

Jason Fisher, a freshman electrical engineering major, plays pingpong with Buzz the Gorilla (Gabe Cook, freshman history major) in the Nebraska Union.

Michelle Paulman/Daily Nebraskan

Play addresses social issues

By Robert Richardson
Senior Reporter

Thursday in the Nebraska Union, the Lied Center for Performing Arts sponsored a promotion of a coming show by featuring a "gorilla" and his trainer playing a game of pingpong.

The show is Ping Chong's production of "Kind Ness," which will play at the Johnny Carson Theatre, Tuesday and Wednesday.

"Kind Ness" tells the story of five children and one gorilla, "Buzz," who meet in elementary school and become lifelong friends. It was written by Chong, the artistic director and founder of the company, who has been working at his craft since 1972. He founded his company in 1975.

The work, developed at Northeastern University in Boston, did not start out in a play format. Bruce Allardice, company director said this work is not necessarily indicative of Chong's work; it just sort of happened.

"The important thing to remember about Ping's work is he does not write plays," Allardice said. "They are created through improvisations in rehearsal. And they're created collaboratively as a group effort."

The organized effort paid off — the play

won a 1988 USA Playwrights award. In addition, it was published by the Theatre Communications group.

"It was developed in the same experimental way that all of Ping Chong's works have been," Allardice said. "But in a sense, it has become a play and now it exists in a play form. And other theaters around the country have licensed the work and directed it and done their own interpretations of the piece."

But "Kind Ness" is not something to be taken lightly. Allardice said people will be confronted with issues.

"It's basically a social satire. Ping sometimes calls them subversive comedies. Either term is fine," Allardice said.

Different ethnic backgrounds separate the five children and one gorilla as they deal with their various differences.

"The play operates on two levels. It is at once a kind of nostalgic look at childhood and growing up in American in the '50s and '60s," Allardice said. "And it does that by looking at the lives of six kids in school. And each one is intentionally a kind of stereotype."

There will be tension, Allardice said, but he hopes there also will be familiarity.

"If I was to broadly categorize it," he said, "I would say the dramatic effect that he does, which is relatively rare, not the usual work process for most artists, is that he creates a world on stage that is alike and not alike."

With all this information being presented to the audience, Allardice said, Ping thought there were no wrong answers.

"I know what Ping would say is that all answers are right," Allardice said. "And what the audience would come away from it with is the point. In that sense it's poetry. In all of Ping's work it's personal interpretation."

But in order for Ping and company to feel successful, they would ask just a little bit more from the audience.

"If we succeeded in making people ask some questions about the way they conduct their lives, the way they experience their lives then we've succeeded," Allardice said. "And I think that's the intention of the work."

"Kind Ness" is playing at the Johnny Carson Theatre, 12th and R streets, on Tuesday, 8 p.m. and Wednesday, 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. Tickets are \$5 for UNL students and \$10 for general admission and are available at the Lied Center Box Office.

Country artist performance set at Omaha

By John A. Skretta
Staff Reporter

Barbara Mandrell may have been country when country wasn't cool, but Ricky Van Shelton sure wasn't.

In fact, according to Andrew Vaughan, author of Who's Who in New Country Music, Van Shelton grew up listening to the Beatles and the Rolling Stones, thinking country music was very "uncool."

Van Shelton has now established himself as one of the premier neotraditional country vocalists. Fans can listen to Van Shelton's baritone prowess tonight at Omaha's Civic Auditorium.

Van Shelton's ride to success required talent and dedication. His father was a part-time gospel singer and his older brother played in a bluegrass band, so when Van Shelton's voice began changing, his family noticed the potential he had. Several years later, he found himself in Nashville recording a series of classic country tunes by the likes of Merle Haggard and Buck Owens for a debut album from CBS Records.

"Wild-Eyed Dream" was Van Shelton's 1987 debut, and according to Jim Patrick, program director of KZKX (96 KX) radio in Lincoln, "after that, everybody wanted Ricky Van Shelton."

Not only was the album successful artistically, Patrick said, but "Wild-Eyed Dream" was a financial coup for CBS records.

"They didn't do more than three takes on any song for the first album," Patrick said, "because Ricky was so conscientious, he had the songs learned previously and the work was completed in a matter of days. Obviously, production costs were minimal."

If Van Shelton's first album established him as an up-and-coming talent, RVS III, released in 1990 by CBS, "firmly entrenched Van Shelton and cemented his status as a country superstar," Patrick said.

RVS III contained several smash singles, including Jan Crutchfield's "Statue of a Fool" and "I Meant Every Word He Said," by Curly Putnam, Bucky Jones and Joe Chambers. RVS III reflects the work of 18 songwriters, including Van Shelton.

Van Shelton is at the forefront of country's new traditionalism movement, Patrick said, using less of the twang in older country music.

Tickets are still available for tonight's show and can be purchased at all Pickles locations and at the Omaha Civic Auditorium. Tickets are \$16 each. All seating is reserved. Patty Loveless and Aaron Tippin will open for Van Shelton.

Rap musician aims for education, entertainment



Courtesy of 4th and Broadway/Island Records

By Andrea Christensen
Staff Reporter

"Message for survival: Education is power, so tear your soul out!" rap musician Laquan notes on the CD cover of "Notes of a Native Son," his latest release from 4th and Broadway/Island Records.

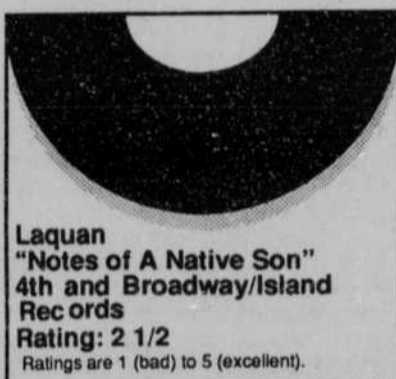
The messages on this are common: Avoid drugs, stay out of jail, praise God, be proud of your heritage, beat the odds. Many listeners may find the messages repetitive.

The musical style also is familiar, rap superimposed over a standard rock beat.

Laquan, who goes by only one name, often preaches directly to "brothers" about religion, drugs, self-esteem and discrimination. Presumably his message would apply to women as well, but they are seldom mentioned.

The fast and often complex rhythms of the record lend themselves to modern hip-hop dancing, but those who pay too much attention to the beats will miss the record's progressive political message.

The first and title cut addresses issues from murder to Christianity. Tying the issues together are seem-



ingly interminable strings of disjointed adjectives.

"Panic, rhythmic, dope addict/ Words come automatic/ Sticks like static/ Frozen and freeze-dried," is a typical line.

Next is "Brother to Brother," a cut that's a little more focused. The track presents Laquan's arguments against selling and using drugs. Although these are not original, they are worded in a fresh way.

The instrumentation, however, is the same measure after measure. A monotonous, syncopated drumbeat and repeated organ chords make this cut tiresome.

"Now's the B-Turn" is more so-

phisticated. It encourages black pride, an issue particularly close to Laquan's heart. The lyrics approach eloquence several times, especially with "Africa is home and the birth of humanity," and "Awareness of black pride was kept inside/ It's time the mentally dead revise alive." A complex rhythm and the addition of a flute add interest.

Laquan describes his reason for singing in a track entitled "Soul Soloist." He says, "So what if you don't dance/ As long as you're hearing me?" Clearly, his purpose is as much education as entertainment.

The second half of the album addresses more controversial issues. In "Swing Blue, Sweat Black," Laquan speaks of frustration about continuing inequality in the United States. He urges listeners to refuse to recite the pledge of allegiance to an unjust nation and urges flag burning for the same reason. He asks, "When will this color war come to an end?/ And do the good still always win?/ Hell is on earth."

"Imprison the President" is a witty track that points out the corruption of the government by exaggerating it. It

See LAQUAN on 10