

# Arts & Entertainment

## Firehouse's fare worth the road trip to Omaha

By Lise Olsen  
Staff Reporter

About 50 miles down a four-lane interstate lies Omaha's Firehouse. Instead of ladders, trucks and firefighters, the Old Market Firehouse Dinner Theatre offers food and farce.

Last March the Firehouse Dinner Theater, 11th and Jackson streets, began serving meals in an adjacent restaurant, "Harrigan's."

### Theater Preview

We sat on a hardwood church pew in a basement corner of the restaurant, where an antique-framed two-dimensional couple watched us from their portrait. The stone walls were covered with antiques and theater posters. Chairs varied from table to table.

We were hungry, so we broke into a waiting bread basket. As I slid my pat of Land-O-Lakes butter slowly over my roll, we heard a man at a neighboring table say, "When I went to El Salvador, all we did was drink beer."

That was only the beginning of our adventure at the Firehouse, a trip made to view the current offering, "The Foreigner." Before the night was over we would meet a slightly confused singing waiter named Bill, drink a large pink mixture of 80 proof alcohol and watch men in sheets chase each other on stage until one melted like the Wicked Witch of the West in "The Wizard of Oz."

My date had his first doubt about our waiter, Bill, when Bill asked what "flavor" of beer he wanted.

I scorned the barley in favor of a fruitful selection from Harrigan's elementary French lesson-wine list. "Par-terger Vin Blanc sounds good," I said using my best accent.

Dinner included a main dish, prime rib or cordon bleu florentine, or shrimp on a skewer, served with rice or potatoes, carrots, salad and coffee.

I ordered the shrimp, which was served with fresh zucchini in a tangy orange cocktail sauce. The skewer was well-stocked with nine tasty shrimp. Delicious.

The creamy Italian dressing was tasty, but my companion said his prime rib was a little overcooked. We both liked the vegetables, though, especially the tangy rice pilaf.

At 7:35 p.m., Bill, who occasionally sings and dances in the pre-theatre show, informed us it was time to "skeddadle upstairs" for the main event.

The preshow features the "Firehouse Brigade," who double as dessert and cocktail servers during intermissions.

They sang a somewhat predictable routine of Broadway hits including "That's Entertainment" and "If I Only Had A Brain" from the "Wizard of Oz."

My companion said some parts of the show reminded him of his high school swing choir, but I thought the choreography was cute without being nauseating. Surprisingly, the pseudo-spontaneous gags were funny and nicely broke up the predictable progression of the songs.

But then came a somewhat annoying announcement that the brigadiers are paid only by tip. From attending other dinner theaters, I realize it is common to use such semi-slave labor. But in this case our over-worked brigadier, Bill, made just two breathless, but smiling, appearances at our table. A host and busboy brought our drinks and dessert. With a guest-server ratio of about 20-to-1, service was slow, but you had to tip well with a testimonial guilt trip like that.

The dessert (we had cheesecake and amaretto pie) was wonderful but my pink drink, named after the play, was wicked.

Then at 8 p.m. the Omaha premiere of "The Foreigner" began. In the opening scene, the tone of the quasi-melodrama is set by the introduction of a ridiculous premise: Charlie, a shy proof-reader who fears ridicule because of his lack of social graces, is introduced as a "foreign houseguest" who doesn't speak English. This "I Love Lucy-ish" plot line leads the viewer to expect the absurd and the silly, and that's what the play delivers.

John Paul Gamoke, "Charlie," is excellent as the false foreigner. Gamoke's physical acting keeps the scenes exciting. As the play progresses Charlie is visually transformed by the attention he receives as an "exotic foreigner." More and more, Charlie leaves behind the dull shell of himself to become an unlikely hero.

As Charlie gains self-esteem, he also draws out the best in the personalities of his hosts and exposes the villains, who want to turn the Georgia country home into a headquarters for the Ku Klux Klan.

The plot centering on Charlie's transformation and his effect on the other characters, including delightfully simple "Ellard" (Jerry Longe), is the play's strength.

The play is set in Georgia in the present, and maybe I'm just picky, but the characters' accents seem inconsistent with the setting.

My most serious objection to the play is that the melodramatic villains are members of the Ku Klux Klan. The modern strength of racism and the sheer existence of the "invisible em-

pire" are disquieting social problems that I do not take as lightly as the play does at times.

Other critics disagree. "The Foreigner" is the winner of the 1985 Obie Award for best off-Broadway production and the 1985 Outer Critic's Award for best new American play.

Taken as a whole, the dinner theater experience was a nice, though somewhat expensive, change from the pizza-movie routine. The scarlet dinner theater and the historic old market district itself provide a festive atmosphere for having fun that is well worth an hour's drive.

Performances are every night except Monday with matinees Wednesday and Sunday. Prices range from \$12.50 for Wednesday matinees to \$21.50 for a Saturday evening.

Special discounts are available for conventions, clubs, office parties and other group gatherings. The box office number is (402) 346-8833.



Courtesy Firehouse Dinner Theatre  
Jerry Longe and John Paul Gamoke in "The Foreigner."

## Tugboats leave Chesterfield's; McGuffey's only jazz outlet

By Scott Hill  
Staff Reporter

The Tugboats, a local jazz group, will no longer play Thursday nights at Chesterfield, Bottomsley & Potts. This leaves McGuffey's as the main outlet for jazz aficionados in Lincoln.

According to Brady Weibeck, assistant manager of Chesterfield's, when the Tugboats' contract ended earlier this month, both club and group agreed not to renew it.

"It costs too much," said Weibeck, "and we simply weren't making enough money."

Weibeck said the contract cancellation was not a personal matter, but simply a "mutual agreement."

Tugboat bass player, Russell White, agreed. He said the band took a risk when, last fall, they moved to Chesterfield's from McGuffey's, where the group

had been known as the Lincoln Jazz Society.

At McGuffey's, the group played jazz standards and allowed members of the audience who had brought their own instruments to sit in and solo.

"We had the same format at Chesterfield's, but we tried to monitor who played with us better," White said.

White said the group, whose other regular members include Tom Larson, Joe Gourlay and Ed Love, is looking at other places in Lincoln to play. "But," he said, "we're not like a band that practices every week in a garage, we are all professional musicians in other ways."

Bob Thurber, manager of McGuffey's, said he did not think the Tugboats' contract with Chesterfield's would last when the group moved there last fall, but that he wasn't excited about the contract cancellation at Chesterfield's.

"I think that any promotion of music, especially jazz music, in Lincoln, is to be encouraged," Thurber said. "Any time music or jazz music is cancelled, it hurts us all."

Weibeck said Chesterfield's doesn't have a replacement for the Tugboats' Thursday night slot.

### Hypnotist appears at Unions today

Hypnotist Jim Wand will make a return appearance to UNL today.

At 2 p.m., Wand will present a "teaser" in the Nebraska Union Crib. At 5 p.m. Wand, who was at UNL last year, will perform at the Terraces in the East Union.

At 7:30 p.m., he will conduct a seminar on self-hypnosis.

For more information, contact Lori Amsberry at UPC-East, 472-1780.

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