

DIVERSIONS

Theater chair plays many roles

By Kevin Cowan
Senior Reporter

The bone-white spotlight opens on Tice Miller, center stage.

The university bestowed the title of interim theater department chairman on Miller in July. The appointment, however, is temporary. And for Miller, this prestigious office may or may not be the final curtain drawn. He has not been one to burn his bridges; rather, he writes the entire cornucopia of theater into the "Big Picture."

His cornucopia? Aside from the time-consuming responsibilities of department chairman, Miller heads the graduate program in theater, is managing director of the Nebraska Repertory Theater and has written a book on American theater aesthetics and criticism. Another book on American comedy is half finished. Both books center on theater in the earlier decades of the 20th century.

"I'm kind of stuck in the 1920s," he said.

He speaks with glib tongue and answers to the fullest any questions relating to his involvement in the many projects. And since his appointment, a few of those projects have taken the back burner.

For instance, with time scarce at the moment, American comedy waits quietly at the typewriter.

"I haven't written a page since I started this job," he said, "though I've got to start writing again . . . soon."

The university is conducting a nationwide search for a new theater department chairman; Miller seems an obvious candidate. Whether he will enter in the running remains to be seen.

"If I can get the work load organized, I'll be a candidate," he said.

Moving towards being effective is the primary concern at this time, he said. And with the installation of Theatrix, a student-run experimental theater project, as well as organizing and hiring new theater staff, effectiveness seems the proper description.

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However, he doesn't judge plays with the concepts of conservative and liberal.

"I believe in very few restraints on artists," he said. "Everything we're going to do is in artistic good taste. If anything even smacks of pornography, I won't do it. It's degrading to women."

Miller said, however, that pornographic gray area is fairly large.

Miller has experienced life in the way most educators aspire to. He received his bachelor's degree in speech and political science from Kearney State College in 1960, a master's degree in speech and dramatic art from UNL in 1961 and a doctorate in speech and dra-

matic art from the University of Illinois in 1968. He took time off between those years to join the Navy and see North Vietnam "from a distance."

But with all the sights and memories he's gathered over the years, Miller said he feels committed to Lincoln and Nebraska.

"I'm part of the state," he said. "I've run the gantlet of formal education in Nebraska." Miller attended rural Nebraska schools.

Miller said he is proud of Nebraska and the UNL theater department.

"We have one of the best programs in a three-state area," he said.

"We've had a tough five years," he said. "I'm looking forward to seeing the improvement."

And what about the Lied Center

controversy?

"We've got it and we're going to run with it," he said. Miller put to rest the concerns of theater majors who say the Lied Center will never be used for student performances. In conjunction with the music department, he said, patrons can expect to see several student-oriented productions upon the center's completion.

Miller said he sees the Lied Center as an artistic focal point for the next 25 to 30 years.

Yes, Miller has seen the world, and since then has found his home in Nebraska. But he encourages new actors and actresses going to school here to taste other horizons before choosing a final destination.

"The people in theater should go to Chicago or New York and try to make it," he said. "It gives them

a feel for the business. It's where all the talent is hired in this country."

But Miller is not consumed by the needs of the theater department. He and his wife, Carren, assistant programmer for the Nebraska ETV Network, enjoy the challenge of raising two small boys: Dane, 8, and Graeme, 3.

"I find parenting very rewarding," he said. "There's never enough time to spend, but we have a decent relationship."

Being department chairman seems to agree with Miller. But he is torn between that job and his writing career, he said.

All in all, he said, the job has been enjoyable.

"It's been fun being the chairman; if it weren't fun, I wouldn't do it."