

arts/entertainment

Musician strives for individuality of handwriting

By Bob Crisler

"What I'm going for is an American music. I'm trying to sound like handwriting," Charlie Burton said.

Burton, a native Lincolnite who has, in recent years, made his mark in the music press, has had music in his blood since birth.

The Burton family moved to Lincoln in the early 50s from the East Coast, where his father had cultivated an interest in classical music and his sister took up piano.

"Rock and roll was forbidden in the house," Burton said. "My father first had a classical show on KLMS and KFOR, but he wasn't satisfied with the AM sound, so in 1957 he founded the first FM station in the area—KFMQ," Burton said.

In 1963, at the grand opening of Lincoln's TV Service Company, Burton won a transistor radio.

"By that time, the local stations had obliterated all memory of real rock 'n' roll from the airwaves, so I got into finding the real far-away stations. One night I was listening to a station in Boston, and the DJ said, 'Here's a new record from England, by a band called the Beatles,'" Burton said. "It was cosmic. It got me hooked on rock 'n' roll." Burton's father sold KFMQ in the early 60s and bought a harpsichord factory, which Charlie inherited after his father's death a few years later.

"At the time, there were people waiting in line to get these things (harpsichords) and there were musicians in Lincoln I wanted to perform with, so I left Ann Arbor and came back here," he said.

Sound influences diverse

Burton's distinctive sound developed during the 1970s out of such diverse influences as Gene Vincent, Otis Redding, Chuck Berry, Skeets McDonald, Iggy Pop and George Jones.

In 1977, Charlie Burton and Rock Therapy was formed, and the first single, *Rock and Roll Behavior*, was recorded.

A thousand 45s of the song were pressed and Burton began sending copies to critics nationwide.

The record showed up in print in New York at No. 3 in the Village Voice Critic's Poll.

"There it was, right under Elvis Costello and Neil Young. God, it was a thrill," said Burton.

That victory for the band led to a January 1978 booking at CBGB's, then the hottest rock club in New York. They drove a 1966 Cadillac with a trailerful of equipment through three blizzards to make the trip, and were rewarded with "one of the most memorable nights we could have picked," Burtons said.

There was an Italian film crew at CBGB's, making a movie about the New York New Wave. "All the stars were there," Burton said, "Johnny Rotten,



"Without America, there would be no Rock 'n' roll," says Lincoln rock musician Charlie Burton as he strikes up a Mansonesque pose.

Cheetah Chrome, all of the big names."

The band came back to Lincoln and later that year recorded *Guitar Case*, which was wildly successful critics' circles. By that time, Mercury Records' new-wave subsidiary, Blank Records, had offered to sign Burton and his band to its roster, next to the likes of Pere Ubu and the Suicide Commandos, but during negotiations, Mercury cut off additional funds to Blank.

The band continued playing local haunts like the Zoo Bar and the Howard Street Tavern with occasional opening-act engagements with bands such as the Talking Heads and the Ramones.

In 1979, the band continued its annual tradition and released its third 45, *Mobile, Alabama*, and the flip, *Dead Giveaway*, on their independent label, Wild Records. The May, 1980 Trousers Press reacted to the record in unseemly fashion. The critique reads:

"If they rock like this in Nebraska, imagine what must go on in South Dakota! Instead of nostalgic vibes offered by a lot of modern-day rockabilly, both sides here are timeless roofblowers. The Buzzcocks should sound this hot."

It is this kind of criticism that makes Burton's 45s sell. "The best kind of publicity is free publicity," Burton said.

Remote control fame

Burton sells his records by mail order from a Lincoln post office box.

"For trying to become famous by remote control, I've been moderately successful," he said. Burton's harpsichord business requires that he stay in Lincoln.

Stressing that he has not jumped on the trendy New Wave bandwagon, Burton said, "I'm no Johnny-come-lately. In all modesty, I've always had a New Wave attitude. I've always liked Iggy and MC-5."

"I read somewhere 'What's a New Wave band? It's the only band in town that doesn't know how to play 'Stairway to Heaven.'"

Burton hasn't performed publicly since the old band brought in the New Year at Lohmeier's Drumstick. Butch Berman, Rock Therapy's lead guitarist, informed Burton the day after Christmas that New Year's would be his last show with the band. Nevertheless, Burton plans to put out another 45 with an as-yet-unnamed backup band before the year is out.

"I don't think I've got any laurels to rest on. I'm off to a good start, but if I don't do something soon, I'm going to let myself down. I don't want to end up being a footnote."

Student's play opens tonight at Studio 12

By Debra L. Miller

Shower Me With Blessings, an original one-act play by UNL theater graduate student R. Scott Lank, will open tonight at 8 p.m. in the Studio 12 facility at Kozer Hall.

The production, sponsored by the Nebraska Masquers organization, is directed by theater graduate student Don Renaud, director of *La Turista* earlier this semester.

The play explores "the destruction of a family unit by shifting devotions and religious ideas," Lank said.

The plot concerns a crisis in the lives of three women. A tragic car accident 16 years in the past which unhinged the mind of the mother and deeply affected her two daughters has ultimately led to a crisis of relationships over the four-day period covered in the play.

Lank stresses that the play is a "work in progress." The script began over a year ago, growing out of an Advanced Playwriting course, has been rewritten several times, and has continued to evolve throughout the rehearsal process.

Director Renaud said the emphasis of the production is on the actresses and the rehearsal process that has been used.

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Slimy being is core of 'Eraserhead'

By Jennifer Bauman

Henry and Mary are the parents of a premature baby. Well, the hospital isn't quite sure it's a baby. Henry's discovery that Mary has given birth to this being, and their attempts to care for it once it has arrived, make up the narrative core of *Eraserhead*.

movie review

David Lynch wrote and directed *Eraserhead* in 1978 as his college thesis, in cooperation with the American Film Institute Center for Advanced Film Studies. He also did the special effects that make the film the bizarre specimen that it is.

The people in *Eraserhead* are all either dull, weak and nondescript or they are scarred and infirm in some way. Henry is the epitome of passiveness; he is so slow to speak and act that it is unclear whether he has his wits about him. Mary is much like Henry. Furthermore, she shares with her

mother a strange motor coordination problem in which she has to be occasionally soothed out of spasms. Mary's father, with a moronic grin, tells about the self-induced paralysis in his arm.

Mary's and Henry's baby looks a little like a premature Tyrannosaurus Rex, or perhaps a turtle embryo. It constantly bleats like a baby goat. When Mary tries to feed the creature, it forcefully spits the food back at her. Its body is bound up in bandages, which is probably just as well; what we can see of it is all covered in slimy mucous. This vulgar being is the ultimate prospective parents' nightmare. Nevertheless it is somehow pathetic in its apparent helplessness.

Eraserhead is full of images of animal and vegetable matter. Some are wet and fertile and others are dry and barren. Slimy substances and mucous objects are abundant throughout the film. In some ways they seem to function as symbols of fecundity, therefore contrasting directly with opposing visions of decaying organic matter and of deteriorating human life.

As Lynch creates his picture of life processes on earth, he tries to put it into the

context of the greater cosmic scheme. At the beginning and end of *Eraserhead*, we see a scaly demon in an abandoned warehouse pulling levers. Surrounding him is the vagueness of cosmic infinity. Is this the one in control? Neither Henry nor Mary seems to be endowed with any destiny-shaping powers.

Eraserhead deals with the grotesque side of fantasy and dreams, and with the nightmarish aspects of consciously-experienced events. It shows a vision of monstrosity in everyday life and examines how the mundane can become grotesque. Or are the mundane and the grotesque really the same thing?

Asparagus, an animated short by Suzan Pitt, is showing with *Eraserhead*. It is a colorful, stream-of-consciousness fantasy about asparagus in every aspect of the protagonist's life: as food, as excrement, as furniture, as phallic symbols. Like Lynch's film, it is highly imaginative and well-made. The two films are interesting to compare in terms of theme and handling.

Eraserhead and *Asparagus* are showing at the Sheldon Film Theater Friday through Monday.