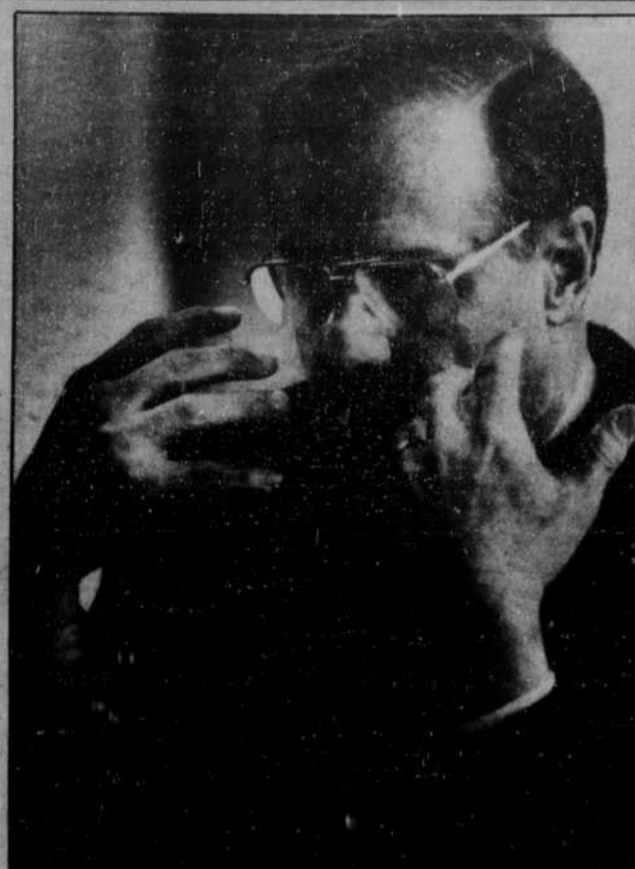
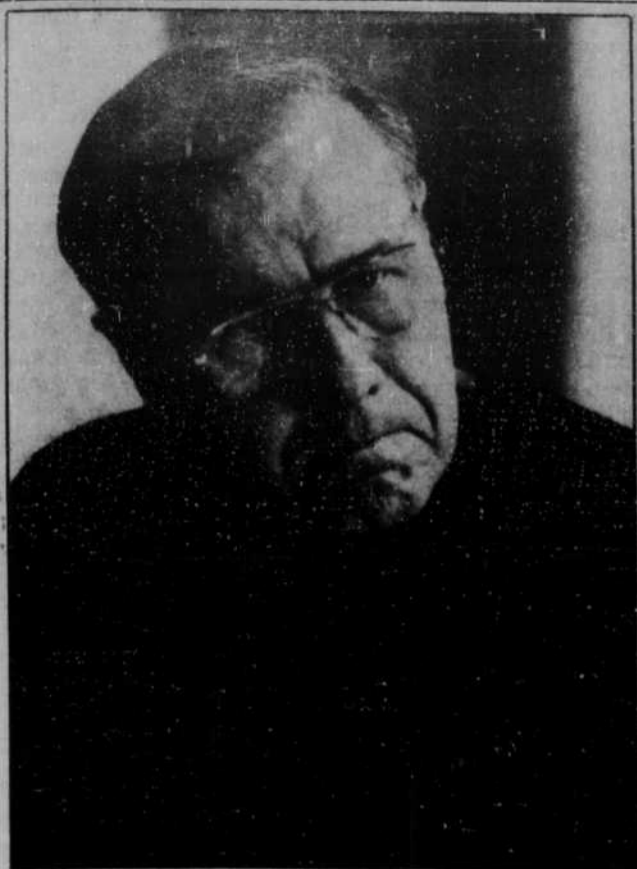


Arts & Entertainment



Currie

Paul Vonderlage/Daily Nebraskan

Former actor supports theater union

By Charles Lieurance
Senior Editor

Fergus "Tad" Currie, area representative for Actor's Equity Association, was in Lincoln last week initiating negotiations to make UNL's summer repertory theater an Equity member. He also spent time in Omaha troubleshooting for Omaha's financially troubled Equity theater, the Firehouse.

Currie said he became interested in the labor side of the theater business when he was doing local television ads in Atlanta, Georgia, in the mid-1950s.

"The climate for performers was very bad and we'd get \$50 for doing a commercial that might run for the rest of our lives," Currie said.

"I didn't set out to do labor work in theater," Currie said. "But while I had one commercial running in Atlanta, no one would let me do another commercial until that one stopped running. But yet the TV station and the advertiser continued to make money off that commercial."

"It was a limited market, and I

couldn't tell someone to bank one place and then the next week tell him to bank somewhere else," he said. "But yet I've still only made \$50 off that commercial."

Currie said Actor's Equity deals with these problems.

"We try to open up a pool of talent to theaters that would normally be closed to them," Currie said. "Theaters no longer have to get 20-year-olds to play 50-year-olds — there's a pool of 36,000 professional actors in Equity."

Currie said actors seldom work for anyone a long time, and Equity tries to make that transient lifestyle as healthy, safe and monetarily rewarding as possible.

"Should the actor wind up working for a failing company, we are a safety net, making sure the actor is paid," he said. "Most of all, we have a desire for identification of professionals, like the weather people and their meteorological association. Being an Equity actor means someone was willing to hire you under a certain set of professional standards."

Currie came into the labor end of theater after a long career as

actor, producer, director, stage manager, artistic director, technical director, scriptwriter, theater and speech magazine editor, teacher and theater manager. He has been in numerous films, more than 200 national, regional and local TV commercials, and more theater productions than "he cares to remember." He was Walter Matthau's stand-in for George Saks' film production of the Neil Simon play, "The Odd Couple."

"Walter had just had a heart attack, and I had to do all the running scenes for him," Currie said. "Plus George had a strange sense of humor, and put Walter and I in a lot of scenes together — I'm in a grocery store line with him and several other scenes."

If the UNL summer repertory theater becomes a part of the Actor's Equity "family," it will engage a small number of professional actors to be corps members of the company along with the students.

"It's not our intention to bring in leads, but instead to bring in actors who will provide a balance and expertise," Currie said. "When

students work hand in hand with professionals, it makes the transition from the educational stages to the professional stage more meaningful. When I ran the university theater in Emory, I found I didn't have to do as much coaching if there were professionals and students acting together."

Currie said university theaters are a "closed environment" where each actor becomes overly familiar with other actors, the theater building itself and the whole academic ambience.

"This gives a false impression of what the theater business is like," Currie said. "Most theaters have a constantly changing cast from show to show and actors, directors, etc., have to work with a variety of people — people without egos, with egos, total strangers."

"If the student actor has an opportunity to work with professionals, they won't be as threatened by that in the competitive world outside the academic community."

If the UNL summer repertory theater agrees to become an Actor's Equity theater, students

will be invited to be a part of a candidate program, Currie said. They would be able to work within an Equity framework for 50 weeks and then would have an option to join Actor's Equity any time in the next five years. During that five years, they could go to any Equity auditions. The cost to join the program is \$50.

Currie said this is a greatly reduced rate for Equity membership.

"Normally there is a \$500 initiation fee for an actor and then another \$52 a year in dues, with work dues of 2 percent on all salary earned," Currie said. "This is fairly standard."

The cost is high, Currie explained, because the cost of serving members is high.

"Also, we don't want people joining just for the sake of joining," Currie said. "We want commitment."

Actor's Equity gives extensive information on auditions around the country through an Equity hotline, Currie said, but at any given time 75 to 80 percent of its actors

See CURRIE on 10

Lincoln-born director returns to UNL from 'off-Broadway'

By Scott Harrah
Senior Editor

Shakespeare's plays are interpreted differently each time they are performed, said Robert Hall, a New York theater professional who will be a guest director and instructor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln next semester.

Hall, a Lincoln native who has worked in the New York theater world for several years, will direct "As You Like It" for the UNL theater department.

He said that because most directors add personal touches to Shakespeare, he isn't quite sure what his production will look like.

"I presume that by the time I get it on its feet, it'll be different from what others have seen," he said.

Hall will help teach advanced acting classes and direct "As You Like It" during the second half of the spring semester. He said another director/instructor, John Pynchon Holmes, will do the same in the beginning of the semester while Hall is

in New York directing "A Winter's Tale."

"Off-Broadway," the generic term for experimental, new plays that either aren't ready or suited for "the big time," is a realm Hall knows well.

One of Hall's most renowned efforts is "The Passion of Dracula," which he wrote with David Richmond. This variation of Bram Stoker's classic ran off-Broadway in New York for two years and also played in London and Tokyo. The play is now running in Omaha at the Firehouse Dinner Theatre.

He said the main difference between "The Passion of Dracula" and similar plays about the venerable vampire lies in its witty characters and intelligent tone.

"It's not as campy as certain other stage versions tend to be," he said.

Hall also is the founder and co-artistic director of The New Rude Mechanicals, a classical New York-based theater company.

The New Rude Mechanicals produced "The Misanthrope" this summer and will perform "A Midsummer Night's Dream" this fall.

Hall and Richmond also have written a variation on the Frankenstein story, "Frankenstein: The Modern Prometheus," which is playing in Ohio this fall at The Cincinnati Playhouse in the Park.

Although most thespians dream of producing something on Broadway, Hall said he's currently satisfied with off-Broadway because it nurtures creativity.

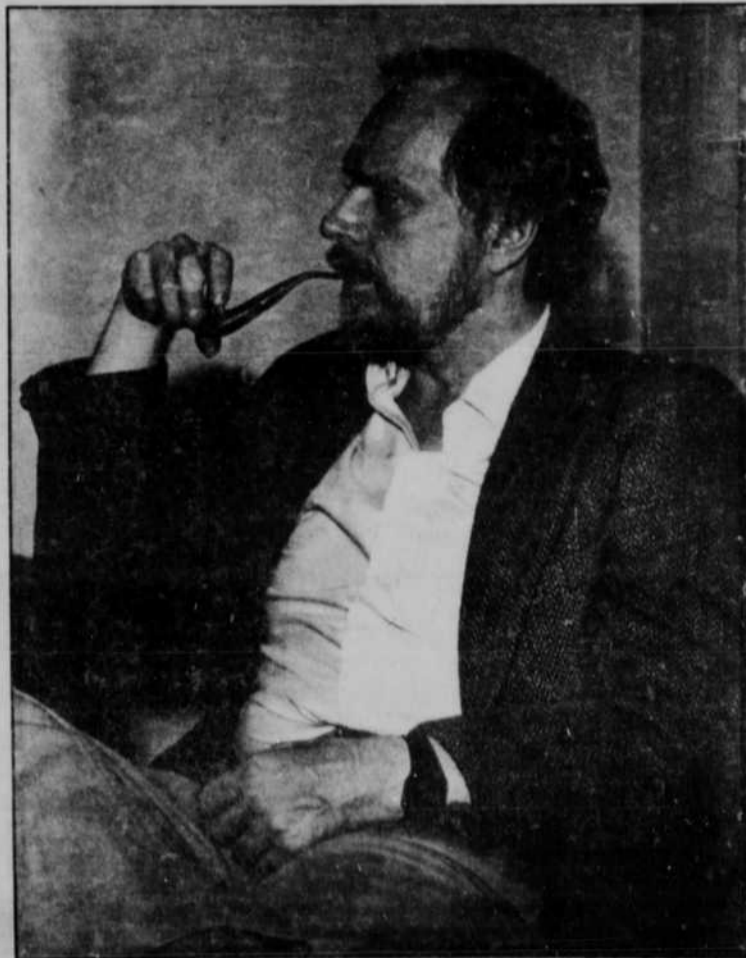
"I wouldn't say it (Broadway) is the major goal I'm trying to reach," he said.

He compared modern Broadway fare to the mainstream productions Hollywood and the TV networks produce.

"There's very seldom an interesting new play on Broadway," he said.

He said Americans tend to "lionize the British theater," which is why Broadway now imports farces and low comedies that already have been successful on London's West End.

Hall, who earned his master's degree in the 1970s, did much of his initial theater work here and at the Lincoln Community Playhouse.



Hall

Dave Hansen/Daily Nebraskan