

Arts & Entertainment

Musicians' whims met for sake of concerts

By Lise Olsen
Senior Reporter

Van Halen wanted brown M and M's picked out. Bruce Springsteen requested a jacuzzi, but settled for a massage table. Hall and Oates wanted to play ping pong.

Local organizations, like the University Programs Council and Pershing auditorium officials, are often responsible for making sure musicians who play major Lincoln concerts are safe and satisfied.

Sometimes the requests seem a little "prima donna"-ish, said Doug Kuhnel, Pershing manager. However, Kuhnel said, he understands the bands need to be specific about their menus and accommodations.

"If they left it up to each hall, they'd eat McDonald's hamburgers every night," he said.

For Bruce Springsteen, the UPC's Major Concerts Presentation's Team turned a locker room into a living room — complete with large house plants, rented furniture and curtains to hide the lockers, said Chris Amberg, team chairman.

Local groups' responsibility extends beyond meal and room planning. They also coordinate security, concessions and T-shirt sales and help the bands setup and pack away equipment, Amberg said.

The Lincoln groups are at the end of a long chain of concert organizers.

The chain begins with the rock group itself. The group is represented by a personal management company that contracts with a booking agency. Booking agencies notify promoters (entrepreneurs who put up the money for the shows) about available dates and routes, Kuhnel said.

Both Kuhnel and Amberg work with the Midwest's major promoters: Contemporary of St. Louis, Jam of Chicago, Beaver of New Orleans, Feyline of Denver and Schon of Minneapolis.

Throughout the year, Kuhnel says he makes 15 to 20 calls a week to promoters. Amberg contacts them five or six times every two weeks during the school year, he said.

The two compete with Omaha facilities to draw concerts but not with each other, they said. Omaha has the advantage of having a larger population. But concerts are cheaper to produce in Lincoln, which has a larger university student population, Kuhnel said.

Lincoln and Omaha are "tertiary" markets, Kuhnel said.

"They're not going to center a tour around us," he said.

Whether a major concert comes to Lincoln depends on the concert's route, tour dates, contracts, weather conditions and whims, Kuhnel said.

December is a slow month for Nebraska concerts because of potentially hazardous driving conditions, Kuhnel said.

Even in April, weather can be a problem. Kuhnel recalled an April 2, 1982 ZZ Top concert at Pershing. The day started out in the 70s, but by nightfall a blizzard had hit and roads were closed. The group left Lincoln after the show anyway to stay on schedule.

Lincoln and Omaha concerts are mostly limited to "Top 40"-type groups because of the sameness of the region's radio station formats, Kuhnel said.

This year, several mainstream rockers — Heart, Ratt and Night Ranger — have appeared at Pershing. Ticket sales were lower than expected, Kuhnel said.

Kuhnel and Amberg said it is often difficult to predict ticket sales because groups quickly gain and lose both regional and national popularity. Because most concerts are planned months in advance, some are surprise successes and some are flops.

"You make a lot of guesses. You try to know your market and you hope for good ticket sales," Amberg said.

Last year, UPC major concerts team brought Springsteen, Chicago, Elton John and Hall and Oates to Bob Devaney.

This year, not as many major groups are touring, both Amberg and Kuhnel said.

UPC major concerts has yet to produce a show this year, although Amberg said an unnamed band is tentatively scheduled to perform in April. If a definite agreement is made, details will be announced when tickets go on sale sometime next semester, Amberg said.

First semester, Amberg said, he reserved concert dates at Devaney for Eddie Murphy, Bryan Adams, Tina Turner and Bill Cosby.

For various reasons — canceled tours, TV/movie roles, alternate locations — each show fell through, he said. Only about one out of five "holds" (reservations) materializes into a concert, Amberg said.

Because of those odds, most concerts aren't announced until "we physi-



Phil Tsai/Daily Nebraskan

ically make the call to have the tickets printed," Kuhnel said. Promoters usually won't put up the money to print tickets unless the concert is reasonably certain, he said.

But even on the day of the show things can fall through.

Kuhnel's biggest disappointment as an auditorium manager was when Neil Young canceled a Lincoln concert on the day of the show in 1983. The concert had sold out in one day and equipment was already set up when Young called from the Lincoln Hilton and said he was too sick to perform.

"We felt the power of the artist at

that point," Kuhnel said.

The earlier euphoria of good ticket sales turned into a nightmare of refunds and explanations as fans drifted in from Lincoln and from out-of-town, he said.

Because of the size of the halls Amberg and Kuhnel work with, both are limited to bigger acts with widespread appeal, they said.

Pershing's 8,500 seat auditorium is too big for bands like Stryper and the Violent Femmes, but it also is too small for Springsteen, Kuhnel said.

The 14,000 seat Bob Devaney sold-out Springsteen's concert last year. But

UPC's biggest ticket count to date was for a Journey show, Amberg said. Because of seating and staging arrangements, Journey topped Springsteen by 200 tickets, Amberg said.

Amberg attributed the major groups' touring slowdown to the popularity of videos.

"It's a hell of a lot easier to make a video than spend all that money on production and spend six months of their (the group's) lives on the road," he said.

Major concerts cost \$60,000 — \$120,000 (Bill Cosby's minimum guarantee) to produce, Kuhnel said.

Simple lyrics, surprises help 'Live in London'

By Mike Grant
Staff Reporter

Editor's note: The following is a review of two country music albums. One is by a comparative newcomer, Ricky Skaggs and the other by Johnny Cash, who has

been on the country music scene for more than thirty years.

Record Review

Ricky Skaggs, "Live in London," CBS.

Ricky Skaggs is one of the few bright spots in country music. Rather than depending on slick musical arrangements and silly bravado lyrics, which sell so well for people like Lee Greenwood and T. G. Sheppard, Skaggs digs deeply into his bluegrass roots for pure and simple lyrics and music that is

traditional without being bland.

"Live in London," his latest LP, is a good showcase for his talents, with a few surprises.

The first surprise is that Sheppard recorded the album live at the Dominion Theatre in London. Country music has a dedicated following in England.

Secondly, British singer/songwriter Elvis Costello teams with Skaggs for a duet of "Don't Get Above Your Raising" a song written by Lester Flatt and Earl Scruggs. But Costello also has written country songs before and performed with George Jones.

But it is a surprise to hear Charles Haid, who plays Andy Renko on "Hill Street Blues," perform the introduction to the album.

It's a pleasant album. Skaggs has some of the best pickin' you're going to hear on country radio stations today. Songs like "Uncle Ben" and "Country Boy" show off Skaggs' and his band's vast talents.

"You Make Me Feel Like A Man" is the prettiest country ballad recorded in a long time.

Skaggs may lack the edge of progressive country performers like Rosanne Cash or Willie Nelson, but after all, this is bluegrass-influenced country, so it has a right to be mournful and slick, and it's done well to boot.

The Bottom Line — This is a fine record. If you're looking for a good introduction into the current bluegrass-country scene, you couldn't pick a better record than Skaggs' "Live in London."

Please see COUNTRY on 7

HEADLINES-FAIR DESIGN INC.
announces
Group Tanning

- Campus Clubs
- Dorm Floors
- Organizations
- Fraternities
- Office Groups
- Sororities

If 3 or more members of a group* come in they each receive

HEADLINES-FAIR DESIGN
488-4832
4003 "A" St.
*all members need not come in together.

10 visits for
\$30
(save \$15)

Don't Be Caught Unprepared!

Let the Nebraska Unions Prepare your Deli trays for the Holiday Season.

Just call our "Deli Hot Line"

472-2181
City Campus
472-1776
East Campus