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Lied stage prepares for 'Porgy and Bess'

theater preview



By Paula Lavigne
Senior Reporter

In the midst of a segregated South, burdened with Jim Crow laws and the Ku Klux Klan, black people were isolated and hidden from society.

In 1935 this subculture was pulled from the ghettos and placed on the stage in George Gershwin's revolutionary opera "Porgy and Bess," which will be coming to the Lied Center for Performing Arts this weekend.

Although it featured a cast of black actors, the opera did not focus on black issues. Instead it was a love story about a crippled man named Porgy and a young girl named Bess.

William Marshall, who will be portraying Porgy in Friday night's performance, said the opera could be a very uplifting experience.

Marshall said Porgy started out as a rather lonely individual waiting for something to happen. He said when Porgy met Bess, his outlook on life was transformed.

"All the emotions play in him—love, anger, hope, despair, even jealousy," he said.

"He has the determination to get up and fight for what he believes is right."

However, Marshall said, Porgy shouldn't be seen as the underdog. "That would be too simple," Marshall said. "He's not necessarily the hero. He's just someone like you and I, except with problems."

Marshall said the love story was even more intimate because Porgy was strapped to a go-cart and Bess had to kneel to communicate with him.

Marshall said Bess, who will be played by Vanessa Stewart on Friday and Claudette McCargo on

Saturday, should not be perceived as a prostitute, although she came off as a beautiful and sexual woman.

"She's a woman who is sexually and physically bound to this man named Crown," he said. "When she meets Porgy, she becomes emotionally involved."

Marshall said Porgy and Bess leaned more toward a "love quartet" because Bess was being pulled by Porgy, Crown (Stephen Finch) and drug dealer Sportin' Life (Cornelius White, John Lesane).

"There's the bad-guy element, a drug element and a love element; however, the piece really first and foremost deals with religion and spirituality and the need for prayer," he said.

Placing blacks into such strong subject matter as this in the 1930s, instead of the traditional roles of entertainers and jokesters, was Gershwin's purpose, Marshall said.

"He wanted a show that was going to feature all Negroes," he said. "Negroes would be the leading characters and would be the focus for this type of subject."

He said when "Porgy and Bess" was in musical form, Al Jolson wanted to do it with a black face, but Gershwin rejected it.

"It was about southern Negro life. The portrayal of blacks seemed more real," he said, "more blood-and-guts, not so stereotypical."

Marshall said "Porgy and Bess" opened many doors for black actors and actresses.

"It immediately put to the directors that blacks were capable of taking leading roles," he said. He said it opened the public's mind as well.

Marshall said it was important for people to realize that although the story line behind "Porgy and Bess" was strong, it was not a musical. It is an opera.

Porgy will be played by Andre Solomon-Glover on Saturday.

Tickets for "Porgy and Bess" this Friday and Saturday are \$28, \$24 and \$20; student tickets are half-price.

Country-punk hits Knickerbockers



By Joel Strauch
Senior Reporter

The southern bluegrass "cow-punk" sound of Blue Mountain is stampeding into Lincoln this weekend.

Blue Mountain, a dynamic three-member band from Oxford, Miss., has recently self-released its self-titled debut album. The album shows great diversity with its broad spectrum of songs.

The backwoods rock of "Soul Sister" and "Bud" blends well with the melancholy banjo and mandolin-streaked tunes "Let's Ride" and "Mountain Girl."

Their style of music is highly original, combining punk rock with folk, bluegrass and country music.

Blue Mountain's music stems from a variety of influences, ranging from Neil Young to Hank Williams.

"KRNU (the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus radio station) has been playing them heavily," said Ernie Pulos, publicity director of the Knickerbockers bar.

"Blue Mountain is on their top rotation," he said. "And Saturday at 5, KRNU is going to do an over-the-air interview with the band."

Blue Mountain consists of lead vocalist Cary Hudson on electric and acoustic guitar, background vocalist Laurie Stirratt on bass guitar and Matt Brennan on the drums.

Hudson and Stirratt were members of The Hilltops and formed Blue Mountain in early 1992. Brennan joined them in June of 1993. They have toured heavily in the Southeast and the Midwest.

"A lot of people are really excited to see them play here (at Knickerbockers)," Pulos said.

"They should draw a pretty good college crowd."

Blue Mountain will be playing Saturday at Knickerbockers, with Omaha's Hanna's Porch opening.

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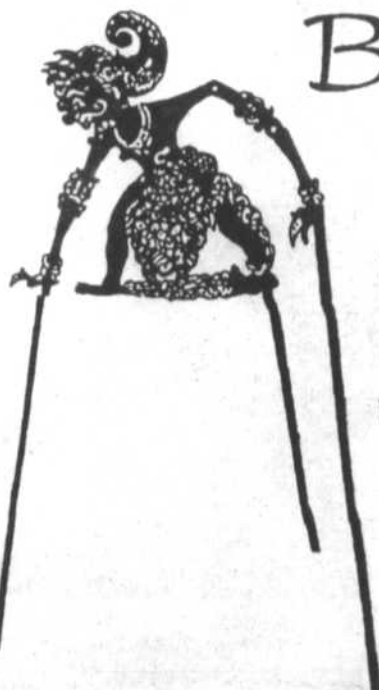
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