

# Characters in Neil Simon's world lack realism

By Chuck Lieurance

Neil Simon's newest comedy, *Only When I Laugh*, is mainly another vehicle for the spelling of Marsha Mason. She has proven yet again (see *The Goodbye Girl* and *Chapter Two*) that no matter what the line may be, she will read it in the same half-sobbing, half-whining way she reads every other line.

Simon is not improving with age as a writer either. He has long been a cancerous tumor in the theater world and his move into films was an utter atrocity.

The Simonization of America has been one of the most serious plagues in the performing arts.

Simon's characters have no depth. They speak in unrealistic and numbing repartees, leaving the minds of the audience as though injected with Novocain. The world, for these stick figure characters, is without economic restrictions or tediousness. It is always witty, elegant and smart in that special New York way.

In *Only When I Laugh*, however, Simon

has lost even the quick witty banter. The characters play each line like a Simon gem, but the lines are rarely funny and often offensive considering that in this film Simon aims his fluffball New York wit at alcoholism and homosexuality — not to mention his usual twist of racism, in this case towards a Puerto Rican grocery boy. These subjects scarcely deserve the horribly shallow treatment they receive from Simon's obviously shallow mind.

Marsha Mason is released from a center for alcoholism at the start of the film looking, "More beautiful than when she came in." She seems to have no mental scars, but only to have lost some weight.

From the impression Simon gives us, she has spent the last six months in a spa instead of drying out. We never learn Mason's motivation for alcoholism, why she turned to the bottle. We only know she used to drink and embarrass everyone, a sin which I'm sure Simon sees as unforgivable.

Mason's best friend is a homosexual played by James Coco, who, at best hideous token, prances about and makes coy

references to his sexuality. Why this character is homosexual is beyond me. Simon seems to have wanted to fill a quota of smart New York types.

If the central aspect of *Only When I Laugh* is Mason trying to put her life together after being an "embarrassing drunk," then the whole thing seems unbearably easy. Of course, Simon is having too much fun to inject an element as serious as psychology.

It would be impossible to do a psychological profile on any of these characters because they are devoid of personalities, let alone instabilities or complexity. They are only the sum of their lines, and since they only have cheap throw-away lines, the sum is quite small if not zero.

The worst aspect of the film, though, is poor Kristy McNichol. Although I found it difficult to believe, she seems to have some talent and seems to want to say her lines like an actress instead of a robot. But she

cannot hold out against the flood of zeroed lines emanating from Mason. She might as well have played her lines off a wall.

McNichol attempts to inject just the right touches of bitterness, resentment and compassion into her role as Mason's daughter. Perhaps it is not that she is so good but that everyone else is so bad.

Although everyone in the film is complaining about their poverty and inflation, they remodel their apartments and dash about the city in and out of all the finest shops buying indiscriminately. The characters are always dressed in the height of fashion also.

It would be interesting to find out how much these pieces of clothing cost in New York and how much these smart New York apartments rent for. But Simon is also having too good a time to worry about economics. What he does not seem to realize is that all this lack of tedium is getting downright tedious.

In new screen splendor...The most magnificent picture ever!

DAVID O. SELZNICK'S  
PRODUCTION OF MARGARET MITCHELL'S

**GONE WITH THE WIND**

STARRING: CLARK GABLE  
VIVIEN LEIGH  
LESLIE HOWARD  
OLIVIA DE HAVILLAND

Winner of Ten Academy Awards

THE PHONIC SOUND METROCOLOR An MGM Release

\$2.50 UNL Students \$3.00 General  
Thurs., October 1 and Fri., October 2  
7:00 p.m. only  
Sheldon Film Theatre

Sponsored by UPC

"A DYNAMO OF SEXUAL ENERGY. ALL PARTS MESH LIKE A WELL-OILED MACHINE. ONE RARE PORN FLICK!" HUSBAND MAGAZINE

"SOPHISTICATED SEX! VISUALLY A PLEASURE. YOU CAN BET ON 'MISBEHAVIN'." PLAYBOY

"SUPERIOR PRODUCTION!" CINE MA X MAGAZINE

"THIS YEAR'S HOTTEST X-RATED!" SIR MAGAZINE

Leslie MisBehavin'

STARRING: LESLIE BOVEE • GLORIA LEONARD

EMBASSY

1730 O ST 476 6042

**EXPERIENCE KIMBALL**

**Polish Chamber Orchestra**  
20 member ensemble from Poland  
Sunday, October 11 at 3pm  
Vivaldi Concerto  
Tchaikovsky Serenade  
Sunday, October 11 at 8pm  
Handel Concerto  
Haydn Cello Concerto  
Dvorak Serenade

**Houston Ballet**  
with Live Orchestra  
Thurs-Sat, Oct. 1, 2, 3 at 8pm

The Houston Ballet is supported in part by funding from the Nebraska Arts Council and the National Endowment for the Arts-Dance Touring Program, as coordinated by Mid-America Arts Alliance.

**KIMBALL HALL 11&R**  
Box Office (11-5)  
113 Music Bldg. 11th & R  
472-3375

University of Nebraska Lincoln

Opening Soon!

**Johnny's Lounge**

- Dancing
- Beer
- Food
- Liquor

2604 Park Blvd.

**douglas 3**  
13th & P 475 2222

5:15-7:20-9:25  
Two hours of non-stop thrills. Now Here!

**RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK** PG

5:20-7:20-9:20  
A REVEALING COMEDY (So Fine)

**RYAN O'NEAL**

5:15-7:15-9:15  
Dudley Moore Liza Minnelli John Gielgud

**Arthur** PG

**PRIME & PIZZA**

**2-Fers Every**

**Monday — 4:30-9:00**

**Wednesday — 4:30-6:00**

**Friday — 4:30-6:00**

Prime With  
**Miller, Miller Lite**  
**Pabst & Michelob Dark**

Plus Most **MICHELOB DARK** Cocktails

Good at Downtown Only

**Godfather's Pizza**

DOWNTOWN  
12th & Que  
Upstairs in the Glass Menagerie  
474-6000

**20% OFF ON ALL HOUSE BRAND SHOES**

Good through Sunday

Open M-F 10:00-9:00  
SAT 10:00-5:30  
SUN 12:00-5:00

**Red Hot**

In the Skywalk between Millers & Magees