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Fine arts celebrated at college's dedication

By Paula Lavigne
Senior Reporter

Normally, a dedication ceremony for a new college conjures images of lengthy speeches and lectures.

But dances, theatrical performances, songs, music and famous celebrities made the "Celebrating! Dedicating!" ceremony for the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's College of Fine and Performing Arts an exception.

The ceremony took place Friday night at the Lied Center for Performing Arts.

The college, officially instituted in July 1993, comprises the Department of Art and Art History, the Department of Theatre Arts and Dance, and the School of Music.

In an opening speech, Chancellor Graham Spanier said the dedication was "an auspicious moment in the history of this institution."

"We're proud of this new college, which brings together three important units," he said.

Although the college was new, Spanier said, the individual departments rested on years of expertise and achievement.

"We're not starting from scratch," he said. "We're building towards a great tradition."

Larry Lusk, dean of the new college, said he was proud and honored to have worked with so many talented people in the college's first official year of operation.

"The great teaching that goes on here really works and produces great results," Lusk said. "This college is dedicated to dispelling the image that the arts are a mere decoration or frill to our lives."

Lusk then presented a plaque to Spanier to give to the Nebraska Department of Education in honor of all the arts educators in the state of Nebraska.

The ceremony featured dance, theatrical and musical performances by UNL students, staff, faculty and alumni.

Dancer/choreographer David Parsons, in town for his weekend performances at the Lied Center with the Billy Taylor Trio, gave a surprise performance. During his arrangement of "Caught," Parsons appeared to be suspended in air through the use of a strobe light.

Contemporary visual artist Wayne Thiebaud, national leader in music education reform Richard Colwell and celebrated scenic designer John Conklin were honored guests and gave brief speeches on topics in their fields.

— "This college is dedicated to dispelling the image that the arts are a mere decoration or frill to our lives."

— Lusk
dean of College of Fine and Performing Arts

Beverly Sills, keynote speaker and general director of the New York City Opera, gave a speech about her career and its relation to the progression of arts in America during past decades.

"I'd always been told opera was a European art form," she said, wishing to dispel opera's misconceptions. "We were not big, fat women with horns coming out of our heads."

Sills, who has since retired from singing, chronicled her life as an opera singer from the 1930s through her career as a director today.

Her struggle as an opera singer was for more than amusement, she said. It was to prove a point.

"The picture I'm trying to draw is that our country was a cultural desert in the '40s and '50s," she said.

Since then, the future for American art has flourished, she said.

Sills said the arts in America definitely were not dead, though people often asked her where one can still find them.

"Just look at this theater. This is obviously a community that wants a little beauty," she said. "So, I think the arts are doing just fine."

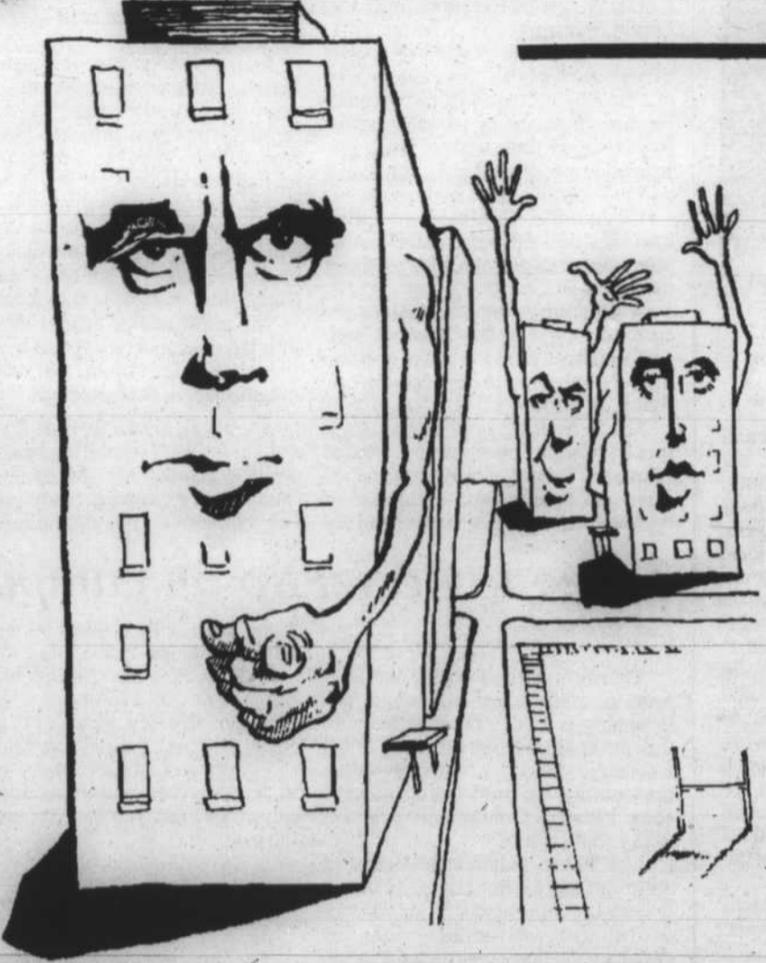
Too many people believe a foreign label means better quality, Sills said.

"I believe there is such a thing as American know-how, and you're sitting in a theater that proves that."

An unnecessary emphasis is placed on arts funding controversies, Sills said. When AIDS, homelessness, teenage pregnancy, crack babies and other serious problems need support, she said, people should not despair over arts funding.

If people wish to preserve arts in their communities, Sills said, they will do so out of their own initiative, regardless of cost.

"If you can live without music, beautiful paintings, sculptures, there's no reason for you to have it," she said. "But if it's a part of your soul — if it's something that separates the two-legged ones from the four-legged ones, then you should keep it."



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