

Script troubles mess up promising play

theater PREVIEW

By Mark Baldrige
Senior Editor

The Omaha Magic Theatre is nationally known as one of our country's oldest experimental theaters. It produces the most avant-garde works in the Midwest, and counts among its admirers some of the big names in American experimental theater.

But an experiment, in theater as in chemistry, yields unpredictable results. Sometimes you produce explosions of emotion and meaning — sometimes just a mess.

The current production of "The Plucky and Spunky Show," playing the next two weekends at the Magic Theatre, doesn't make much more than a mess. A pity, too, because the play (really a series of short sketches) promises so much.

A good deal of the trouble seemed to originate with the script. Written by Susan Nussbaum and Mike Ervin of Chicago, both of whom suffer from disabilities that keep them confined to wheelchairs, the play takes on society's attitudes toward the disabled with wit, insight and cutting irony.

Sometimes. Like most plays, "Plucky" cries out for some brave editor with a blue pencil to cut out the dead weight. This says less about the state of theater in America: It's fat and flabby and needs the exercise. Theater isn't feeling too spunky itself these days.

That's no excuse of course. "Spunky" should be better than it is, but some of the blame has to go to the production. It was chaos.

Technical problems (a mike that kept shorting out and sounded like a bullhorn when it did work) badgered the troupe. But even when all seemed to be going as planned, there was no



Doug Marr, Barbara Loper and Krystal Anne Kremia rap in "The Plucky and Spunky Show" last Saturday in Omaha

Courtesy of Megan Terry

obvious plan in operation.

Almost every scene lagged. There seemed to be plenty of energy on stage, but no focus anywhere.

Director Doug Marr may have been unused to the production style of the

Magic Theatre, which he described as a sort of "Zen boot camp."

He appeared in the play, and threw himself about the stage with such energy and zest that it was impossible

to be sure whether or not he needed the Canadian crutches he used.

He does.

The decision to feature as many disabled people as possible in the

production was obviously the right one. A problem is that Nebraska doesn't produce a great many disabled actors. The production should have taken the inexperience of the players into account.

HIV-positive men strike, flee world with humor, 'Thelma & Louise' style

Mary Riepma Ross
Film Theater

Gregg Araki's "The Living End" propels its viewer with gut-wrenching black humor into the world of two HIV-positive gay men on the run.

Araki transforms potentially overwhelming and depressing subject matter into a morosely funny road movie. The twist here is that what these men run away from is the unknown, while what they run to is certain death.

Luke (Mike Dytri) is a hedonist prone to violence against gay bashers and authority figures.

Jon (Craig Gilmore) is a prissy film critic who begins a dive into depression just before Luke comes along.

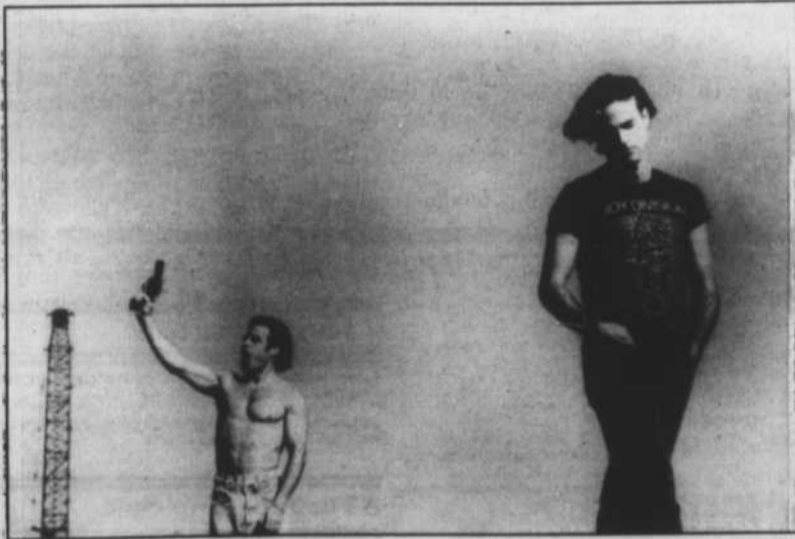
Luke spray-paints "Fuck the World" (the film's original title) on a wall in the first shot. In the next scene, a doctor tells Jon he's HIV-positive with a snide "sorry." Thus we see the essence of the film's humor.

That night Luke shoots and kills three skinheads intent on bashing him with steel baseball bat. In a panic, he flags down Jon's car.

The subsequent road movie proceeds like a queer version of "Thelma and Louise" or Fritz Lang's "You Only Live Once."

Opposites Jon and Luke stick together because of their isolation as HIV-positive people in a paranoid world.

Jon despairs when Luke aims his gun at a traffic cop or fires at a malfunctioning automatic bank teller,



Courtesy of October Films

Luke (Mike Dytri) and John (Craig Gilmore) are on the road in "The Living End."

pleading with him to put the gun away.

Luke suggests that they drive to the White House and kill President Bush, or better yet, "inject him with some of our blood; I bet by tomorrow they'd have a cure."

Also showing is "Resonance," a hypnotic short film by Stephen Cummins about a gay bashing and its aftermath.

"The Living End" and "Resonance" are showing at the Mary Riepma Ross Theater on Thursday through Saturday, February 11-13, and Thursday through Sunday, February 18-21. Showtimes are 7 and 9 p.m. daily, with matinees at 1 and 3 p.m. Saturdays and at 3 and 5 p.m. Sundays.

—Calvin Clinchard

FILM STUDIES SCHEDULE, SPRING 1993

"Homicidal," William Castle's classic shock film, involves the story of an attractive psychotic

nurse, her silent husband, and the weird house they occupy. It's showing at 1 p.m. Tuesday and 3:15 p.m. Wednesday at the Mary Riepma Ross Film Theater, and 7 p.m. Tuesday at Bessey 117. All film studies films are free and open to the public.

New video releases range from top-notch to bad to mediocre



Stinker, clunker, gem — not a very balanced week for home video, but, what else is new?

"Death Becomes Her" Supposedly about the dangers of vanity and immortality, this is a terribly ineffective comedy.

The innovative special effects are spoiled by a sorry story line and the foul stench of terrible overacting.

All these elements make for an exceptionally bad picture — especially considering the cast.

Meryl Streep plays a has-been actress whose youth and good looks are slipping away from her. Goldie Hawn is her life-long friend, fat and unattractive, married to plastic surgeon Bruce Willis, who plays a nerd and whose trademark smirk is nowhere to be found.

Streep finally seeks out a youth serum from Isabella Rosselini — it gives her back her looks, her tight bod and her youth, but there's a price.

The script is bad; the acting is bad; everything is bad. Well, except for the special effects. They come courtesy of FX wizard Robert Zemeckis, who dazzled movie audiences with the visually stun-

ning "Who Framed Roger Rabbit?"

Unfortunately, even the effects can't save "Death Becomes Her" — it's a stinker.

"Stephen King's It" Television adaptation of yet another horror story by the horror king.

John Ritter, Annette O'Toole and Harry Anderson are childhood friends who reunite to fight the entity that scared the pants off them as kids.

The nasty baddie is a clown.

Based on the 1986 best seller, this version looks like a mediocre TV movie and acts like one. It's a wonder King's books keep making it to the screen — rarely does TV or film do him justice.

"The Waterdance" Partly autobiographical, this drama teaches about learning to live, and love, after tragedy. And it looks like a winner.

Eric Stoltz is a writer who is paralyzed in an accident. While in a rehabilitation hospital, he meets up with Wesley Snipes, another paraplegic working to regain some strength. Helen Hunt is the woman who helps Stoltz on his road to recovery.

All titles are available Wednesday.

—Anne Steyer