

'Slow Fire' give commentary through music, theater, motion

By Julie Naughton
Senior Reporter

Unusual musical theater is the closest one can come to describing the performance art of the Paul Dresher Ensemble, which performed "Slow Fire" in the Lied Center's Johnny Carson Theater on Saturday and Sunday.

One of the most avant-garde theatrical renditions to recently play Lincoln, the ensemble performed an eclectic combination of music, theater and movement.

"We're a group that doesn't fit neatly into a category," said the man for whom the ensemble is named, artistic director Paul Dresher.

"Slow Fire" is the story of one character, Bob, portrayed by Rinde Eckert. Dresher, on keyboards and guitar, and percussionist Gene Reffkin are seen in the background throughout the performance. Bob is a wacked-out hit man, and throughout the work, he recalls moments with his equally wacked-out father.

In Act 1, Bob remembers his father, and asks questions. He recalls advice that his father gave him — to buy land. In a strange twist, Bob keeps singing "What state are we in now, Dad?" every few lines. The answers come "Nebraska," "Wyoming," "California" (this with a disgusted

tone of voice.) Finally, we hear more locales: Vietnam, Cambodia, finally "real estate." Dresher does both Bob's voice and Dad's voice, with Dresher and Reffkin filling in with electronic effects and music.

As the work progresses, more weird aspects are revealed. Bob's father kept telling him to buy real estate, to shoot

concert

into the clouds and to make duck decoys that the ducks would believe were real.

Near the end of the work, it is revealed that his father shot himself in front of Bob when Bob was a young boy. And that Bob is a hit man, who dresses in a khaki vest, tie, pants, jacket and hat.

Dresher said that the ensemble's compositions, including "Slow Fire," are motivated by strong feelings and opinions in political and social issues. He said that the compositions are intended to be "commentary on our culture."

The "core group" of the Paul Dresher Ensemble consists of nine people, including Dresher, as artistic director; Eckert, as a writer and performer; Robin Kirck, as producer and Gene Reffkin, as percussionist.

Other core group members are

Melissa Weaver, production manager, and Larry Neff, lighting designer.

The Ensemble evolved from Dresher's work with solo electronic music, chamber music and experimental music theater. According to Dresher, each composition the group performs is a collaborative effort; he says that there is no "hierarchy of importance." Each member is important, and has valuable input, Dresher said.

Dresher frequently mentioned Rinde Eckert as an important part of the ensemble, noting Eckert's performance and writing skills.

Dresher said that Eckert, the principal performer in "Slow Fire," has "personally evolved" the idiosyncratic movement featured in the work. Eckert is an athlete by training, Dresher said, and has worked with Dresher and other members of the ensemble to perfect the work. Eckert has worked with Dresher since 1980.

The Paul Dresher Ensemble will return in February to perform "Pioneers" on the Lied's Main Stage. Dresher compared sizes of the two productions.

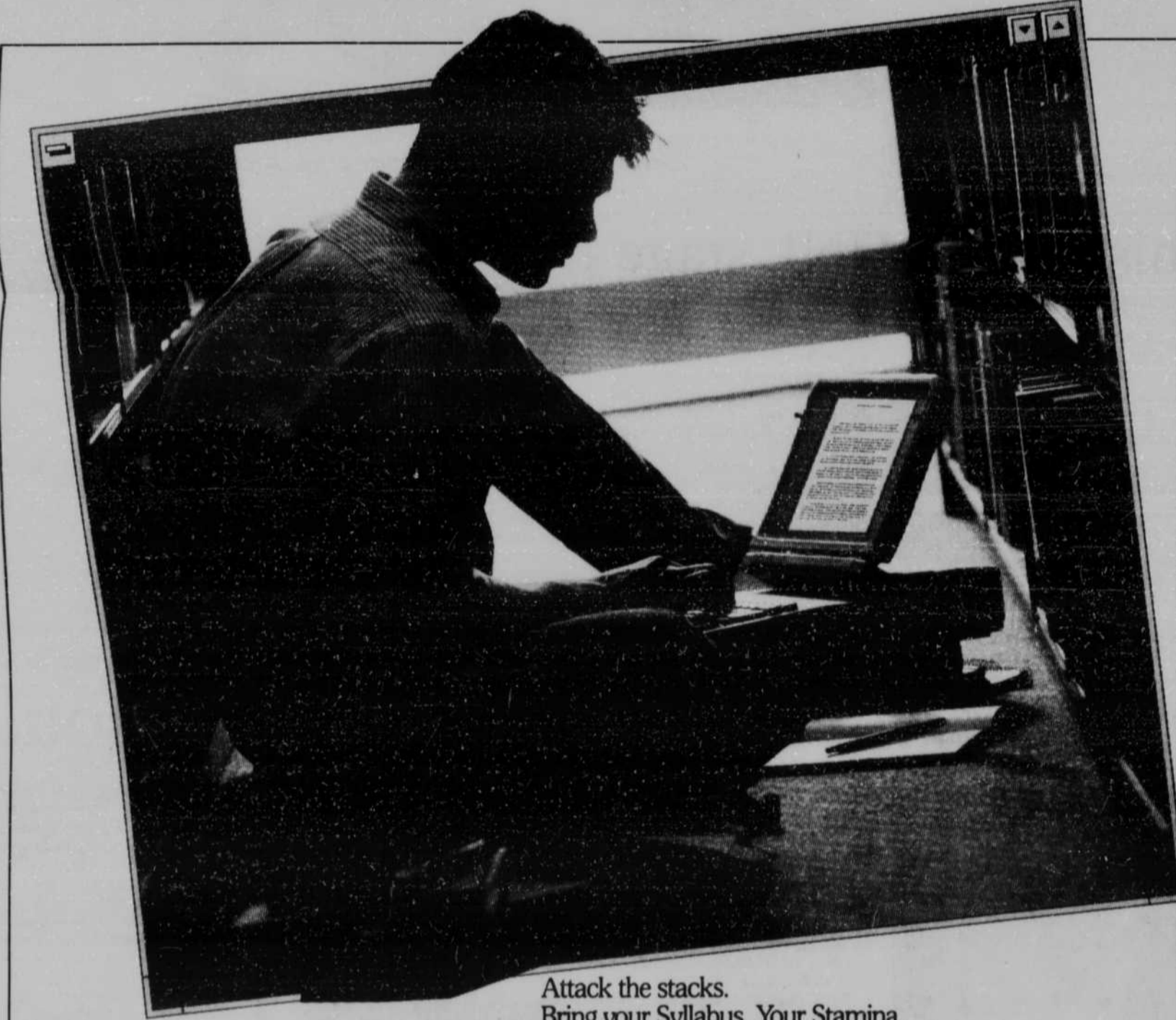
"'Slow Fire' is a chamber work," Dresher said, "while 'Pioneers' is a full-scale orchestral work. There is a huge leap in scale."

Dresher said that he looks forward to returning to Lincoln.



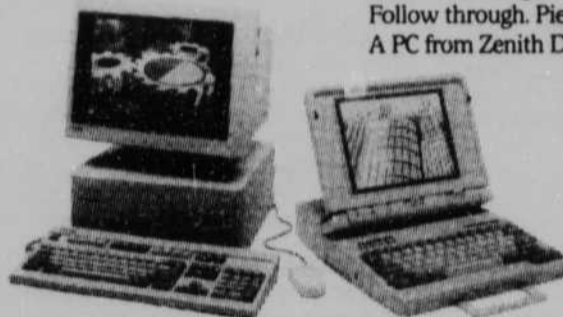
Photo by Michele Clement

Paul Dresher



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there is," Bavouzet said.
Prices start at \$15 with special rates for students. There also will be a pre-concert talk presented by Noon and Braunstein at 7:25 p.m. in room 132 of the Westbrook Music Building.

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