

UNL alumna goes west, makes it big in movies

Production designer credits her success to theater department



By Paula Lavigne
Senior Reporter

From the bridge of the newly remodeled Starship Enterprise at Paramount Studios in Hollywood, Calif., Sandy Veneziano said she missed the secure lifestyle of the Great Plains.

Veneziano, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln alumna, earned her Master of Fine Arts degree in 1978 and went on to prove that a small-town girl can make it in the big city and on the big screen.

As a production designer for "Star Trek: The Next Generation The Movie," Veneziano said she credited her success and that of her classmates to the professors in UNL's theater department.

"They instructed an overall view of design. When I graduated from there, there wasn't a question that I couldn't pick up my portfolio and get a job wherever I wanted."

And she was right. With a resumé that lists movies such as "Dead Poets Society," "Father of the Bride," "Star Trek V: The Final Frontier" and "Terms of Endearment," Veneziano staked her claim on production as soon as she landed in California.

"I didn't even think about competition," she said. "That's what I wanted to do, and I did it."

Starting out as a set designer for "Dallas," "Eight is Enough" and "M*A*S*H," Veneziano worked her way up to assistant art director, designer and eventually production director.

As a production director, Veneziano is in charge of the overall look of the show, including the set, costumes, makeup and lighting. She said it was very much a team effort.

"You have your crew under you, and you work as a team," she said. "Theater people know how a team works."

She said she had to take a different approach with the movie she was working on now.

"It's Starfleet, it's Star Trek, and there are certain guidelines you must follow knowing your Starfleet limitations."

For "Dead Poets Society," a period piece, a lot of research was required to find the right school for the movie, Veneziano said.

"It was very specific about color palettes and lighting," she said. "You have that old tradition in the colors and costumes and everything."

Along with working on set design and other production elements, Veneziano is in constant contact with several movie and television stars.

"Some of them are just unbearable, and some of them are genuine professionals," she said. "Jack Nicholson is a pro. When he walks on the stage, you watch."

"Then you have the ones who need Evian water to wash their hair, are constantly late and pretty bitchy."

Because of the differing personalities, Veneziano said she had to play several roles herself.

"You're a politician a lot when you work in the movie industry. You have so many personalities from actors to grips and technicians."

"You need to pass through each section with a great deal of political correctness to get everybody to communicate and agree," she said.

Although her work is demanding, Veneziano said it was rewarding.

"It's a lot of work, it's a lot of time, but it's very creative and very fun," she said. "When you get a good movie on the screen and affect the audience in a positive way, it's great."

One of her greatest experiences was working in her hometown on "Terms of Endearment."

Veneziano received a key to the city and an Alumni Achievement Award from UNL as well. She said these awards made her feel terrific, because they reflected back to the teachers who brought her to where she is now.

"Their knowledge, communication and tightness with the students made it special," she said. "You didn't just write a paper; you did a lot for design. You learned a little bit about all the areas overall, and that helps immensely in film."

Veneziano's ties to teaching are so tight, she might want to try it herself. She said she wanted to establish a film design program at UNL and become a professor while maintaining her production director jobs.

Born and raised in Nebraska, Veneziano has other reasons for coming back — overpopulation, crime and her 6-year-old son.

"Hollywood is much better for work, obviously, but as for a lifestyle and living environment, it's not a great place to be," she said. "The Midwest is much better."

She said living in Nebraska wouldn't affect her career, because many production companies are filming out of state. As long as she has a base in a large city, she can live and teach in Lincoln.

Living in a large city, Veneziano has encountered a lot of the Nebraska stereotypes.

"Some of them still think there are still Indians and no toilets," she said, "but that's only from people who haven't been there."

Regardless of the stereotypes, Veneziano said she was proud of her Nebraska heritage.

"From growing up in the Midwest, you can do anything you want. That's the way we're raised."

"Nebraska has an ethic about it. Here's the job. Get the job done. Now, go play."



Jazz great Gerry Mulligan will perform with his quartet Saturday night at the Lied Center. Mulligan has jammed with Duke Ellington, Billie Holiday and Louis Armstrong.

Courtesy of the Lied Center

Jazz great to visit Lied



By Paula Lavigne
Senior Reporter

Blaming U.S. radio stations and the media for the hidden role jazz has played in recent musical history, jazz veteran Gerry Mulligan said this musical art form had a chance at rebirth.

And he should know.

Founder of the pianoless quartet, this famed saxophonist has collaborated with jazz greats Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong and Billie Holiday. His latest album, 1992's "The Re-Birth of Cool," proves that all the legendary jazz greats haven't blown their last horn.

Mulligan will be blowing his own horn at the Lied Center this weekend.

When he was a boy, Mulligan grew up with jazz bands on the radio. Things have changed in the years since Mulligan tuned into the sounds of Dizzy Gillespie on his radio dial. Jazz has fallen out of popularity with the younger generations, as they turn toward rap or rock instead.

The problem was one of radio economics, Mulligan said.

"Radio is a totally different vehicle than it was 30 years ago. Stations play only one type of music," Mulligan said. "A station has a musical policy, and they adhere to that. There's no variety."

He said radio stations and the media often picked up on only the most popular music and neglected other styles. European radio stations are more creative, because they are subsidized by the government and do not have to cater to sponsors, he said.

The future of jazz, Mulligan said, depends on the future of America.

"The major problem of the world of the future is how to deal with an overpopulated planet," he said. "What we grew up with in this century is individualism. It becomes superseded

by what's good for the group."

Jazz could become the future music of choice because of its adaptability with other cultures and musical styles. On "The Re-Birth of Cool," Mulligan used that theory when he mixed jazz with Brazilian melodies.

"Musicians in any given country have their own variations in jazz," Mulligan said. "How it's received by an audience is something more complicated. It depends on how people use music in their culture."

Mulligan's work with jazz legend Duke Ellington reinforced those points.

"His outlook was typical of the worlds we pass through," Mulligan said.

Another aspect of working with Ellington was traveling by train, Mulligan said. That led to a fascination with trains, and Mulligan went up and down the East Coast on the rails.

As the popularity of traveling by train fell to the convenience of modern transportation, jazz legends fell to today's influx of new musicians, he said.

"Milt Jackson, a vibraphone player, once said, 'There ain't but a few of us left,'" Mulligan laughed. "I think the media are responsible."

The media concentrate on things that appeal to the biggest numbers, he said.

"If you're not on the cover of People magazine, you don't exist. The generation of players now who are 30 and younger are quite well-known, compared to those two generations ahead of them."

"None got a chance to develop into a successful leader."

New jazz and classic jazz still has a chance to reach a younger audience, Mulligan said.

"If they are given a chance and get to hear it, sure," he said. "Universities don't get the cooperation they need. They still treat it as an esoteric phenomenon."

The problem was not getting the younger audience to like jazz; it was getting jazz to the younger audience, he said.

Mulligan is doing his part in making jazz more accessible by working on new projects in modern jazz, writing saxophone chamber music and teaching.

Mulligan will be on stage at the Lied Center this Saturday at 8 p.m. Regular tickets are \$22 and \$16; student tickets are half-price.



Bands

- Wed.**--Duffy's Tavern: Dream Machine with Rosebud
- Royal Grove: Ivory Star
- Speakeasy Lounge: Alibi
- Yia Yia's Pizza: Justice League of the Blues
- Zoo Bar: Catfish Keith
- Thurs.**--Duggan's Pub: Sean Benjamin
- Morgan's Upstairs: Bill Ritchie Quartet
- Ninth Street Blues: The Gypsies
- Royal Grove: Ivory Star
- Speakeasy Lounge: Alibi
- Zoo Bar: Yabba Griffiths
- Fri.**--Duggan's Pub: Leory & The Liars
- Knickerbockers: Echoing Green with the Geckos
- Morgan's Upstairs: Lost & Found
- Mountains Grill & Deli: Karma
- Royal Grove: Ivory Star
- Sidetrack: Joyce Durand, Paul Newton, Sam Schultz
- Speakeasy Lounge: Alibi
- W.C.'s: DV8
- Zoo Bar: Yabba Griffiths
- Sat.**--Duggan's Pub: Leory & The Liars
- Knickerbockers: The Return with The Plowbabs
- Morgan's Upstairs: Skinny and the Wingtips
- Mountains Grill & Deli: Karma
- Ninth Street Blues: Tuna Fish Jones

- Royal Grove: Ivory Star
- Sidetrack: Joyce Durand, Paul Newton, Sam Schultz
- Speakeasy Lounge: Alibi
- W.C.'s: DV8
- Zoo Bar: Yabba Griffiths
- Sun.**--Duffy's Tavern: Gregory and Lorianne
- Laser Shows**
- Mueller Planetarium, Morrill Hall, **Fri. & Sat.**--Led Zeppelin at 8, 9:30 & 11 p.m.
- Music Performances**
- Wed.**--Big Guitars from Memphis with The Fishheads at the Nebraska East Union 8:30 p.m.
- Thurs.**--University Orchestra and the Oratorio Chorus, directed by Emil Aluas, performing Puccini's "Tosca" at Kimball Hall 8 p.m.
- Fri. & Sat.**--The Scarlet and Cream Singers at Kimball Hall 8 p.m.
- Sat.**--Gerry Mulligan at the Lied Center 8 p.m.; Concert of Classical Music from India, Rajeev Taranath, Westbrook Music Bldg. 6:30 p.m.
- Sun.**--UNL Percussion Ensemble 8 p.m.
- Theater**
- Thurs.-Sat.**--"True West" at The Temple Building, Studio Theatre 8 p.m. (2 p.m. Sun.)
- Thurs.-Fri.**--"The Empty Plough" at the Johnny Carson Theater, Lied Center 8 p.m. (2 p.m. Sat., 4 p.m. Sun.)
- Event of the Week**
- Mon.**--Melissa Etheridge with Matthew Sweet at the Orpheum in Omaha 8 p.m.