

# Campus hit inspires student to write more plays

By Mary Louise Knapp

Dastardly villains, sweet heroines, and brave heroes inhabit the world of Kathy Herrin, a 21-year-old broadcasting and theater student who has written, directed, and produced a melodrama entitled "The Saga of the Good Gunfighter," or "How Goldfish Won the West."

The melodrama recently was performed by the Neihardt Residential Center staff and student assistants as part of Neihardt's 50th anniversary celebration.

The play involves a reformed gunfighter, Will E. Mishem (played by John Thomas) who gave up gunfighting to come to the Nebraska Territory to open a fish store. In his desire to acquaint people of the territory with the delights of a peaceful existence, he inadvertently stocks the villain's pond and water supply with fish.

The villain, Frank Lee Nasty, played by David Chester, and his evil sister, May-Bee Badnuez, played by Shirley

Dunham, have come to the territory to open a gambling casino and to make Frank the governor.

Frank falls in love with the heroine, Isabelle Ringin, played by Theresa Schekirke, a poor orphaned seamstress. He forces her to accept his hand by threatening to ruin Will's fish business. Will and Isabelle have fallen in love, and Isabelle, knowing how much Will's store means to him, reluctantly agrees to marry Frank.

In the meantime, May-Bee entices Juan Ekstrahace, an unscrupulous gambler (played by Louis Alioto), to enter the casino business with her.

Will soon realizes why Isabelle accepted Frank, and takes care of Frank and May-Bee with several swift blows, reclaims his store and proposes to Isabelle.

## Good attendance

The plot is enhanced by the antics of Elwood Sap, a lumberjack, played by

Don Blankenau, his fiancée, Learn Lesson, the town schoolteacher, played by Beth Griffin, and Ima Bratt, an unruly pupil played by Myra Palmer.

Mianitiv, an Indian guide (played by Carol Nodgaard), Dr. O. G. Blood played by Jim Reilly, Yul. B. Dead, the undertaker, played by Rob MacTier, Wanda Belt, the proprietor of the Chug and Slug Saloon, played by Liz Willborn, and the dance-hall girls Constance Distraction played by Peg Miller Yvonne TaDanse played by Mary Hruska, added excitement to the melodrama.

Herrin said about 125 people attended the performance, which vastly exceeded her expectations.

"We expected about 60 or 70 people," she said, and some expected only 10 people to attend. However, the play was such a success that it was videotaped and shown again on Saturday.

"We never expected such a turnout and such enthusiasm," she said.

Herrin said the Neihardt student assistants had discussed presenting a melodrama as part of the anniversary celebration last year.

"I thought it would be a challenge for me to do it," she said.

Herrin wrote the original script for the melodrama while she was home for Christmas vacation this year.

"I started typing, and the ideas just kept coming," she said.

Herrin said she first thought of the characters' strange names, and then tried to fit her characters to the personalities of the members of the cast, who were Neihardt student assistants.

The goldfish entered the picture because many members of the Neihardt staff own fish, she said.

"Nobody else writes fish into a melodrama," she said, laughing.

## Novice actors

Herrin said that some of the cast had had previous acting experience, but a few had never acted before. To prepare them for their roles, she used a variety of methods.

"I asked them to do a character analysis," she said. "For example, to imagine how Isabelle became an orphan. . . to say 'I am this character.'"

Another directing technique was to have the cast deliver their lines in the style opposite to that in which they were supposed to be delivered. The villain, instead of speaking in sinister tones, would recite his lines as if he were a perfect gentleman, and the heroine would try to sound like a villainess. This helped give the cast a fuller understanding of the play as well as being a fun exercise, she said.

"I did get a little discouraged at times," Herrin said.

"I had to yell at the cast sometimes, and that's hard because they are my peers and I worked with them, but they understood," she said.

Herrin, the only theater major in the group, said that the respect among cast members was one of the main reasons for the melodrama's success.

"We're a close staff," she said. "The Neihardt S.A.s (student assistants) do a lot together and we care about each other."

Time conflicts and line memorization were two of the biggest problems, she said.

"We had about 15 rehearsals, and that was not enough, but we pulled it off," she said. "Not everyone was there for the first nine or 10 rehearsals, but toward the end they made it a point to be there."

"We didn't have our costumes and sets until almost the last minute," she said.

The Neihardt staff provided some of the costumes and props, and others were borrowed from Nebraska Wesleyan University, she said.

"As the producer, I footed most of the bill," she said. "It cost me \$75, and with the other people's expenses added in, it cost at least \$125. I had no idea I'd be paying so much," she said.

## More melodramas

Herrin said that she will continue to write melodramas.

"I've gotten the bug now," she said. "People have told me they'd like to see two or three performed a year. I hope we can do it again."

"I still do not feel it is a complete script," she said. "We made a lot of changes as we went along. Sometimes some of the people's ad-libs worked as well as the original lines."

During the melodrama, the audience was continually reminded, either by the signs to boo for the villain and sigh for the heroine or by actual lines in the performance, that what they were seeing was a farce.

Herrin explained that this technique is necessary to keep the audience in the right frame of mind.

"The minute they start to take it seriously, it's lost," she said.

"I am writing down ideas," she said. "I want to develop a style all writers have their own style and I think I want mine to be those God-awful names."

Herrin said she has many ideas for her next melodrama.

"What I'm thinking of right now is a novice cowboy being abducted by a group of outlaw women," she said.

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