

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

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Romance meets trickery in the land of Italy



Scott Bruhn/DN

Scapino (played by Paul Steger, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln theater professor) hides behind Ottavio (Dean Houser, a graduate student in theater) in "Scapino!" The play opens tonight in Howell Theatre.

By Paula Lavigne
Senior Reporter

The moonlight spills over a sultry Italian waterfront as a plate of spaghetti flies through the air and elicits a weak "Ow!" from an unlucky waiter.

Italy, home of romantic "amore," spaghetti, spumoni, and "Scapino!" — Frank Dunlop and Jim Dale's romantic comedy full of laughs and foolish trickery.

"Scapino!" — under the direction of visiting director Brian O'Connor — will open the University Theatre's 1994-95 season tonight.

"Scapino!" is the story of two young Italian men who want to marry their secret sweethearts but are afraid their fathers won't allow the marriages.

They want to trick their fathers into permitting the marriages, so they enlist the help of a servant, Scapino, known for his cunning deceit. Scapino snatches the opportunity, and the comic chaos begins.

O'Connor, a native of New York City, said the plot was "merely a device to hang comic business."

When the original script was written in the 17th century by Moliere, it was based on the comic scenarios and characters of the commedia dell'arte, O'Connor said.

In fact, Italy and comedy always have gone hand in hand. The Italians coined the term for physical comic routines — *lazzi* — and used it extensively in their work.

O'Connor said the play continually was updated to fit contemporary comic and social standards. He said some of the jokes worked better if they fit modern America.

The original script contained a scene in which Scapino imitated a Japanese male, but O'Connor thought some people might find that offensive. He had Scapino imitate American movie stars instead.

Scapino is portrayed by University of Nebraska-Lincoln theater professor Paul Steger, who specializes in stage movement

I tended to think of him (my character) as a chicken with its head cut off.

JONAS COHEN

graduate theater student

and combat choreography. Because the play relies heavily on physical action, Scapino allows Steger to use his specialties.

O'Connor said "Scapino!" was time-consuming because every movement in the play had to be worked out carefully. He said even if the activity was silly, the stakes for the characters must be high.

Steger said the physical activity made "Scapino!" funny, but "keeping deadly serious" was the only way to make the audience laugh. This paradox means the characters have to believe their problem is serious, even if the actors make the situation funny.

"It's like playing tragedy with a rubber sword," Steger said.

One of the best "serious" situations explodes between Scapino and Geronte, one of the fathers.

Geronte is played by graduate theater student Jonas Cohen, a native of Long Island, N.Y. Cohen appeared in last season's "The Heidi Chronicles" and "Tango."

Cohen's character on stage emerges as a grumpy, gray-haired miser who wields his wooden cane with rage when he finds out Scapino "needs" 500 lire or Geronte's son will be kidnapped.

"This money is so important, he's almost willing to let his son be kidnapped," he said. "He just loves being nasty to everyone."

Cohen said Geronte never wanted to be wrong or fooled, but he fell into Scapino's trickery.

"Geronte provides necessary conflict," Cohen said. "He feels that because he has money, everyone should respect him."

To Geronte, handing out money is like ripping his heart out or losing a close relative, Cohen said.

Cohen said he didn't want to play an old man because of the related stereotypes. He said he practiced different walks and tried to compare his character to an animal.

See SCAPINO on 10

Quik Facts

Show: "Scapino!"

At: Howell Theatre, Temple Building

Times: 8 p.m. today, Friday, Saturday and Tuesday through Oct. 15

Tickets: students, \$6; faculty and senior citizens, \$7; and general public, \$9

History of bluegrass music re-created in 'High Lonesome'

By Chad Johnson
Staff Reporter

"High Lonesome" could be words that describe the vocals of the father of bluegrass music, Bill Monroe. The high pitch and plaintive sound is an amalgamation of musical styles that have their origins in cultures as diverse as the British Isles and Africa.

The film does an outstanding job of retelling the history of a much-overlooked form of music and leads the viewer along the path of its development — from Scottish folk songs through its decline with the advent of rock 'n' roll to its subsequent resurgence with the arrival of the folk movement of the late '60s.

Rachel Liebling does a wonderful job combining archival footage, still photographs, contemporary concert film and interviews to cre-

Quik Facts

Movie: "High Lonesome"

Rating: No Rating

Stars: Bill Monroe, Ralph Stanley, Mac Wiseman

Director: Rachel Liebling

Grade: B+

Five Words: Effective history of bluegrass music

ate an impressive feel for the music and the performers.

Searching for some of the clips needed for the film became a quest for Liebling. That quest took her from New York to Virginia, North Carolina and Kentucky and back to New York again in search of a clip of Bill Monroe performing

"Body and Soul" at the Grand Ole Opry in 1969. Her diligence payed off; the film is much more lifelike and tangible with the additional footage, which draws the audience into a far more intimate circle.

Some of the footage takes on an ironic twist that music fans will appreciate. Look for Jim and Jesse McReynolds performing "Johnny B. Goode" in a style far different than the duck-walking Chuck Berry. Also catch the San Francisco concert with the psychedelic light show and flower children enjoying bluegrass with the same relish most believe is reserved for The Grateful Dead.

"High Lonesome" is an effective documentary that informs the audience of the history of bluegrass and expands the audience's knowledge of the performers and their motivations. While bluegrass is not to everyone's liking, preference is not a prerequisite for enjoying this informative and thoughtful film.



Courtesy of Tara Releasing

Bluegrass legend Jimmy Martin is shown singin' and strummin' as a child.