

# Arts & Entertainment

## 'Toby Show' refreshing for kids, adults

By Judi Nygren

The actors and actresses preparing their make-up at the ice-cream parlor tables go unnoticed by the children who run through the zoo's village square fighting for more popcorn and playing Duck-Duck-Goose. But once Toby bounds onto stage, the games cease and the popcorn grows cold in idle hands.

Toby, a red-headed, freckle-faced, country bumpkin played by John Merriman, is the star of "A Toby Show." In his starring role, Toby plays narrator — talking with the audience throughout the hour-long play — comedian, prankster and fair godperson.

Toby is a natural comedian with his down-home humor, but he makes an unlikely fair godperson. He only becomes fairy godperson after stumbling into an evil step-mother's scheme to keep her beautiful step-daughter locked in the kitchen while her two bumbling daughters court the prince.

If this tale sounds familiarly stale, don't be disheartened. The Nebraska Repertory Theater adds contemporary twists to the classic "Cinderella" story to create a refreshing rendition both children and adults can enjoy.

The show offers something for every age group, according to Christopher Wineman the show's director. Children at each performance find Toby "very entertaining," he said, and adults leave saying, "Oh wow, I saw Toby when I was growing up."

Because so many area adults grew up watching Toby, Wineman said the repertory theater feels it is important to travel throughout Nebraska performing the children's play.

"It is a chance to let the children in the area see a part of theater that their grandparents saw when they were growing up," he said.

Unlike the open-air performances children watch at Folsom Children's Zoo, many grandparents grew up watching performances in tents or local opera houses. The old shows, accompanied by vaudeville acts and bands, gained popularity in the early 1900s.



David Trouba/Daily Nebraskan

The "bad guys" in A Toby Show are from left to right: Sophia, played by Jane Gronstal; Mauderina, played by Priscilla Stengel; and Mrs. Van Undersquire, played by Patricia Raun.

During the shows' height of popularity, more than 400 traveling companies performed throughout the Midwest and South. The companies performed a different show each night and over a period of time, more than 200 Toby tales developed.

It was from the early companies' shows that Aurand Harris created his "Cinderella" version in 1978. Harris wrote the script after months of researching, interviewing retired repertoire perform-

ers and attending shows performed by today's only touring Toby company based in Mount Pleasant, Iowa.

Harris discovered that Toby could be young, old, lazy, energetic, Southern, Mid-Western or anything else an author wanted Toby to be. Harris chose to create an energetic, country boy turned fairy godperson for his rendition.

Today, Harris' design is further enhanced by the repertory company's casting of Toby. Merriman's sturdy, young body squeezed into tattered overalls lends itself to the hick design and makes for a most unusual fairy godperson; the traditional fairy godperson being a pudgy, old woman.

Merriman's gender and physique are not the only things that make him an unlikely candidate for fairy godperson. While the traditional fairy godperson drips with sweetness, Merriman's character pounces on every opportunity to hurl insults at the high-falutin' Mrs. Van Undersquire, played by Patricia Raun, and her daughters, Sophia, a singer played by Jane Gronstal, and Mauderina, a poet played by Priscilla Stengel.

For instance, after Mrs. Van Undersquire discovers Toby is not the prince but merely a handy-man, she sends him to the kitchen. Toby constantly gets in Mrs. Van Undersquire's way as her kitchen helper driving her to holler, "You can't even talk to an idiot."

"Okay," Toby responds, "I'll just write to you." Although the list of Toby's failures as a traditional fairy godperson goes on and on, he finally fulfills his role after befriending the step-daughter, Cindy, played by Joyce Welsch, Prince Burdock, played by Shimon Ramirez, and the prince's grandfather, the Colonel, played by Todd Pickering.

Toby calls upon many standard "Cinderella" tactics to accomplish his mission, but off-beat characters and incidents help him do so in such a way as to breathe the new life into the age-old tale.

"A Toby Show" will be performed at the Folsom Children's Zoo, 27th and A streets on Aug. 2, 4, 9 and 11 at 10:30 a.m. City Parks and Recreation will sponsor a performance at Antelope Bandshell Aug. 1 at 7:30 p.m.

## Life-real dialogues inspire Spanish author

By Mike Frost

"And welcome to another edition of 'Between the Covers,' the program that talks about books and their authors. Books have always played an im-

### Humor

portant role in the teaching of foreign languages. Today, we're fortunate to have in our studio Frank Lenoir, a gentleman who's written many instructional books including "Spanish I," "Spanish II," "Spanish III," and an effective compilation, "Spanish I-III." "Welcome to 'Between the Covers,' Mr. Lenoir."

"Good evening. What are you called?"  
"My name is Peter Toomey."  
"Good evening, Mr. Toomey. How are

you (formal)?"  
"I'm fine. How are you, Frank — may I call you Frank?"  
"Very good, thank you. What condition is your mother in?"  
"Condition? She's fine. What condition is your mother in?"  
"Condition? She's fine, I suppose."  
"How is the weather?"  
"Frank, I have this sneaking suspicion I've heard you speak somewhere before."  
"What is the place you (formal) have seen me, Mr. Toomey?"  
"I know. The dialogue tracts in my 'Spanish I' book — you must have written it!"  
"Yes, this is of the truth. You (formal) are very smart."  
"Well, thank you."  
"It is of nothing."  
"Tell me, where do you get the inspiration for the dialogues you create for these books?"  
"They are all taken from life-real, Mr. Toomey."

"I find that hard to believe, Frank. Let me translate, if I may, from page 24 of 'Spanish I.'"  
"Please, you (formal) translate from page 24 of 'Spanish I.'"  
"Here we are. 'Pedro, how have you come here?' 'I have not come by car, Jose.' 'Have you come by the autobus?' 'No, I have not come by the autobus.' 'Have you come by the burro?' 'Yes, I have come by the burro.' 'Goodbye Pedro.' 'Goodbye Jose.'"  
"Yes, this was an actual life-real conversation I had with my friend."  
"Well, if this is how you conduct a conversation, I think you've been in the Spanish language text book business just a little too long."  
"You (formal) are correct, I have been in the Spanish text book business a little too long. This is why I (informal) have decided to branch out into styles different of writing."  
"Yes, I noticed you brought a bound manuscript with you. Is this your new book?"

"Yes, this is my new book. It is called 'The Mountains of Mexico.'"  
"Sounds fascinating."  
"Yes, it is the sound of fascinating. I would like to read a selection to you (informal). May I call you (informal) you (informal)?"  
"Please."  
"Thank you (informal). I shall read now. There are many mountains in Mexico. Many of the mountains they are tall. You cannot travel to them in an autobus. You cannot travel to them by burro. You must travel by helicopter. Jose travels by helicopter."  
"Well, I see we're just about out of time, Mr. Lenoir. Thank you for sharing your book with us. Good luck."  
"Thank you (informal)."  
"Until next time, I'm Peter Toomey, 'Between the Covers.'"  
"I need a ride home. I cannot ride by burro. I cannot ride by airplane. I cannot ride by autobus."  
"Good night everyone."

## Where has all the linoleum gone?

One of the world's greatest art forms is quickly becoming extinct. Walk in to your kitchen or bathroom. Look down. Do you see what I see? Our linoleum has gone to the dogs.

### Billy Shaffer

As a house remodeler in the Pacific Northwest a few years back, I began to collect patches of the floors in kitchen and bathroom that were to be replaced. The patterns were fascinating examples of a time when the idea of "modern" could even be applied to your floor. Most of these designs were produced in the 40s and 50s, at a time when the world was ready to move ahead and forget about world wars.

Well, everyone knew that the "modern" home needed a "modern" floor-covering. Something plastic, something

durable, but most importantly, something "smart." The world had come to accept, if not appreciate, the work of Piet Mondrian and Theo van Doesberg. Mondrian's work became classified under the "De Stijl" movement, but he personally preferred the term "neo-plastic." Mondrian's work was a very objective, stylized, and analytic form of abstraction. Mondrian's theory of "plastic mathematics" is an especially fitting term for what evolved into the predominant style of "modern" linoleum. Floating squares, circles and stripes repeat themselves in endless patterns, similar to Larry Poon's paintings in the 60s and 70s. The look is distinctively "jazzy," loose but placed into a structured framework.

The color scheme of the old linoleum invariably consist of a flat, neutral grayish or light background with bright primary and secondary colors used for the squares, stripes, etc.



Craig Andresen/Daily Nebraskan

Continued on Page 7 Two pieces from the Billy Shaffer Collection of Antiquated Linoleum.