

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

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Realistic stage fighting takes practice, timing

By Paula Lavigne
Senior Reporter

Paul Steger knows how to swing his meat. Steger raises a giant sausage link and bludgeons his student, Jonas Cohen. Steger yells, "Hasta la vista, baby. I'll be back!" while Cohen, trapped in a large sack, winces with each wallop.

Sound like a fight gone out of control? It's not.

It's actually a series of timed, precise movements that have been repeated several times during rehearsals for the University Theatre's production "Scapino!"

Steger, a theater professor at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, specializes in stage movements and combat choreography. He's starring as Scapino in the University Theatre's season opener.

Steger spent this past summer choreographing 46 fights for the Wisconsin Shakespeare Festival. He is a member of the Society of American Fight Directors and also has studied with the Society of British Fight Directors and the Fight Directors Canada.

Steger, a native of St. Louis, said he studied stage combat because he "got bruised up, beat up a lot" in performances.

Shakespeare plays often feature sword fights, Steger said, and people are swinging steel swords within 3 feet of each other. If they aren't careful, they could be seriously injured.

Steger's technique lies in making fights and stunts look real while keeping the actors — and the audience — safe.

During "Scapino!" Steger jumps off the stage, runs into the audience and walks across the backs of chairs. His movements and timing have to be precise.

"You have to have alternative plans," he said. "When you're walking across the backs of seats and you see an old lady, you don't

want her to freak out and have a heart attack."

Steger said his first theater professors — Wayne Loui, Richmond Shepard and the famous mime, Marcel Marceau — got him interested in stage combat, movement and miming.

He performed as a street mime in St. Louis, New York City, New Orleans and Chicago before taking a stab at theater.

"You don't perform violence. You make it look like violence. That's what makes it hard."

■
PAUL STEGER

UNL theater professor

In the past 20 years, Steger has survived chipped teeth, broken fingers, bloody noses and many bruises while mastering his talent.

Communication, timing and repetition, he said, are the three elements vital to making stage movement safe.

Steger said fight partners had to communicate with vocal and body language and had to time each move in order to obtain the right effect. Repetition, he said, instills these skills.

"The body perceives things faster than the eyes can," Steger said.

The challenge lies in actors trying to avoid appearing as if they know what is going to happen, Steger said. He said overzealous actors, who actually wanted to be violent, created other problems.

"You don't perform violence. You make



Scott Bruhn/DN

Paul Steger, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln theater professor, beats on Jonas Cohen with a giant sausage in the play "Scapino!" at the Howell Theatre.

it look like violence," he said. "That's what makes it hard."

"It's like martial arts. It requires time, discipline and patience. In Tai Chi, your hands are at a specific place and time. The body must be balanced, unless you plan for it not to be."

Physical violence, he said, also relied on physical condition.

"It's not just how strong you are; it's how you use your strength," he said. "It's know-

ing where your body is in space, (whether) you're standing up, lying down or flying through the air."

Steger said no matter how combat was done, it always was dangerous.

The sausage scene in "Scapino!" is a prime example.

"I'm hitting Cohen with a sausage, and if I hit him too low, I'll hit his kidneys. If I

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TV scandal relived in 'Quiz Show'

By Gerry Beltz
Staff Reporter

Robert Redford scores again from the director's chair, this time with "Quiz Show."

Before Bob Barker asked anyone to come on down, or before Richard Dawson ever kissed a contestant, America was fixed on a quiz show called "Twenty-One."

However, all was not as perfect as it seemed. As it turned out, "Twenty-One" was rigged.

Winners and losers were decided ahead of time, and the questions and answers were available to the contestants days before the show was aired. It wasn't the smartest person who won week after week; it was the person who got the better ratings.

At the center of the scandal was Charles Van Doren (Ralph Fiennes). He was extremely telegenic, and he had the education to back up his apparent knowledge.

The first chink in the show's armor showed up when the show's producer told Herb Stempel (John Turturro), a "Twenty-One" champion, to take a dive to make room for Van Doren.

Stempel decided to get his due. Many listened to his accusations, but little was done until they were picked up by a young Washington, D.C., attorney named Richard Goodwin (Rob Morrow). He got wind of what was going on and began turning over rocks to find the truth.

Meanwhile, Van Doren was put on a pedestal, was featured on the covers of both Time and Life magazines and got thousands of fan letters. Van Doren soon found that the price of fame and fortune often included a loss of privacy and, in this case, integrity.

All of the movie's actors deliver top-notch performances, both in leading and supporting roles. Christopher McDonald (Daryl Hannah's husband in "Grumpy Old Men")

Quik Facts

Movie: "Quiz Show"

Rating: PG-13

Stars: John Turturro, Rob Morrow, Ralph Fiennes

Director: Robert Redford

Grade: A-

Five Words: Scandal brought to big screen

is rather amusing as Jack Barry, the cardboard, self-absorbed host of "Twenty-One."

Also good is Hank Azaria (a regular voice on "The Simpsons") as Albert Freedman, a producer who has all the ethics of a bag of yak hair.

The standouts, though, are Fiennes and Turturro. Fiennes' Van Doren has rationalized that he is helping America's youth to want to learn, and that result atones for his dishonesty. Fiennes shows his character trying to convince himself that he is doing the right thing when he knows that he is not.

Turturro's Stempel is great, too. He is obsessed not with doing right but with getting what he wants. He doesn't blame just the producers; he also wants Van Doren brought down.

Redford's direction is clean and crisp; the result is another incredible film to add to his already-impressive résumé.

In "Quiz Show," Redford takes moviegoers back to a turning point of America's television fling, a time when they realized — too late — that not everything they saw on the tube was real and pure.

'Specialist' not special

By Joel Strauch
Senior Reporter

"The Specialist" is a fair adventure film that has some great stunts and a lot of explosive action, but the far-fetched plot and mediocre acting make it nothing special.

Obviously, the filmmakers thought that having blockbuster stars Sharon Stone and Sylvester Stallone would excuse them from making the plot smooth and entertaining.

Stallone plays Ray Quick, an explosives specialist who is hired by May Munro (Stone) to assassinate the three men who killed her parents.

Unfortunately, these men are part of a Mafia family that has hired Quick's former boss, Ned Trent (James Woods), as their own personal explosives expert.

A confrontation between Trent and Quick is inevitable and predictable. The rest of the movie has a lot of things getting blown up but few surprises.

Stallone again demonstrates the acting prowess that brought us the many-faceted characters of John Rambo and Rocky Balboa. He grunts and groans his way through another superficial role and makes sure that his butt gets a good showing.

Stone, the other half of this duo, puts in an exceptionally bad performance as Munro, a vengeful woman who has problems with loyalty. Her performance is as transparent as the clothes she wears on screen.

Woods, as the antagonist Trent, gives

See **SPECIALIST** on 10



Courtesy of Hollywood Pictures

Ralph Fiennes, left, and John Turturro, right, star as Charles Van Doren and Herbert Stempel in "Quiz Show," based on the 1950s game show scandal.