

'Sweeney Todd' comes together in Kimball

By Micki Haller
Senior Editor

Any musical play stage production has special work that goes on backstage. Things that make everything click at the right time... things the audience never sees.

The University of Nebraska-Lincoln School of Music and Department of Theater and Dance are collaborating on "Sweeney Todd," a production that has special problems for the actors, director and crew to overcome.

The stage of Kimball Recital Hall has changed this week from a flat, wooden floor to part of London in the 19th century. The most important part of the set is Mrs. Lovett's bakery and Sweeney Todd's apartment above.

At several points, victims of Todd's razor, slide down a chute to the Lovett kitchen; the people become meat pies.

The shop is extremely complex; it had to be constructed in Omaha, then brought to Lincoln.

The victim reaches the shop by a ladder, is murdered, falls through a trap door, slides down a chute, flips around to go down a slide and arrives in Lovett's bakery.

The ensemble members practiced with director Keith Grant, an assistant professor of theater, and Harold Chin, Kimball's stage manager. Chin helped the actors through the set.

"The key to not getting hurt is leaning back and letting your butt hit the cushion," he told the actors.

The space between the trap door and the first ramp is small; it's easy to miscalculate and hit the edge of the trap.

"It's really fun," said Danny Kubert, a high school senior performing in the musical. "Except when you hit your head."

The trap opens with a loud thump, the door to Mrs. Lovett's bakery with a loud whump. It sounds like a guillotine. Chin asked Grant if he wanted the doors to open quietly, but Grant said he was pleased with the sound.

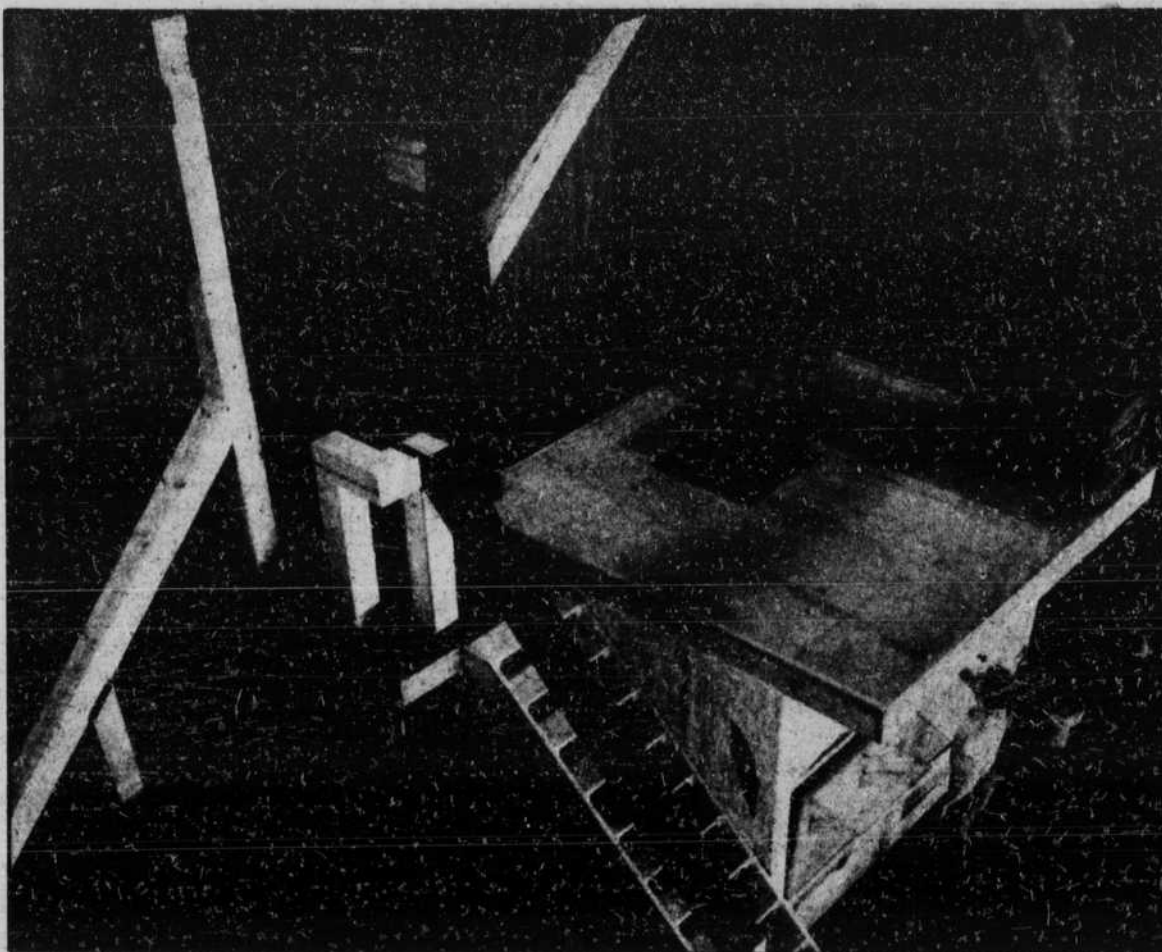
Both Grant and Heather Flock, the assistant director, said the musical was challenging.

Almost everything in "Sweeney Todd" is accompanied by music. An actor can't just walk to a place; he or she must time the walk to match the music.

At first, the cast practiced with a piano accompanist, then a conductor. The final step before performance is practicing with the orchestra.

The cast had been cutting off notes and not staying strictly with the music because the accompanist was able to keep up, Flock said. However, an entire orchestra isn't able to follow the singers.

However, the cast still has some time to work out the bugs. "Sweeney Todd" plays at Kimball on Nov. 4, 5 and 6 at 7:30 p.m.



Butch Ireland/Daily Nebraskan

Paul Dunn, graduate student, works on the "Sweeney Todd" set Thursday at Kimball Recital Hall.

'Sweeney Todd' at Kimball Nov. 4; musical criticizes industrial England

Rape, multiple murders, cannibalism and assorted mayhem litter a musical about revenge and love. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln School of Music and the Department of Theater Arts and Dance are cooperating to produce Stephen Sondheim's "Sweeney Todd, the Demon Barber of Fleet Street."

The musical will be at Kimball Recital Hall Nov. 4, 5 and 6 at 7:30 p.m.

The story tells of a 19th century barber who was unjustly imprisoned in Australia by a lecherous judge who coveted Sweeney's wife.

The judge rapes the wife and becomes the ward of Sweeney's daughter, Johanna.

But after 15 long years, Sweeney returns to England to avenge his wrongful incarceration.

While he waits for his chance to slay the judge, he begins to practice on "less honorable" folks, slitting throats and sending them down to Mrs. Lovett, the baker who lives in

the apartment under his. Because of the severe meat shortage in London, Mrs. Lovett begins baking the bodies into meat pies, and her business thrives.

The judge, meanwhile, intends to marry Johanna, who has met a young sailor. Sweeney helps the sailor, Anthony, elope with Johanna, in hopes of luring the judge to his "tonorial parlor."

The unusual plot is intertwined with Sondheim's lyrical melodies, as well as comic renditions of the more gruesome aspects of the work.

Sondheim is the premier American music theater composer of today; his credits include "A Little Night Music" and "Send in the Clowns."

Sondheim makes social comments on industrial age England. The corrupt old order is represented by the judge, and the heartless new business class is embodied by Mrs. Lovett.

The story of Sweeney Todd and

demon butchers is an old one. There is no proof that Todd was a real person, but he has become a British legend.

Some believe the story has its origins in a 14th-century French ballad about a Parisian barber and a merchant. Others link the tale to a legend of murders committed by a barber in Paris around 1800.

Scotland has a legend about Sawney Beane and his gruesome family of cannibals who haunted Scotland during the 1600s. The family was said to have eaten more than 1,000 people in 25 years.

The saga of Sweeney Todd and Mrs. Lovett was first introduced to British readers in 1846 in a "penny dreadful." The story was dramatized on stage in 1847, and went through many versions before Sondheim's musical opened in New York on March 1, 1979.

A pre-performance talk will be given at 7 p.m. in 119 Westbrook Music Building. Tickets are \$10 and \$8; senior citizens and student tickets are half price.



Courtesy of Kimball Box Office

John Bruce/Daily Nebraskan

Punk style, political lyrics permeate new six-band LP

By Bryan Peterson
Staff Reporter

"Their eyes seem to tell the story of a nation in poverty! They don't need your apathy—they need your sympathy!" — Desecration, "In a Child's Eyes"

The folks who produce Arizona's Hippycore fanzine have begun releasing records on their own label, Hippycore Records. Their first release, "Metal Gives Us a Headache", is a six-band, seven-inch record.

All six bands contribute songs with a punk style and political lyrics. The record is a benefit for an Arizona animal rights group, but only one of the songs is about animal rights. A 20-page booklet of lyrics and other information is provided with the record. "What Does It Mean?" by

Washington's Subvert is the best song on the record, although there are no sleepers.

The most annoying song is by Stikky, who mixes Barry Manilow lyrics with questions about bands who sing about political issues. Dead Silence, Cringer, Desecration, and Dissent also have songs on the record, all of which are solid punk tunes which avoid sounding generic.

"Why must we all be so serious? Too many bands seem so furious/Sure it's important to be concerned/But why can't we all laugh and learn!"

Such lyrics seem out of place among five songs full of political lyrics, but also serve as a reminder for some bands to lighten up a bit. After all, it is hard enough listening to incomprehensible punk ramblings without being addressed in a sermon. But is it preaching or merely

communicating ideas? There is probably some of each involved. The songs deal with vivisection, a crumbling America, child abuse, homelessness, sexism and the role of political bands.

Any collection of songs about such topics requires people to pay attention to the lyrics. Some will call it preaching; but they do not have to listen. Others will see it as a forum for political or social ideas, and they will enjoy this record if they enjoy the punk style of the bands.

This is more than a collection of songs by six ranting punk bands on the compilation. There are a few poems placed in between the songs.

Pages of information concerning animal rights are also included. There is also a thought-provoking story about a "superior" alien who eats humans just as humans eat animals.

This story, because it is so acces-

sible, is the best presentation of animal rights ideas in the entire package.

Not many people listen to hardcore bands, but nearly everyone is willing to read a benign little story. Some challenging ideas are packed into this simple tale.

The music and topics presented are good, but I wish the bands would take less rigid views in their songs. All the issues are seen in black and white, with no moderation or middle ground.

The band members would reply that moderation and middle ground lead to complacency and the slow rate of progress made by the world in dealing with these issues. And we probably are both partly right.

"But what? Foolish mortal, you talk in rhyme, your arguments are all double standards, you find your reasons for you to consume animals, and reject mine for consuming humans."

- from the record booklet

the
fifth
column
album review