

The Daily Nebraskan Diversions

A preview of arts and entertainment

Performance art: New medium hits the local scene

By Charles Lieurance
Senior Reporter

The 11th Street Gallery was filled with Dinosaurs.

Archeological artifacts were displayed, models of Pterodactyls and other dinosaurs were made from boxes and other "found" materials.

Michael Lewis, who wrote the performance piece "Dinosaurs," stands. He tells about a special refrigerator in a New Jersey laboratory that contains the cells of 95 million-year-old organisms. He tells how eventually whole living things can be generated from these cells.

Lewis informs the audience that the dinosaurs will be returning, that in 50 years the dinosaurs are coming back.

"Dinosaurs" was performed in the 11th Street Gallery last September by Lewis, Mark Harper, Nena Shanks and Kurt Larsen, who portrayed a Tyrannosaurus.

"Dinosaurs," "Birds" by Brian Beezley, Susan Langsley, Michael Lewis, John Moran, Nena Shanks and Michael Zangari; and "Changing of the Season," an opera by John Moran, were the first pieces of what is called performance art to be performed in Lincoln.

Performance art has been popular in larger cities such as New York, Chicago and even Kansas City since the mid-'60s. A mixture of a variety of mediums including poetry, music, sculpture, painting, costuming, dance and drama and film, performance art was brought to mainstream attention because of Laurie Anderson's "United States," which received wide coverage in Vanity Fair, Mademoiselle, Saturday Review and The Village Voice.

Four of the most energetic young Lincoln performance artists are Michael Lewis, Mark Harper, Nena Shanks and John Moran. Their work represents the conception of an avant garde artistic community in Lincoln. Public reception of the performance artists' work has been cool and the 11th Street Gallery, which has acted as a home for experimental and conceptual arts, has had to overcome tremendous financial difficulties in order to survive.

Shanks, a sculptor who graduated

from UNL in Integrated Studies in 1974, believes the cool reception to the performance pieces is not due to the local area's conventional attitude toward art.

"People are used to performances, chairs lined up and faced in one direction, that makes it easier to convince them to see and listen," Shanks said, "Performances can be a lot of things and audiences can be educated."

"Dinosaurs" incorporates choral poetry in which three different parts say three different things at once, reworking word structures and word orientations; percussion oriented music played on brake drums, pony kegs, bass drum, triangle and copper tubes; costuming and narrative pieces concerning the second coming of giant reptiles.

Lewis says he wants his work to "leap-frog from idea to idea rather than letting an idea slowly develop in the course of a play."

"I want to orchestrate people's voices instead of instruments," Lewis said.

Many scenes in "Dinosaurs" merely involve the saying and repeating of dinosaur names and the meanings of the names.

The final scene of the performance has Harper crucified on a Pterodactyl while percussion pounds out intricate polyrhythms.

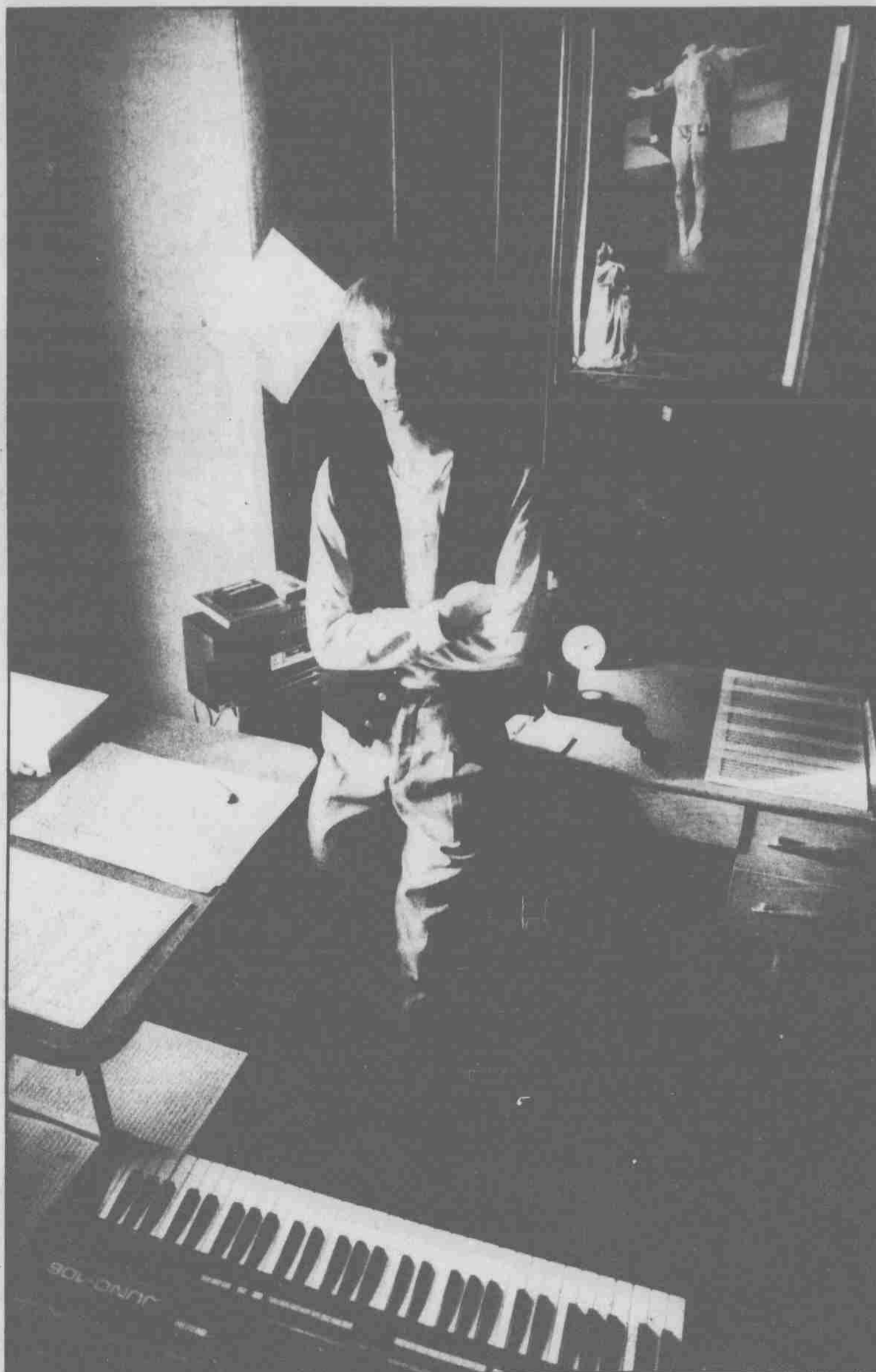
If the piece has a plot at all, it is that Harper plays a man who believes that a dinosaur is growing inside his body, its form weaving around his bone structure.

Most of the performance artists started out concentrating on one art form. Shanks is a sculptor, Lewis graduated from Wesleyan University with a Bachelor's degree in Art and has exhibited paintings and sculptures, Harper is in a performance art band called "God" and John Moran considers himself primarily a musician and composer. Each artist approaches the performance pieces from his or her artistic view.

"I don't think like a dancer. I don't think like a choreographer. I think like a sculptor," Shanks said.

Shanks says she basically "sculpts" her performance pieces with the human form as the medium.

See POETS on 13



Moran

Dave Bentz/Daily Nebraskan

Oscar nominations announced — Page 9

!!!T! 22IM T'WOD