

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

Friday, February 17, 1995

Page 9

Romanian revolt explored in play

By Paula Lavigne
Theater Critic

"It" is going to happen. Hidden behind masks of paranoia and fear, Romania waits for it. But when it comes, will they be able to adapt?

It is December 1989, the revolution and the overthrow of the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu.

It is playwright Caryl Churchill's "Mad Forest" presented by the University Theatre Thursday night.

"Mad Forest" mixes reality, symbolism and the supernatural in three parts — before, during and after the revolution. Between the realism, the play breaks for testimonial interviews conducted by Churchill while in Romania.

Romania was a history lesson in fiction that built up to Dec. 21, 1989, when chaos took over. The revolution "of sorts"

changed the face of Romania forever, but no one knew whose revolution — or coup — it was — the people's or the army's.

Much of the pre-revolution "Mad Forest" steps right out of George Orwell's "1984." The interrogation of a peasant by a member of the Securitate, the secret police, shows the intimidation and fear wielded like an iron bar.

The storyline follows mainly two families, and actors often play more than one character. The play is so entrenched in history and politics, however, that sometimes the audience can get lost within a web of words.

Except for a small slump in the second act, the actor's performances were victorious. Each one was a ticking time bomb full of suppressed frustration toward the government and each other.

See MAD FOREST on 10

'Firecracker' fails to ignite any sparks

By John Fulwider
Theater Critic

It's sad when good performers get saddled with bad material.

That was the case at Wednesday's sneak preview of "The Miss Firecracker Contest" at Lincoln Community Playhouse. The performers, sets and lighting design were superior. But the plot left a lot to be desired.

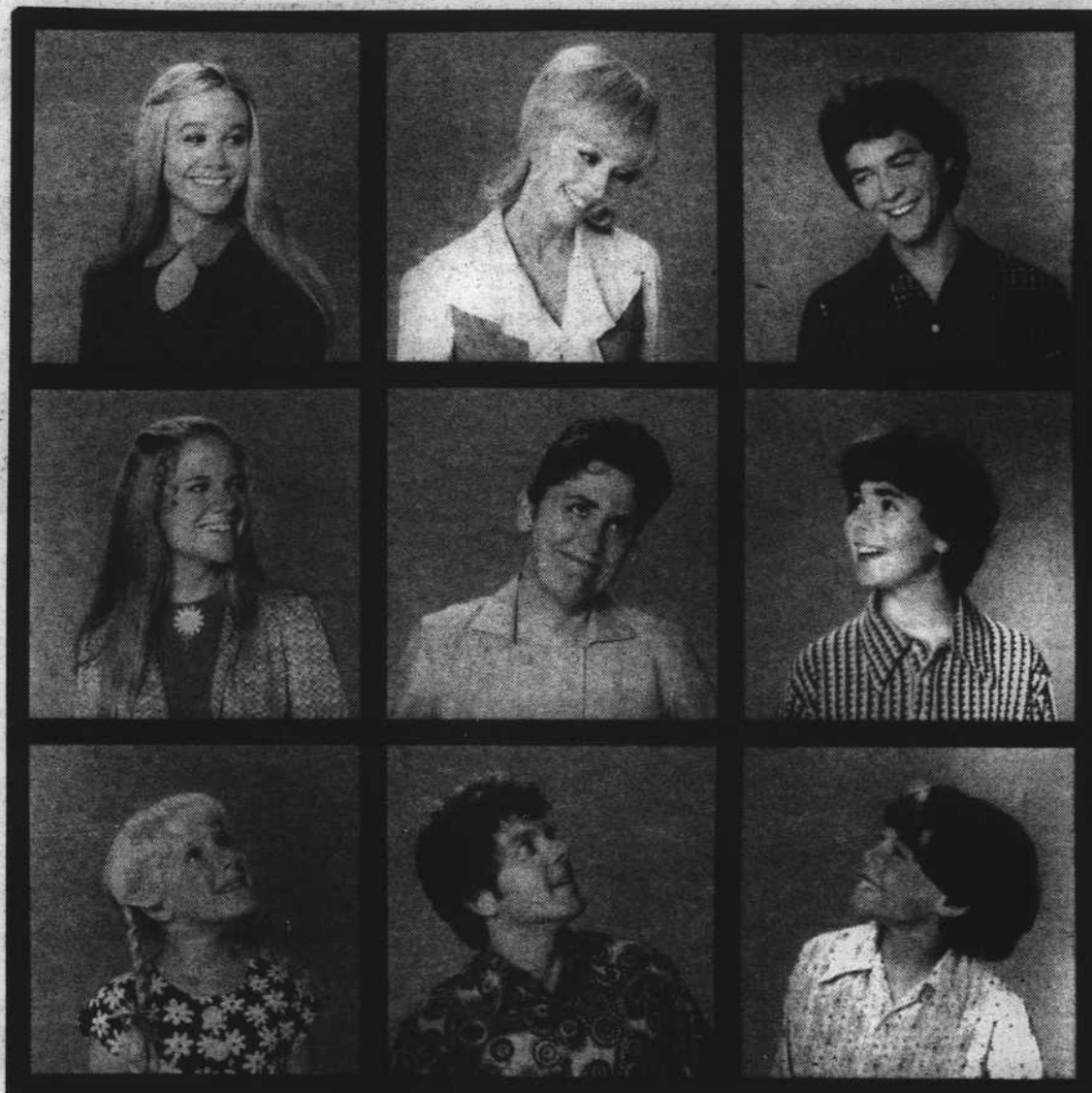
The play, written by Beth Henley and directed by Judith Hart, explores the attempts of Carnelle (Sara Bucy) to prove to the world that she is pretty and talented by winning the Miss Firecracker contest on the Fourth of July.

To win, Carnelle must overcome her reputation as a "hot tamale" following her indiscriminate choice of bedmates and subsequent contraction of a sexually transmitted disease.

As the play opens, Carnelle is practicing the routine she hopes will get her first prize: tap dancing to "The Star-Spangled Banner." Presumably this, along with many other scenes in the play, was supposed to be funny. But this scene, along with many others, simply wasn't funny.

The lack of humor in the play (advertised as "very funny") certainly wasn't the fault of the actors and actresses. With one

See FIRECRACKER on 10



The Brady Bunch jumps to the big screen this weekend.

Photo courtesy of Paramount Pictures

Old, new films fill theaters

From Staff Reports

It's Oscar time, and a busy weekend for Lincoln movie theaters. Three new features arrive today, and a couple of Oscar-nominated films are returning to the first-run screens.

Leading the pack of new films is "Just Cause," starring Sean Connery and Laurence Fishburne. A man is forced to give a confession, and a lawyer (Connery) comes out of his 25-year retirement to get him off the hook, but soon finds himself over his head.

The glut of TV-series movies continues with a big-screen version of "The Brady Bunch," with "Cheers" alum Shelley Long heading up the cast as Carol Brady.

These are the same '70s-type Brady characters we watched as kids, but they are now in a '90s world, facing the same problems — in the same apple-pie way — they did years ago.

For the kids, "Heavyweights" is the third and final new film. This one looks at a camp of heavy-set kids who have always been

picked on, but now they are going to fight back.

The Academy Award nominations came out Tuesday, and some of the more heavily-nominated films are being re-released to the first-run theaters. Two films nominated for Best Picture, Best Director, and Best Supporting Actor have returned; "Quiz Show" is at the Plaza 4, while "Forrest Gump" — which received a whopping 13 nominations — opens at the Lincoln 3 and the East Park 3. "Nell," with Best Actress nominee Jodie Foster, lands at the StarShip 9 today.

'Figaro' a wonderful marriage

By Jeff Randall
Theater Critic

Thursday night's premiere of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln School of Music's production of "The Marriage of Figaro" helped justify the opera's 200-plus years of existence.

The combination of strong acting, beautiful singing and jolting music left the audience at Kimball Recital Hall so entertained that the 3 1/2-hour opera seemed to pass by all too quickly. "Figaro" is one of the best works by one of history's greatest composers, Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, and this production does it justice.

Kenneth Floyd, in the title role of Figaro, was a constant source of energy. Every moment he spent onstage was one worth watching.

Playing opposite Floyd was Tamara Ensrude as his bride-to-be, Susanna. Ensrude's voice and actions instantly demanded attention. Their chemistry was immea-

surable; their connection was undeniable in every moment they spent together on stage, from the opening scene until the closing.

Eric Strong's name seemed very appropriate in his role of the Count, a domineering father figure. His booming voice and large stature fit his character perfectly in the first act. Those same traits came to serve as ironic when he found himself outwitted and outdone by those who he at first controlled.

But despite all of these excellent performances, it was Laurie Lashbrook's character of the Countess that stole the show. Lashbrook did a superb job in revealing the gradual transformation of the Countess from a subservient housewife to a woman in control of her life.

The rest of the cast held its own, often grabbing the audience's attention away from the principal characters and earning it.

The UNL Orchestra, under the direction of Tyler White, provided

beautiful background sounds. But their aural presence was often of such strength that it took the spotlight from the visually accessible performers on the stage.

Stage director William Shomos has done a terrific job in coordinating the potential chaos of frequently intricate scenes. The hectic confusion in the opera's wedding day setting is a difficult thing to control, but Shomos' direction combined with supreme efforts by the entire cast, maintained the necessary focus.

"The Marriage of Figaro" is a top-shelf production. For opera novices, it is an excellent opportunity to discover the art form. For those more familiar, it is an opportunity to see a world-class production with roots that are close to home. The second and final performance will be this Sunday at 8 p.m. in the Kimball Recital Hall. Tickets are available at the Lied Box Office, \$12 for adults, and \$6 for students and seniors.

Polecat plays tonight

From Staff Reports

Polecat will bring their unique personalities and style of music to the stage tonight at Knickerbockers, 901 O St.

Bassist Brendan Blaha describes the band's music as somewhere between emotional melodic punk and rock and roll. The band is currently dividing its time among writing new material, giving Lincoln shows and recording songs for various compilations.

They are focusing most of their attention on their split 7-inch record with Sunbrain, a band from South Carolina.

But for now, the band is content to play the Lincoln clubs. Blaha particularly is looking forward to tonight's show, because it will be the band's first time working with opening act Puggy.

"Jon (Hischke, Puggy bassist) and I are good friends,"

Blaha said, "and I have wanted to play with him for a long time."

On Saturday night, Chicago's Agatha and St. Nickelhead will play at Knickerbockers.

The Zoo Bar, 136 N. 14th St., will feature Gullibanque tonight and Carolyn Wonderland & the Imperial Monkeys Saturday night.

The Sissies will play tonight at Le Cafe Shakes, 1418 O St.

And tonight at the Hurricane, 1118 O St., the L.A. Ramblers will play. Rascal Basket, Wide and Blaster will play at the club Saturday night. Kiss cover band Strutter will play Sunday night at a 19-and-over show.

Lie Awake will play in the Centennial Ballroom at Nebraska Union Saturday night. That show will be an all-ages show, free with a student ID and \$3 without.