

Arts & Entertainment

Shearing: Sophisticated, playful, passionate jazz

By David Wood

The ground floor of Pershing Auditorium was sprucely arranged in rows of folding tables Friday night. In contrast to the putting-green color of the painted concrete floor were red paper tablecloths.

On the tablecloths were plastic wine glasses, partially filled bottles, an occasional candle, nice-looking picnic baskets and coolers, beer and pop cans and September Pops placemat/programs.

Around the tables sat well-dressed men and women, Lincoln's "beautiful people," and around the ground

Concert Review

floor, filling maybe a quarter of the grandstand seats, sat more.

Imagine my companion's and my surprise when we traipsed in on what we had thought was a three-headed heavy-metal monster concert, which would have been the previous night, had it not been canceled because Judas Priest's truck broke down.

"Look at all them picknic baskets, Boo Boo."

"Let's introduce ourselves, Yogi. I'm hungry, and he's ravenous."

"H & R. We stock up."

In truth, we knew the performance was to be the George Shearing Duo and the Lincoln Symphony Orchestra. But Boo Boo and I, casually attired and sitting at the only vacant table on the ground floor, seemed as out of place as two confused Iron Maiden freaks at a pops concert.

There was a conspicuous scarcity of college-aged persons in the audience. It was unfortunate. Graceful, emotive music filled the arena despite the periphery of empty seats.

The Lincoln Symphony was the opening act. The show began with a sustained crescendo, "Fanfare for the Common Man" by Copeland, followed by "On the Trail" from the "Grand Canyon Suite" by Grofe and "An American in Paris" by Gershwin.

Though not everyone may know the tunes by name, no one can mistake their familiar ring. A clapping Walt Disney mule pops into mind listening to "On the Trail." "An American in Paris" evokes Broadway and Fred Astaire. Indeed, a working definition of "pops" for the neophyte might be "classic or classical pieces that have become part of shared reality by their appearance in popular media, in movies, cartoons, commercials."

Next up was the George Shearing Duo. Don Thompson led Shearing to the center-stage piano, then picked up his upright bass. Shearing is 63, blind, has 55 records to his



Staff Photo by David Wood

Don Thompson, left, conductor Robert Emile and George Shearing

credit and tinkles the ivories with marvelous, tender, playful passion. His brand of jazz is called "sophisticated." I can think of no better label.

Frills and fills waft listeners instantly into Shearing's artful world of the unexpected. Thompson and He, toying with anticipations of the ear, keep the listeners attentive and pleasantly surprised while the music climbs, soars, swoops, glides and rests between shifting moods. The talented Shearing and Thompson can duel licks like savvy nightclub veterans or break into ornate fugal counterpoint like crown-commissioned chamber musicians.

In the course of the set, Shearing introduced Thompson as "the finest bass player I have had the pleasure to know," "the fine pianist" and "the fine composer." Thompson is fine on all counts but incredible on bass. The bearded musician's slender, extended fingers batted the upright's strings with blurring, unerring brilliance.

I was sorry to see him leave the stage for the pianist's solo, the only piece with voice in the show, even though Shearing's singing was wholly engaging.

In the third and final part of the performance, the orchestra joined the duo. Shearing's virtuosity is unquestionable, as jazz and classical flavors mixed deliciously together through the commonality of good taste. For instance, a charming jazz rhapsody was made of a theme by Paganini, a 19th-century longhair, in one Shearing adaptation. Conversely, the nursery air "English Country Gardens" was rendered as a cathedral canon.

I wanted to hoist a flaming Bic. But this was not a Judas Priest concert, and there was no encore. Instead, the closing fare was Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever," as conducted by the highest bidder in the audience. When Boo Boo and I split, careful not to make any sudden movements that the auctioneer could mistake for a bid, the going price was \$600.

Pilobolus dancers evoke organic-illusion world

By Terry Field

This weekend at Kimball Hall, UNL was treated with the unique, fascinating choreography of the Pilobolus Dance Theatre. The six member company can put a smile on the face of even those who don't think they enjoy dance performances.

Pilobolus's sculpturistic style is not classical ballet, nor is it modern dance. It is a style all their own. The Washington, Conn.-based company's imaginative use

Dance Review

of the human body brilliantly gives meaning to both abstract and literal forms of movement.

The company's style apparently led to its choice of name. Pilobolus is a type of phototropic fungi. The dancers, throughout their routines, contort and shape their bodies into the oddest of form, much like fungi.

The company's first of two performances opened Saturday evening with a piece titled "Molly's Not Dead." It is a famous, humorous highlighter from the company's repertoire. It begins with two men wrapped together, one draped over the other's back and shoulders, ambling about the stage.

Colorful costumes

The costumes were full body and colored yellow, maroon and orange. Like the costumes, the lighting was simple and without any special effects.

Later, gnome-like creatures were formed by each pair of dancers. They took on genders and played seemingly boy-girl games. The humor gave way to a more serious theme when the men returned with their limp partners in their arms. The comedy resumed when they mouth the words over the music, "Pa, Molly's Dead. She ate some leaves."

In the end, the men carried off the women's bodies high over their heads, the bodies moving in the air like rippling ocean waves. The music continued, "Molly's not dead. She's only a-sleepin', patiently waiting for Jesus to come." When the audience's laughter ended, there was a feeling of calmness.

Slapstick dance

"The Empty Suitor," another slapstick, took place around an old wooden park bench. The music opened with an almost African jungle mood. Two men with long poles and dressed as if they were oarsmen slid and maneuvered across the stage. The poles in turn became spears, oars and shovels. Against the blue stage they soon disappeared in seemingly slow motion, precise aerial turns.

There was an oversized man on the bench with a grotesque huge stomach. Out of his long black over coat appeared a woman in a long black skirt. Her mischievous teasing made the man in the overcoat appear foolish. Two men reappeared in black coats and top hats. There is a sexual confrontation with the woman, each man approaching her for a bite of the apple she holds in her mouth.

A comical section follows. As the music of "Sweet Georgia Brown" plays in the back ground, he stumbles and trips, trying

to regain his balance and his hat which keeps falling off.

As music takes on a whimsical quality, the quick and percussive form becomes more subdued and motionless. The men with the poles roll out a large pile of newspapers across the stage.

The woman, as if forgotten, rolls along engulfed by the newspapers. The men join the others on the bench while the woman stalks the men with her large skirt. She lifts the skirt up revealing her bare legs and covering the rest of her body. She then disappears under the skirt while sitting on the laps of the men. With only her legs visible, the illusion that they are the men's is created. They stretch out and cross over one another. As each man possesses the legs, his facial expressions convey his obvious pleasure.

New Wave rock

The final piece, "Day Two", one of the group's most recent works, is set to the new wave rock sounds of Brian Eno and David Byrne of the Talking Heads. The piece is extremely open to interpretation, yet themes of creation were apparent throughout the piece.

The costumes for "Day Two" were of the bare essentials. The men wore flesh colored G-strings. The women wore flesh colored leotards without backs.

As "Day Two" began, the roar of thunder could be heard before the curtain opened. The pulsating music pounded through the audience. All four men appeared in a slight diagonal, on their knees, suggesting worship. Their bodies bobbed up and down with quick percussive motion.

Out of all of all the pieces, this dance

seemed the most danced and abstracted in nature. When the women appeared, bodies were spun both high and low, women swinging men, men swinging women. The movements are both sexual and asexual. This dance differentiates the bodies by their own strength, balance and flexibility, not by sex.

In "Day Two," there is a wonderful illusion using two long poles. The women appear suspended and drift in the air while the men carried them above their heads with the poles. Treading through the air, they all began to slow down, creating the feeling of what it might be like on the moon.

As organic as the piece is, it was especially wonderful when the dancers began crawling under the rubber floor covering. Clumping to the middle of the stage, the mass grew larger until it broke out of its shell.

When all seemed to have been finished and the curtain finally closed, the thunder could be heard again, and the audience seemingly baffled continued to applaud. The sound of the thunder increased, the stage curtains flew open, and the music started to pulsate again.

Suddenly one of the dancers slide across the stage, on his back. Creating the illusion as if it had rained, the stage floor turned into one giant horizontal water slide. One after the other, dancers slid with ease, not only on their backs, but on their stomachs, feet and fannies.

The Lincoln audience enjoyed the performance by Tim Latta, Carol Parker, Josh Perl, Peter Pucci, Cynthia Quinn, and Michael Tracy. It was Pilobolus at its finest.