

# Music of UNL employee charms crowds



By Heather Sinor  
Staff Reporter

Every Sunday morning for 29 years, Ray Johnson has climbed 122 tiny stairs to the top of the bell tower at First Plymouth Congregational Church to play his music for the city of Lincoln.

It is from this point at 176 feet in the air that Ray sits on a bench behind the church's carillon and performs for a 4- to 5-mile audience that surrounds the church.

"It's the closest to heaven I'll ever get," he said jokingly.

He may be a familiar face to some University of Nebraska-Lincoln students, because he drives the campus shuttle bus.

Once a student at UNL, Johnson said Myron Roberts, a retired UNL music professor, recognized his musical talent in a class and recommended him for the job of carillonneur at First Plymouth Church, 2000 D St.

Ray originally played the organ, but starting with simple tunes, he soon learned how to play the carillon, he said. The keys are arranged like a regular keyboard, but they are struck with fists.

He plays a variety of specially arranged carillon music before and after church services, at weddings and funerals and for children that come to see him in what he calls his "cabin in the sky."

The church plans to install a video camera in the tower, he said, so people who don't want to make the climb can watch him play.

Johnson said the largest bell weighs two and a half tons, and the smallest weighs 25 to 30 pounds. The bells remain stationary in their frame, and only the clapper moves to sound them. With the exception of the clock chimer,

the system is entirely mechanical, so someone must be in the tower to play the bells.

The bell tower, which was built in 1930, originally housed 48 bells. In 1990, the church supported a \$350,000 renovation project that increased the number of bells to 57 and replaced the old carillon with a masterpiece designed by Timothy Hurd of the Olympic Bell Engineers of Seattle.

A larger frame for the bells was constructed, and the wires that supported the bells were shortened to provide greater playing control. A new set of bells was cast, and the originals were placed in a chamber carillon in the balcony of the church.

“It's the closest to heaven I'll ever get.”

— Johnson  
carillon player

Johnson said he believed it was the only chamber carillon in existence in the United States.

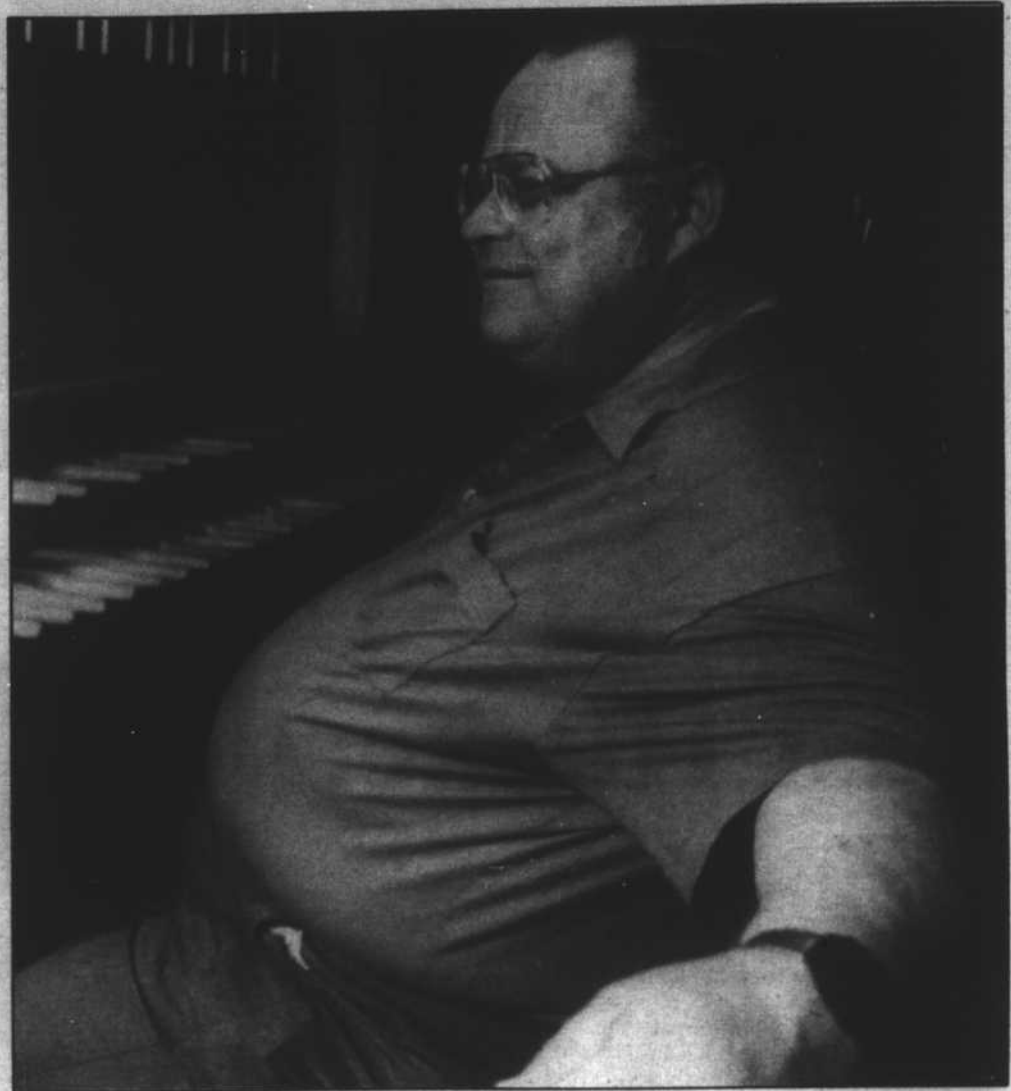
The bell tower brings more than music to Johnson. He said it was a part of his religious contribution. It makes him feel good to know that he "plays the bells that get the people to church and sends them home afterward."

He played well enough that one interested listener crawled up into the tower to watch him play 23 years ago. He ended up teaching her the art of playing the carillon, and 11 months later he married her. Now Kathie Johnson fills in for Ray when he can't play.

Johnson is now busy planning a four-day convention for 150 members of the North American Guild of Carillonneurs Congress, which will be held in Lincoln on June 16-20.

Ronald Barns, a famous carillon composer, will hold a bell concert at First Plymouth to play a song he was commissioned to write for the convention.

Johnson said he welcomed listeners to attend the concert in the church courtyard.



Damon Lee/DN

Ray Johnson takes a break from practicing his bells Monday at First Plymouth Congregational Church, 2000 D St. Johnson, who also drives the campus shuttle bus at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, has played the carillon at the church for 29 years.



Courtesy of Columbia Pictures

Bill Murray and friend in a scene from "Groundhog Day."

## Murray shines in new film

### "Groundhog Day"



If you mix a love story and some standard Bill Murray comedy with one episode of "Twilight Zone", you've got the recipe for "Groundhog Day" (East Park 3, Plaza 4).

Murray plays Phil, a TV weatherman who is egotistical, snobbish, and overly sure of himself.

Yeah, he's the quintessential jerk.

He and his producer Rita (Andie MacDowell) are sent to the Norman Rockwell-ish town of Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania to cover the annual festivities of Groundhog Day, a celebration that Phil is less than thrilled about attending.

Unfortunately for Phil, the blizzard he predicted would completely miss Punxsutawney hits just before he and Rita are to leave, and they get stuck there.

However, Phil doesn't get stuck just in Punxsutawney; he gets stuck in that same day — over and over again.

Every morning, Phil wakes up to Sonny and Cher's "I Got You Babe" on the clock radio (a true hell), the same conversations, and so on.

Unfortunately, the film reaches its peak about two-thirds of the way through, and you're just left hanging there for the last part going "Well, now what?"

Still, Director Harold Ramis ("Caddyshack") does a great job with the film. He makes the bizarre premise work, and he still knows how to get a laugh at something that an audience can see coming a mile away.

And Murray is great here. The same zany personality flip-flops he displayed in "What About Bob" work here too.

Although faulty at a couple of points, "Groundhog" is worth checking out.

— Gerry Beltz

## Adults can enjoy G-rated movie

### "Homeward Bound: The Incredible Journey"



OK, fine. "Homeward Bound: The Incredible Journey" (Lincoln 3, East Park 3) is another one of those "household-pets-smarter-than-anyone-else" movies.

But it works for young and old alike.

The voices chosen to go with the

animals are perfect; the playful spotted bulldog (Chance) is done by Michael J. Fox, the spoiled Himalayan cat (Sassy) by Sally Field and the willful golden retriever (Shadow) by Don Ameche.

They are left with a family friend for only a short time, but soon escape to find their family.

Naturally, along the way they run into various types of problems, such as nature, wild animals and (of course) stupid humans.

Still, while several of the sequences are of the cheesiest type and will appeal to kids of all ages, the adults will still be entertained with the hu-

morous banter between the animals as well as what the animals say to their various adversaries.

The three lead animals also deserve a lot of credit. Their on-screen antics are terrifically entertaining, and many of the camera shots are done from a "pet's-eye view" to give a different feel to the movie.

Rated G and suitable for all ages (although the porcupine incident may be a bit unsettling), it's definitely worth a look.

— Gerry Beltz

## Sappiness trickles through film

### "Untamed Heart"



"Untamed Heart" (Douglas 3, 13th and P streets) works perfectly for an audience of teen-agers, but it falls a few beats short of perfection for grown-ups.

It's not that the movie lacks, um, heart, but instead it's overflowing: longing looks, lingering kisses, romantic overtures — and a baboon heart, magic records and a hurtling hockey puck.

Marisa Tomei ("My Cousin Vinny") shines in her first shot at carrying a film. She is Caroline, a waitress and would-be hairdresser who is a loser in love. That is until she gets to know Adam (Christian Slater), an introverted busboy at the diner where she works.

There's much more to him than meets the eye, of course, and Caroline falls hard and fast. There's a sweet love story — idealistic and hopeful.

Maybe that's where it skips a beat: Can any love affair be that perfect?

All is not lost, however. The script is oftentimes funny and inevitably

sad, and the acting is very good. Slater doesn't have a lot to say, but he has perfected innocence — an odd turn from the bad boy in "Heathers." And Rosie Perez ("White Men Can't Jump") is a riot as Caroline's best friend and fellow waitress.

"Untamed Heart" is sappy in some places, and that sappiness hurts its realistic qualities. But it's also sexy in an offbeat way, sweet in an idealistic way, hopeful in the most romantic way and sad in the most heartbreaking way.

— Anne Steyer

## Lincoln setting of Starkweather murders grabs attention of television screenwriter

OMAHA (AP) — The cultural climate surrounding Charlie Starkweather's 1958 murder spree in which 10 people died intrigued the author of a screenplay for a television miniseries about Nebraska's notorious mass killer.

"It's just a fascinating story," said Michael O'Hara, the screenwriter and co-executive producer of "Starkweather: Murder in the Heart-

land," a two-part ABC miniseries to be aired in May.

"It's all about the time and place for me," he said.

The time was the winter of 1957-58. The place was Lincoln.

The movie, which is being filmed in northern Texas, stars Tim Roth as Starkweather. Brian Dennehy, Randy Quaid and Fairuza Balk also have roles.

### Film involves jazz

"Face the Music" is a film noir thriller involving jazz musicians who struggle to perfect their art but fall into crime. Rare 35mm print showing 1 p.m. Tuesday and 3:15 p.m. Wednesday only at the Mary Riepma Ross Film Theater. All film-studies films are free and open to the public.