

Magic theater offers different brand of acting

SPOTLIGHT

By Bryce Glenn
Staff Reporter

Omaha's Magic Theater has been called many things, including: avant garde, experimental and new theater, but Artistic Director Jo Ann Schmidman called it simply "great, energizing fun."

"It defies labels," Schmidman said. "It engages your head and your silly bone and you recognize it and you hate it and you love it."

The theater, at 1417 Farnam St., presents works that are similar to performance art, as there is a more intimate relationship between the actors and the audience, Schmidman said.

She said she first experienced that type of theater when she worked with the New York-based Open Theater in the 1960s.

When she returned to Omaha in 1968 she opened the Magic Theater. For the past 25 years she has worked to bring established performers to the theater, and she has trained locals in her style of acting, a style she still struggles to describe.

"When people have no experience with this, it's hard to convey it," she said. "The audience is so involved in this energy because the whole space is transformed."

She likened the theater's performances to club concerts where a person is totally overcome by the music.

"Seldom are we able to experience that with theater because of weird restrictions that are put down from other places," she said. "But there are some of us who have felt it at one time or another and do this kind of theater."

Although the Magic Theater has been in Omaha for 25 years, Schmidman called it "Omaha's best kept secret."

It is a reference Schmidman could do without.

"We should get lots of students, but they don't know about us," she said. "We can't afford neon signs or anything, so we pretty much rely on word of mouth."

Schmidman said she was especially anxious to get the word out about the theater's current production.

Raymond J. Barry's play "The Mother's Son" had its world premiere at the theater last weekend. It will be performed again this Friday and Saturday at 7:30 p.m. Tickets are \$5 for University of Nebraska-Lincoln students.

Barry said he had worked with Schmidman and Magic Theater playwright Meggan Terry at the Open Theater in New York.

Barry has written and performed in several plays since his days in the Open Theater, he

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Julia Mikolajcik/DN

Higher Ground owners Scott and Teri Colb and Mike Cramer show some of the products in their shop at 700 O St. The store opened last November.

Pot shots Higher Ground gains fame with its hemp T-shirts

Mark Baldridge
Staff Reporter

It's not that kind of store.

That's what Michael Cramer wants to tell people who expect Higher Ground to be a "head shop" — a store specializing in drug paraphernalia.

What it is: One of the Haymarket's latest additions and a hip T-shirt store.

Under the viaduct at 700 O St., Higher Ground offers clothing, bags and books, as well as T-shirts for which they are rapidly gaining a reputation.

Cramer, with his wife Teri and partner Scott Kolb, started the store's parent company, TeraWear Ltd., in their Lincoln basement in 1991. They printed T-shirts they designed themselves to "make a little bit of extra money," he said.

The company rapidly expanded after the partners peddled their shirts along the "Hemp Tour," a biannual tour of rallies across the

country to promote the legalization of marijuana.

They opened the store last November. "This fall we all quit our jobs and went into that full time," Cramer said.

"Today we're selling shirts all over the country and we're about to start exporting to Japan and Germany."

Cramer attributes part of the company's success to its use of water-based inks and non-bleached cotton shirts.

Both of these measures are eco-friendly, but they tend to raise the price of the shirt, he said.

Still, TeraWear boasts the "hottest selling pot shirt in the country" Cramer said.

It's the pot shirts and hemp products the store offers that lead to the expectation that it's a head shop.

However, Cramer said, hemp is made from the stalks, not the flowers, of the marijuana plant.

Hemp is legal in this country, since it

contains no THC, the mind-altering component of marijuana.

The store also offers marijuana-growing manuals and drug culture magazines, items that contribute to its counter-culture image, he said.

TeraWear is without doubt the biggest part of the business, with about 2,000 orders a month, Cramer said.

"We can't even keep inventory on hand," he said. "We didn't foresee the market."

But with a brand new catalog, and the addition of a line of printed hemp clothing, TeraWear hopes to totally capture that market — expanding beyond the bounds of the storefront outlet, Cramer said.

Being self-employed is much harder than working for "the man," he said.

"You work all the time. Sometimes it doesn't work out to minimum wage."

And there seems to be no end in sight.

"We've been growing about 1,000 percent a year, man," he said.

Fiddler Krauss performs free bluegrass for fairgoers

By Jill O'Brien
Senior Reporter

Alison Krauss lives to fiddle around, playing bluegrass at state fairs, festivals and concerts.



"Bluegrass isn't a very lucrative living for a musician," she said during an interview. "If you do it for a living, you're doing it for the music."

And Krauss, a self-confessed bluegrass fanatic, definitely does it for the music. She performs two free sets at the Nebraska State Fair, tonight at 6 and 8 p.m., at the Pepsi Open Air Auditorium.

Krauss said she was hooked on fast fiddling at age 8. Three years of classical violin lessons limbered her fingers while the music of Ricky Skaggs limbered her mind, she said.

By the time she turned 13, Krauss was a nationally recognized fiddler and a year later, Rounder Records released her first bluegrass album, "Too Late to Cry."

Two months ago, Krauss, now 21,

became the first bluegrass artist in 19 years to be inducted into the Grand Ole Opry.

"It was one of those things you never figured was going to happen to you," she said.

It was the most nervous night of her life.

"We had never imagined being on the Opry, and then we got to be on and we figured it was a one-time thing. We were amazed."

"We" is Krauss and Union Station, a four-piece bluegrass band that has backed her since 1985.

The current line-up includes bass player Barry Bales and guitarist John Bowman. Adam Steffey, who plays mandolin, shares the vocal spotlight with Krauss, while Ron Block pulls triple duty as songwriter, guitarist and banjo picker.

"Our favorite type of stuff is pretty traditional bluegrass," Krauss said, "but, we do more of the new stuff than we do of the old stuff — because we try to do our own thing."

"It's more like original bluegrass with traditional thrown in than traditional with original," she explained.

Although one of her favorite songs,

"Cluck Old Hen," is a traditional bluegrass tune highlighted on her latest album, "Every Time You Say Goodbye," most of the album's songs are originals, written by Block or former bandmember John Pennell, Krauss said.

She said when she chooses a song to play, she tries to avoid cliched lyrics where the listener can guess the next line. The same holds true for the band's performances, she said.

During a set, it's not unusual for her to slip in a contemporary cover by Paul McCartney or Gregg Allman, she said.

When she sings, she again defies tradition. Krauss is a soprano who shifts to baritone as easily as she shifts from bluegrass to contemporary music.

Her voice has been compared to Emmylou Harris, Jeannie Kendall and Dolly Parton.

"It's still kind of new to have women fronting bands, but there happens to be a good number of them now," Krauss said.

"There weren't many women play-



Photo Courtesy Rounder Records

Alison Krauss is set to perform at the Nebraska State Fair tonight.

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