

# UNL graduate's award-winning plays putting Nebraska on play-writing map

By Jim Hanna  
Staff Reporter

In the world of theater, Nebraska has not been exactly a breeding ground for successful, prolific playwrights. Although the state has produced its share of talented actors -- Henry Fonda, Marlon Brando, Sandy Dennis -- big-name playwrights have been a rather rare commodity.

University of Nebraska-Lincoln graduate David Boles, however, is ready to put the state on the play-writing map.

"What's a kid from Nebraska doing in New York?" is a question Boles originally found himself asking when he moved to New York to get a Masters of Fine Arts degree in play writing from Columbia University.

What Boles is doing is finding big success rapidly.

Boles was extremely successful as a writer of local productions in the mid-1980s. His play "A Stone's Throw" was produced by the UNL Theatre Arts and Dance department during the 1985-86 school year. The play was selected to appear at the American College Theater Festival, a national competition for college theater productions.

Boles' plays "Murder in Earnest" and "Cracked Stain Glass," a play for which he won the Purchase Play Writing Award, were staged at the Nebraska Directors Theater. His last Nebraska effort, "Weeping Water Cafe," which he also directed, was produced at the Lincoln Community Playhouse. His show was chosen to represent the playhouse in the 1987 American Community Theater competition.

With all of his Nebraska successes, Boles moved to Washington, D.C., where he worked on productions at the Ford's Theater and the Arena Theater.

Boles took his first big step toward play-writing fame when he accepted a Presidential scholarship to attend Columbia, where he started in fall 1988.

His success in the Columbia program almost was immediate. A short 60-second scene he wrote was incorporated into a dance production by the David Gordon Pick/Up Co., a New York-based dance troupe.

Boles drew upon his Nebraska roots to create the scene. Through it, he explained that when people in his hometown hear a police or ambulance siren, they come out of their homes to see if they can discover the source of the siren, an idea that is foreign to most New Yorkers, Boles said.

This simple message was translated into a dance piece entitled "Fade Away" that had its premiere at the Brooklyn Academy of Music.

His current play-writing project is perhaps his most ambitious. Boles always had wanted to write a musical based on Leo Tolstoy's novel "Resurrection." At Columbia, he wrote the book and the lyrics for such a musical.

Howard Stein, a major name in musical theater, was impressed by

Boles' work and agreed to write the music for the show, his first musical scoring in 11 years.

The production, when staged, will be the premiere production of Columbia's new musical theater program.

With "Resurrection," Boles is taking a significant step toward commercial play-writing success.

Commercial success, however, is not Boles' primary concern right now.

"(I) just want to do good work," he said. "You do good work and money comes."

This "Nebraska kid" seems to have the good work aspect of the formula down. Now, like it or not, the money can't be far behind.



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