

Arts & Entertainment

'Devil's Playground': School pits mind against body

By Eric Peterson

If idle hands are the devil's workbench, then an Australian boys' school must be . . . "The Devil's Playground." The UPC foreign film, directed by Australian Fred Schepisi, will run tonight at the Sheldon Film Theater at 7 and 9.

You see him — the devil — before the film starts, worked into a Gothic capital letter. He doesn't really look that dangerous, and the evil shown in the film, while it is there, never threatens to over-

Film Review

whelm; everything in the film seems to fall into a pleasant languor of color and shade.

It is a film about Catholic Guilt. The capitals are necessary because the film seems to insist on making us realize the fact. Over and over, the nicer, healthier priests who teach at the school shout that the school's hellfire sermons and repressive rules are making the boys morbid.

Opposed to the "good" priests is a thin, ascetic-looking prig, who sneaks around eavesdropping behind hedges and yells at a boy who indecently showers in the nude. Obviously, such a man has to have raging demons of lust inside him and, sure enough, we discover him swimming in a dream with lots of naked women. It's a lyrical scene, with a fluid, blue beauty to it; but his desire becomes obscene and makes us snicker when he is at the public swimming pool, ogling

what he condemns others for having.

In the end, the prig has to go mad. "I hate life. I hate it!" he screams. "The body dominates the mind, clubs it to the very corners." The only answer, he concludes, is to give in to the body — and lose your mind.

But the madness is in the place as well. Even the ruddy complexioned, red-bearded visiting father — a picture of Friar John — preaches crazy sermons about hell and curling red worms and compares eternity to a metal globe the size of the sun being rubbed away by a swallow's wing.

The main subplot in this leisurely film is the escape of a boy named Tom Allen, played by Simon Burke, from this repressive place full of Catholic Guilt. Tom wets his bed every night; his anxiety feeding on itself. He falls into the bad company for a short time of the school's secret society of fanatics, who whip each other into ecstatic vision. "It's not bloody natural!" one good-natured priest says about the group and about the school's denial of the body's needs, making clear that the sado-masochism is the result of the repression and guilt.

Tom falls into more innocent experimentation with a giggling schoolboy in the woods; they wander in front of a labyrinth of branches and don't succeed in the attempt because of ignorance and inexperience. "If you do it, do it properly!" Tom shouts reproachfully.

And Tom has a grand romance with a girl who visits for a little while; their exchange of letters is stopped by the head of the school and, when Tom tries to confess his sins to a gruff, formidable Irish



"Devil's Playground" shows tonight at 7 and 9 in the Sheldon Art Gallery Film Theatre as part of the University Program Council's Foreign Film Series.

confessor, he is continually shut up with "Rubbish! Rubbish, my boy."

The school officials, with the exception of one humorous old man, aren't truly sympathetic to the boy (though no one comes off looking hateful in the film), and after a futile, solitary call to God, Tom runs away. As he rides away in a car, he feels lighter and lighter, his smile

persists and we see the sky reflected in the shiny window of the car. The reflections look like flakes of light curtaining him off; the effect is beautiful.

All of "The Devil's Playground" is like that, actually . . . the pace is so calm, everything is so nice to look at, that worry and guilt are like a murmur in your ear rather than a shout.

Comedian Franklin Ajaye: We have to stop being outsiders

By Ward W. Triplett III

A sharply dressed Franklin Ajaye, tape recorder in hand, walked purposely to center stage amidst scattered applause about 8:30 p.m. Thursday. Ajaye was supposed to be the main attraction of the Black History Month celebration at UNL, yet only slightly more than 30 people greeted the comedian as he began his first Lincoln appearance.

"Wow. . . standing room only," Ajaye remarked at the outset. "Is this all the black people in Lincoln?"

Little went right for Ajaye that day. The show started late because his clothes were flown into Omaha after he had taken a commuter flight from Omaha's Eppley Airport to Lincoln. The small turnout seemed like an extra bit of exasperation for him, the last straw of frustration for Ajaye in his whole Nebraska experience.

"I haven't seen a crowd like this since I started 11 years ago in New York City," he said. He made one joke about crowded New York streets and how he and his brother finally "went ahead and robbed" a couple that purposely avoided them for several blocks. Then he decided to adapt completely to the situation.

"It's very difficult to do comedy straight out to 15 people," he said. "What I'd prefer to do is open it up to questions."

Ajaye has appeared in "Convoy," "Car Wash," "Stir Crazy" and "The Jazz Singer," but pointed out there were no guarantees.

"Even after 'Car Wash' it was tough," he said. "Some of the roles I've been offered I just wouldn't do. The scripts mostly have us (blacks) as pimps and so on, and to do a role, you have to commit yourself to the part. I couldn't do that with a negative role."

Ajaye was born in Brooklyn, moved to Los Angeles when he was three years old and went to the University of Southern California for a year before transferring to UCLA.

At that point, Ajaye seemed to forget about the small crowd. He talked about his experience as a freshman football player

at USC — all 26 seconds of playing time — and being a live dummy for the Trojan varsity defensive tackles.

He performed for more than an hour, bringing up Julius Erving (who traced his roots back to a Converse-wearing Nambian native, Slatka Dunke), Los Angeles police (who once arrested him and a friend on a charge of "niggers on a sunny day" — and what could we do. . . we were guilty) and how sex will make you call up people you don't even like.

In an interview afterwards, Ajaye said the ability to learn the ways and methods of the white power structure in America is the most important thing a black person can learn in college.

"We have to stop being outsiders," he said. "Blacks have to get that education. It's imperative that you be able to realize that whites hold the power in this society, be perceptive of them and be able to communicate with them."

"I believe a black attitude with a white language is where I'm at now," Ajaye said, himself a graduate of UCLA's law school. "It's an attitude that is in the society, but not of the society. That's what I believe blacks should be seeking today."

As Ajaye answered questions from a small group of students after his show, the names of his fellow black comedians, Eddie Murphy, Richard Pryor and Bill Cosby, came up. Ajaye said he doesn't watch any of them much anymore.

"I think I'm at a point where I don't have anything left to learn," he said. "I want to remain an individual and I don't want to be influenced by somebody else."

Ajaye did, however, give his opinions on the three.

"I haven't watched much of what Eddie has done," he said. "But he has got a lot of confidence. Comedy is the way you perform as much as what you say."

"Sometimes you can captivate an audience, to a point where they are waiting to laugh at you, and you don't have to make them. Eddie has that ability. The

Play: Mankind will survive, even by the skin of its teeth

By David Creamer

"The Skin of Our Teeth," is a delightful play with three acts, three directors and three moods, all of which convey one basic philosophy. This philosophy is that mankind, which is represented by the Antrobus family, has and will continue to survive dis-

Theatre Review

asters, either natural or man-made, by the skin of its teeth.

As the play begins, the audience sees the Antrobuses, who have survived fire, flood, pestilence, seven-year locusts, the Ice Age, the black pox and the double feature, as well as a dozen wars and as many depressions.

The audience comes into the play in the middle of an ice age in the first act.

Julie Uribe, a junior, who plays the Antrobuses' maid and cook, Sabina, keeps the play moving at a quick pace. Her frequent departures from the play to talk to the audience on a more personal level keep the audience involved in the play.

Under the direction of graduate student Tim Mooney, Act I creates the mood of the rest of the play. It seems light and slightly abstract, in agreement with the overall atmosphere of the production.

This play follows no ordinary rules — the three acts are disconnected. Also, during Act II, Mrs. Antrobus announces that she and Mr. Antrobus are celebrating their 5,000th wedding anniversary — reminding the audience that the Antrobus family is representing mankind.

In Act II, the Antrobus family is faced with a life-threatening flood, while at the same time experiencing many family problems.

Whereas Act I is set in the Antrobus home in Lincoln, Act II is set in Atlantic City, on the beach. The scenery for this act is brightly colored and blends well with the false theme that Mr. Antrobus announces early in the act: "Enjoy Yourself."

To emphasize the importance of the concept of the family in this act, the director, Constance Hill, wrote this note in the program: "When the world seems against you, when all you touch turns bad, when your life is full of hurt and no one is around to soothe the pain, the bottom line is: THE FAMILY."

Act III, directed by James Stanley Haehl, has a different mood. Act III is more serious and deliberate in conveying the message that mankind must continue to struggle and that, in order to come through, humans will have to come through together.

The third act shows the Antrobus family as they come through a war — any war. It also deals with personal conflicts between Mr. Antrobus and his son, played by freshman Jeff Talbott.

The costuming is bright and almost comical in itself, but with the characters, the combination becomes quite humorous.

Overall, Thornton Wilder's "The Skin of Our Teeth" is a good play with a diverse cast, many of whom play three different parts. The play is funny, yet has a direct message that connects the seemingly unrelated parts.

The final five performances of the play will be in the Howell Theatre March 8 through 12 at 8 p.m.