

arts/entertainment

Ski Nebraska...

Professionals do it sans snow

By Brian McManus

It isn't often that one gets to see professional skiers perform in a flat state like Nebraska. Especially in beautiful 65-degree weather.

But those visiting Gateway Shopping Center last Thursday and Friday had that opportunity. Lawlor's sponsored the Nordica/Rossingol Ski Show which was performed at 3, 5 and 7 p.m. on both days.

Luckily, the Ski Team is capable of performing without the assistance of snow. They demonstrated freestyle aerial acrobatics from a 25-foot high ski ramp made of bristled black "Polysnow."

The performers would leap from the platform, speed down the ramp without ski poles and kick off into the air, executing flawless axles, hammers, front somersaults and back layouts, landing on a 20 feet by 20 feet air mattress.

"This bag looks pretty large when you're down here standing next to it," said Gary Longley, head of the ski team. "But when you're up at the top of the platform, it looks about the size of a peanut."

Also featured was a "revolving table" and a sloped conveyor belt about 10 feet long, where the ski team showed their finesse at ski ballet. After the show, they allowed people to take lessons on the slope.

"For those of you who will be taking advantage of our free lessons, let me warn you that the revolving table is more difficult to ski on than a regular ski slope," Dede Burns, spokesperson for the group said. She then demonstrated some of the

basics in skiing—snowplowing, stem christying, and parallel skiing.

The ski team performed so gracefully and fluidly that the viewer could easily get the mistaken impression that what they were doing was relatively easy. Many people found the opposite when they tried to ski on the revolving table themselves.

The show concluded with Bob Turgeon and Gary Longley flying down the ramp hand in hand—a dangerous stunt—since the ramp is only 3 feet wide. They reached the end of the ramp and kicked off, one doing a forward flip, the other doing a backward flip, in perfect synchronization.

"I haven't really ever injured myself seriously," Longley said. "The people who hurt themselves are the ones who try to do the stunts without really being skilled enough skiers to attempt such things."

For example, he mentioned intermediate skiers who build up their own jumps on a ski slope.

"A person is crazy to start out doing jumps on a ski slope," Longley said. "You should start out practicing on a run set up with a cushion of hay or a lake. Snow's not that soft when you're coming at it at such velocities."

Longley added that this is the 32nd show they've put on since August and after one more show, he said he will finally be able to go home to Vermont and rest.

"It'll be good to go home for a while," he said. "Of course, two weeks after I get there, I'll be heading back out again in competition. The snow's already pretty good in most areas. I'm looking forward to getting out on the real slopes again."



Photo by Steve Visser

A member of the ski team is caught in midair during the Nordica/Rossingol Ski Show at Gateway Shopping Center last Thursday and Friday.

Behmer composition is crowd-pleaser at Open Stage

By Michael Wiest

An open stage — the words seem to promise something. For the musician, it may mean the opportunity to be heard, the incomparable experience of performing before an audience. Perhaps this, or just the new sound one gets from using a sound system.

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For the listener, it means variety and there was plenty of that Wednesday night at the KZUM open stage benefit at Jesse's Lounge.

The evening's entertainment began with Bill Behmer on

guitar and Bill Mearns on dulcimer. These two produced some nice instrumental numbers, mostly in a traditional folk vein. They sounded better when they didn't sing, but even when they did, it wasn't anything to be offended by.

Behmer, accompanied by Mearns, presented an original composition entitled, "I See You've Been Out Smokin' Daughter, Again." This tune dealt with the problems of a father who finds his daughter (only 23 years old) being slowly corrupted by evil city ways.

After finding nicotine stains on her bubble gum, he sees it has only a short road to travel before she starts drinking and smoking LSD, not to mention opium and "marjewana." So he beats her up and locks her in a barn. The number was a real crowd-pleaser.

MEARNS, PREFACING a guitar solo, related a story

about how his mother, after blowing a lot of money on guitar lessons for him, was very disappointed when he quit.

Years later, he said, he picked them up again and paid her a surprise visit. He sat her down and played "Whispering," her favorite song that she used to whistle around the house. She was very impressed, he said. Then he played it for the audience. It was a catchy little tune, done Chet Atkins style. Well, maybe he needed a few more lessons.

The second act of the evening featured the McElravey Bros. They opened up a Grateful Dead songbook and sang "Just a Box of Rain," among other old favorites. This produced some distinctive, if not inspired, harmonies, probably because they were really serious about reading the music and carrying a tune at the same time. Everyone's coordination has its limits.

Later on, the crowd was treated to a little Irish music by Paddywack band members Dan Newton and Terry Keefe, joined by Emon O'Docherty. O'Docherty, on wooden flute, was the real thing, Irish brogue and all, hailing from Dublin.

NEWTON, WHO really looks Irish, certainly played the part, jumping with leprechan-like nimbleness from hammer dulcimer to piano to Irish pipe, displaying great talent and versatility. Keefe played the mandolin.

The final act of the evening featured Bill Wohrman and Rick Kincaid, both on acoustic guitars. Wohrman delivered an impressive Cat Stevens imitation, singing "Hard-headed Woman." The voice was very close, and then, amazingly, he followed this song with an equally impressive Neil Young imitation of "My, My, Hey, Hey, (Out of the Blue)." Kincaid, who played a solo set just after the McElravey Bros., backed up Wohrman with good guitar and harmonica, and helped with the harmonies.

The crowd never quite filled the bar to capacity. KZUM earned \$85, according to Julie Williams, program director.

Liquor, fame and money—the end

By Jerry Fairbanks

The pathos of a performer falling apart from too much money, acclaim and liquor was the underlying theme of a re-creation of a Hank Williams performance in *Hank Williams: The Show He Never Gave*.

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Peter "Sneezy" Waters, an actor from Ottawa, Canada, portrayed Williams in this one-man show at the Music Hall in Omaha Friday before a crowd of several hundred. Weaving music and between-song banter into a narrative, Waters spoke about success, loneliness and ended with religion to describe the life of the father of modern country-western music.

Several devices played a part in giving emotional strength to the narration. The performance began with Waters making several deliberate mistakes in the first song and later beginning to repeat a joke he had told earlier. After intermission, he reappeared acting disoriented, mumbling and falling over, obviously the result of what he termed his "milk" drinking.

Through it all, the back-up band covered for him. The band, George Essery on pedal steel guitar, Dave

Harvey on bass, Doug Orr on lead guitar and Joel Zifkin on fiddle, acted the part of an alcoholic's friends trying to protect him from his own drunken mistakes.

Hank Williams was written especially for Waters by Maynard Collins because of Waters uncanny resemblance to the late country singer in his prime. The show is set on the night of Dec. 31, 1952, the day before Williams died at the age of 29. Thus, Waters often makes reference to the time left before the new year, when both 1952 and his time will have run out.

Williams had a short career in music, gaining fame at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville in 1949. His major innovation was to combine rural forms of music, cowboy songs and folk songs, with popular forms, widening the market for country music. He wrote and recorded a number of songs that were later picked up by rock musicians, such as "Jambalaya" and "Hey Good Looking."

Waters' singing portrayed a good imitation of Williams' voice, a nasal tenor that many country music singers imitate today. He had a strong characterization of a country boy confused by life, subtly put across to an audience that often didn't pick it up. The sole defect was his lack of ability on the guitar, which was distracting when he played solo.

Hank Williams will play this week in Wichita, then tour several Midwestern cities.