extremely difficult character that did not exist in its entirety was that of Irina, the actress, played by Patricia Raun. Like other things in the production, Irina hits one over the head with the lines instead of allowing the play to be the force that motivates the audience. Just because the work has a lack of climax, suspense, and clear purpose does not mean that one has to impose such things on it.

Misplaced love is apparent in many of the characters but never as much as it is with Polina (Caron Buinis) and Masha (Deborah Brooks). Polina was appropriately pathetic and Masha well done with simplicity and style.

#### Old men

Sorin (Myron Papich) is another well created old man by a young actor who seems to specialize in that kind of character. The other old men; Shamrayev (James Mellgren) and Dorn (Eric Sorenson), were played well and had fully rounded characteristics without stereotypes.

Jim Anderson as Medvedenko the schoolmaster was adequate, but lacking in the ability to take the stage when he needed to. The rest of the supporting cast was good and handled well by the director.

The theatre department has more imagination in its technical facets for the studio shows than it does for the main stage productions. The set by Alan Donahue was a good sketch to work with but then the lighting was unimaginative and did not add to the set or the costumes.

#### Too modern

Costumes by Patricia Dennis were well thought out, but again it seems the ideas dried up because of so many characters, and clothes such as Konstantin's in the opening looked much too modern.

Sound design is not apparent in every show and for *The Sea Gull* it was appropriately used to convey many specific things in the script. The wind in the last scenes was nice but could have been less obtrusive.

*Sea Gull* is an actor's play. It is about actors, is consistently a challenge for actors, and sometimes limits the actor's abilities to use his hard sought after techniques because of its subtleness.

Just as there is probably not a music school in the country that could do a good "Othello" there probably is not a theatre department that can completely do *The Sea Gull*. Is this play better left in the classroom?

It's almost always a joy to see a Chekhov play and each time adds a new insight to the problems and the beauty of the work. The Howell production of *Sea Gull* is a definite plus and gives the viewer a peak into the intricacies of the difficulties as well as the psychological ramifications of being an actor. Sit back and let the show wash over you, and let it impress you on its own merit.

