

Arts & Entertainment

Telegram services 'shock' recipients

By Lise Olsen
Staff Reporter

The gift that unwraps itself, strip-a-grams, adds a twist to the usual song and dance of a singing telegram.

Three Lincoln singing telegram services, Excite-O-Gram, 1440 M St., Tune-A-Gram, 464-TUNE, and Original Singing Telegram, 1415 Sumner St., offer versions of strip-a-grams.

Excite-O-Gram, an Omaha-based company, is owned and managed by Jesse Conyers, a senior business major at U.N.O. Conyers started out as a stripper-messenger to earn money for school three years ago and ended up buying the company. He expanded his service to include Lincoln six months ago.

Sales have increased steadily each month since the company's Lincoln debut, Conyers said.

Despite their popularity, some people have misconceptions about Excite-O-Grams, Conyers said.

"It's not Council Bluffs sleazy — we're not an escort service or anything. . . it's just fun," he said, although on some occasions Conyers has gotten date offers, which he has refused.

In three years of stripping, Conyers and other employees have doffed their tuxedos to reveal string bikinis in bowling alleys, airports, warehouses and once in an announcer's booth at the Ak-Sar-Ben racetrack in Omaha.

Part of the male dancing act is to surprise and shock the recipients. But occasionally, Conyers said, he has been a little shocked and surprised himself.

Like the time a lady whose T-shirt read "Sixty, Sexy and Sinful" ripped the buttons off his tuxedo shirt.

"No one had ever done that before," Conyers said.

Another time an inspired 87-year-old lady took off her skirt. Clad only in a silk slip, she joined his dance.

"You don't expect an 87-year-old to do something like that," he said.

For male customers, Excite-O-Gram sends the "Birthday Bunny." She arrives clad in a rabbit suit with a card in her cleavage. The Bunny will tell jokes and coax the recipient into removing her garter with his teeth — but she doesn't strip.

"The bunny stays in her bunny costume," Conyers said.

Another more innocent Excite-O-Gram service is called "balloons with style." A tuxedoed messenger delivers the balloons, which are accompanied by perfume and a rose (or cologne and a mug), a birthday card and a bottle of imported champagne.

Excite-O-Gram services cost \$60 for Lincoln delivery (\$50 for Omaha.)

Tune-A-Gram, Lincoln's oldest singing telegram service, has a version of the strip-a-gram called "Long John Stripper." Originally Long John earned his name by stripping down to long red underwear. However, owner Cecilia Lawson says that customers have gotten more liberal and so has Long John. He's traded his woollens for a more revealing bikini.

Long John's colleagues at Tune-A-Gram include the Kissing Bandit, Baboon-A-Tune, Honey Bunny and Belly (dancer) Telly.

Seasonal messengers like Cupid and the Queen of Hearts make special appearances for Valentines Day (the service's busiest day of the year).

Leprechauns will wear the green and dance the jig for St. Patrick's Day on March 17.

In addition to its regular singing services, Tune-A-Gram will consider special requests.

"Once we dressed as pigs for a guy who was retiring from Swiss Premium, Lawson said.

Tune-A-Gram messengers also have made marriage proposals. Once, Lawson recalled, a man and woman messenger team pantomimed a proposal scene. They performed by the couple's table. A violinist accompanied the pair.

"Luckily she (the customer's girlfriend) accepted," Lawson said, "everyone in the restaurant was watching — it would have been pretty embarrassing.

Tune-A-Gram's messengers have even been asked to fire people, but Lawson said she always refused.

"There's just not a nice way to do that," she said.

However, Tune-A-Gram messengers have delivered bouquets of dead flowers and thrown pies in people's faces, Lawson said.

"We kind of feel out the situation and make sure it's not a vendetta or anything," she said.

Before creating Tune-A-Gram five



Ron Alberison/Daily Nebraskan

years ago, Lawson worked at an Alcohol Rehabilitation Center.

"I was getting depressed by the fact that everyone I worked with was depressed. I wanted to make people happy," she said.

In her five years at Tune-A-Gram, Lawson has delivered messages at swimming pools, city dumps, grocery store checkout lines, city buses, construction sites and even a men's restroom.

"I honestly don't get embarrassed anymore," Lawson said.

Tune-A-Gram prices range from \$14 for a basic balloon-a-gram to \$65 for a belly (dancer) telly.

Original Singing Telegram offers a tamed-down version of the strip-a-gram called a "Comic Strip."

After singing an appropriate song, the messenger discards his kazoo and mechanical monkey and begins what looks like a serious strip tease. But

after he has removed his bellhop uniform, the messenger reveals only an undershirt and a pair of Hawaiian shorts — not his birthday suit.

"It's for someone who wants something fun and different but doesn't want to go the full nine yards with a real stripper," Maggie McGowan, co-manager of Original Singing Telegram, said.

Other unique Original Singing Telegram messengers include "Glittergirl" Cheer (leader)-a-gram, and "Lilly the Gorilly," an ape-suited messenger who sings in a Cyndi Lauper sort of voice, McGowan said.

Original Singing Telegram messengers sing original songs composed for a company songbook. They also will include personal messages in songs.

"If we don't have a song for it (the occasion) we'll write one," McGowan said.

Original Telegram has delivered to

residence halls, Greek houses and even classrooms.

"We call first to make sure it's OK with the professor if we're going to disrupt a class," McGowan, a former junior high school teacher, said.

Original Singing Telegram prices range from \$23 (balloon-a-gram) to \$70 for a belly gram. Prices vary depending on the type of costume or lack thereof, McGowan said.

All three singing telegram services will deliver in a 30 to 50-mile radius of Lincoln, and in some cases points beyond if mileage is paid.

Right now (the period between Valentines Day and Father's Day) is the peak of the business year for Singing Telegram services, Lawson said.

Their worst business day is Halloween. That is the one time that people don't feel stupid dressing up and making fools out of themselves in public, Lawson said.

Film wins with 'black humor'

By Bill Allen
Senior Reporter

You don't often get a chance to see movies like "Repo Man" in Lincoln, so take advantage of the chance now at the Sheldon Gallery Theatre.

"Repo Man" is bizarre. It's off-the-wall, black humor. It's satire. It's been called a science fiction farce, but it's also many other things.

REVIEW MOVIE

Michael Nesmith, (Monkey's TV series producer) produced the 1984 release, which explains some of the more far-stretched images.

For instance: All of the food and drink in this movie is generic, plain label. You don't catch on to this right away.

All the characters, though seemingly unrelated, keep running into each other in weird situations and all are intertwined by the end.

Every car has pine tree air fresheners, which also are occasionally on hospital doors.

And by the end of the movie, you may never open the trunk of your car again.

Basic plot: Otto (Emilio Estevez, Martin Sheen's son) repossesses cars for the Helping Hands Acceptance Company. Now, he's out to repossess a

'64 Chevy Malibu for an amazing reward of \$20,000. Of course, everyone else is after the car too, including other firms besides Otto's and the U.S. Government.

That's the plot, and it's a good plot. It leaves plenty of room for car chases, sex, U.F.O.'s, slinky music, fried shrimp and quite a bit of humor, weird humor.

Harry Dean Stanton is wonderful as Bud, an old-hand repo man code, kind of like a Hemingway code hero.

The movie also has a Bill Murray-type character, Miller, who plays a strange part in the ending. Miller is a former hippy who cleans out the repossessed cars.

"Repo Man" is also a satire of many things in contemporary America. The movie opens with Otto working for a jerk manager in a supermarket. (He later gets revenge on the guy.) Then we switch to a scene of Otto "slam dancing" in an alley with his gang of new wave far out punkers.

Otto leaves the gang, but they keep showing up, robbing liquor stores and committing other crimes, and giving us some classic lines, such as "Don't say our names, Duke, or we'll have to kill all these people."

Later, Duke is shot during a liquor store robbery. Otto just happens to be in the store, as he was during two other robberies, and leans over the dying punker.

"I'm just a victim of society," Duke said, dying.

"No you're not," Otto deadpans.

"You're a white middle-class punk."

The movie also satirizes evangelist

TV preachers, family relationships, drugs and R-rated movies, which it is.

Estevez is great in the role of Otto. It's also easy to tell he's Martin Sheen's son. He has that same deadpan facial expression that conveys different meanings in different situations.

Estevez goes through the movie as I did, a little bit amazed, a little bit confused and accepting everything as it comes. After the first few minutes, you cease to be surprised by anything and you just sit back and accept it, hoping the movie will eventually make sense.

"Repo Man" makes some comments about life in the United States, but you can enjoy it without spending two hours searching for subtle meaning. It's much more fun looking for campaign posters, fried shrimp and plain label beer cans, which are everywhere, and may be a way of saying the producers won't fail for all the commercialism in many of today's movies. But a "Repo Man" soundtrack is available.

The movie is highly recommended for the college crowd, especially that large majority who fancy they have a slightly warped sense of humor. If you like David Letterman, you'll like this movie.

Screenings are at 7 and 9 p.m. tonight through March 18, with a matinee today at 1 p.m. There will be no screening Saturday, March 16 and no Sunday matinee.

Admission is \$3. I got in free for the press screening but I'm going back again. If I spring for a movie, it's good.

H-O-T-S-P-O-T-I-S

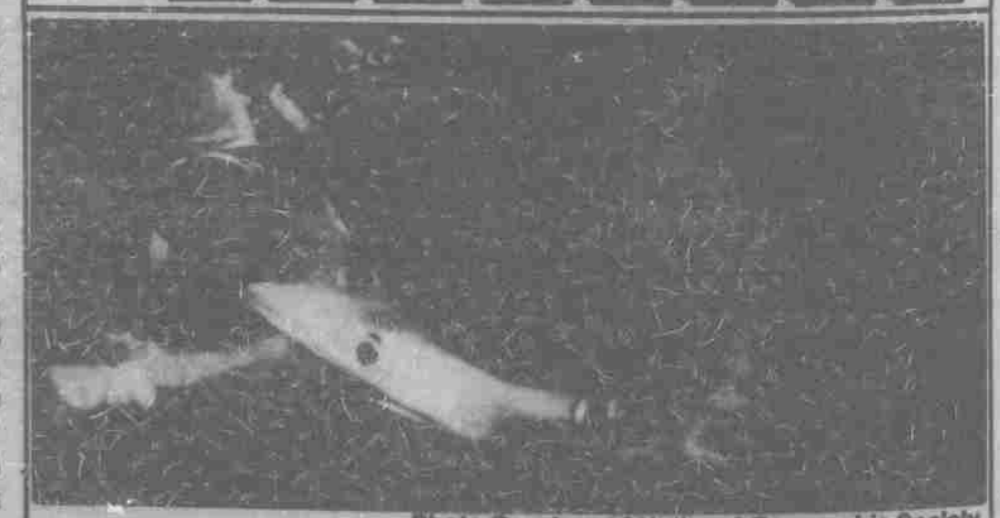


Photo Courtesy of National Geographic Society

"The Sharks," one of the most watched National Geographic specials, is among the many programs featured in Great Moments with National Geographic, tonight at 7 on NETV.

Television

At 7 p.m. on NETV Hal Holbrook will be host of "Great Moments With National Geographic," a retrospective of past National Geographic Specials.

The 90-minute program was created to celebrate the series' 10 award-winning years on PBS.

From the mysterious depths of the oceans to the lairs of the earth's deadliest animals, from the craggy grin of Sir Edmund Hillary to the gentle manner of Jane Goodall, the National Geographic Specials have for years introduced television viewers to fascinating people they probably won't ever meet, places they

couldn't ordinarily visit and animals they would usually never encounter.

This special focuses on scenes from the 40 specials produced since 1975.

On Campus

"Repo Man" at the Sheldon Art Gallery Theatre. Admission is \$3 for this off-the-wall, dark comedy. Screenings are at 1, 7 and 9 p.m.

Around Town

Dietze Hamer Guitar Clinic is at the Drumstick tonight.

The Hot Notes play at the Zoo Bar tonight. A \$1.50 cover will be charged.