

arts/entertainment

Wilderness battles bureaucracy in nature flick

By Pete Schmitz

Mountain Family Robinson is a nature-travelogue film that follows the adventures of a nice middle-class family from Los Angeles. After being fed up with the rat race in the big city, Skip Robinson takes his wife and two kids to live off the land.

The wilderness is such a good living and learning experience for teen-age daughter Jenny, and the little son Toby, that the sister intelligently proclaims to her brother, "We're so lucky to be here with nature!" And so follows the diddly-dah musical score that would make John Denver envious.

movie review

Just when things are going fine for Skip, Pat and their two darling children, a big menace comes along to disrupt their lives. No, it's not a ferocious animal. Dad can take care of that. Nor is it the unpredictable acts of Mother Nature. Dad can take care of that, too. What's really threatening the existence of the Robinsons is the government!

Instead of coming dressed in a black cape and stove-pipe hat, the villainous bureaucrat arrives with orders for the family to make good use of the land if they don't want to get kicked off.

"What are we going to do Skip?" cries Mom. But even Dad can't do anything about that darn representative from the government (boo, boo; hiss, hiss) who promises to be back as he flies off in his helicopter.

Crusty ol' man

Meanwhile, Boomer comes to visit. This crusty ol' mountain man, who takes a bath only once a year, tells his friends they have to find valuable minerals in order to satisfy the government (boo, boo; hiss, hiss) and all their "legal mumbo-jumbo they put so much stock in."

As Boomer goes off into the mountains searching for gold, little Toby is left awe-struck—hoping that someday he too will be a mountainman since he doesn't like girls anyway.

Just in case you got the impression this is a family of anarchists, there is a heartening sequence where the Robinsons, dressed in patriotic colors, go out on a Fourth of July picnic that is initiated by two rifle shots from Dad as he stands next to Old Glory.

As I joyously watched this family surviving in the wilderness without electricity or shopping centers, I was struck by their natural cleanliness, pressed flannel shirts and jeans, as well as their beautiful hair. How they kept

their hair styled without blow-dryers I'll never know. I guess that goes along with being an all-American family.

Mom leaves home

But wait! Mom can't take it anymore! With her garden and clothes line all messed up by the storm, she takes her cue from *Kramer vs. Kramer* and *Ordinary People* and leaves home.

Because Mom leaves the family, little Toby nearly falls off a cliff, but Dad rescues him by grabbing the boy by his overall straps. The motherless boy gets into more trouble as he runs away the next night to join Boomer, only to be met by a hungry wolf. But don't worry, this Montessori-school graduate fends off the animal with his torch until Dad comes along to finish things off.

Just in time, Mom comes back home, bringing a hot tub for her handyman to put up for them and the neigh-

borhood bear. Luckily, Pat's mom told her to go back to the mountains since she belongs with her family.

But once again, that darn representative from the government comes back. Even the family dog growls at him now. This time he has papers for eviction.

Without ruining the end for you, I'll just add that Boomer's smarts, Dad's virtue and Mom's tears (that attempt to soften the nasty bureaucrat) might save the day for our endearing family. But then again, Ronnie Right wasn't around yet to set things straight. So see what happens for yourself.

If you're looking for some good fun, and if you're just plain tired of big government (but not patriotism), go see *Mountain Family Robinson*. It will either inspire or amuse you.



The legendary Muddy Waters will be headlining the Fourth Annual Great Plains Blues Festival Feb. 26 at 8 p.m. in Kimball Recital Hall.

Recognized around the world as one of the most influential electric blues artists of all time, Waters' appearance follows that of such other blues legends as

Opening for Waters will be Lincoln based band, The Heartmurmurs. Tickets for the Great Plains Blues Festival go on sale Wednesday, Feb. 4 at Kimball Hall, John Lee Hooker, Albert King and Sonnie Terry and Brownie McGhee at the blues festival. Dirt Cheap and both Student Unions. Prices are \$8 for students and \$9 general admission.

Professor assists in classic Mozart production

By Penelope M. Smith

Opera has always been an essential part of the harmony in Hans Beer's life. Beer, associate professor of opera and conductor at the University of Southern California School of Music, was in Lincoln last week to assist the UNL School of Music's production of Mozart's *Abduction from the Seraglio*.

Beer has been conducting and teaching operas for nearly 30 years in America and abroad. Born in Germany, he came to the United States in 1955 on a Fulbright scholarship after studying 3 years in Munich as a master student with composer Carl Orff.

profile

Friday he spoke of Mozart and how he was able to assist the cast of *the Seraglio* for the forthcoming production.

Beer said UNL was lucky to have Gregg Tallman, UNL's opera teacher, and because of the UNL teacher's skill, Beer's job became merely that of an objective audience and guide in strengthening performances.

"Gregg is a stage director with marvelous imagination," Beer said "He concentrates at every angle of a

score, I have been helping to solidify some of the soloists but they are very well prepared."

Beer said that one of the greatest problems any young cast must face is that of experience.

"In general any young person has no experience, it takes 20 or 30 years of doing opera and not exactly knowing how to do it before some of this experience is gained."

Historical comparison

To clarify his point, Beer compared opera to a different field of study, history.

"You give a lecture in history, for instance on Alexander the Great, you tell what your professors have taught you, his biography," said Beer. "But later you begin to understand the conflicts, you place him in the context of his time, you deal with the great Persians and India, simply because you know more, you have experienced more, found out more. It is this way with opera, after you do 20 or 30 operas, perhaps fall in love, and meet new problems, it does not become easier but the approach becomes easier."

In the production of *the Seraglio* Beer sees Mozart as one of the difficulties for the young performers.

"The older we become the more we realize how difficult to perform Mozart really is. Maybe he is the most difficult because everything is exposed, clean and clear. Operas like *the Seraglio* are the ideal of classic beauty, it looks simple on the outside and the simpler something is the more difficult it is to do," he explained.

"Mozart is like a Matisse charcoal drawing," Beer explained. "It took Matisse two minutes to do the abstract of a figure but 50 years to learn how to do it, to learn simplicity."

"The drawing like the opera is wide open to the imagination but it compels you to frame your imagination within a few simple lines, it makes you concentrate on the small things," he explained.

Flexible rules

In working with the cast of *the Seraglio*, Beer said he has attempted to show them that each opera has its own set of rules that are flexible within the realms of temperament. This flexibility Beer defines as not a tolerance, which is the willingness to countenance another approach even though you believe it is wrong, but the recognition of different approaches in search of what he describes as the composers great ideal.

"Master works like *the Seraglio* are more than little pieces of entertainment, there are two challenges in the work, the work and the performer," Beer said. "Each performer must realize his temperament, and so must each director, he may have an ideal but it may not be suited for the performer. This is not a quality statement but one of temperament," Beer explained.

"Temperament is essential, you must never imitate in an opera but go back to your core, in this I pass on my experience," he said. "We must go back to the senses because there is no mathematical definition of opera, in the senses we have deeper insight and have learned more about life."