

Artist not harping, he's happy with life

By Melissa Dunne
Staff Reporter

With only a three-credit freshman math course standing between him and a Spanish degree, Bryan Bowers dropped out of college.

More than 30 years later, Bowers couldn't be happier about his decision.

"I'm doing what I'm supposed to do," he said.

For Bowers, that means making music, especially if it involves an Autoharp. Bowers will play his Autoharp tonight at 8 at the Joyo Theater, 6102 Havelock Ave. The concert, sponsored by the Lincoln Association for Traditional Arts, is \$8 in advance and \$10 at the door.

Bowers said he found his calling when he started playing guitar between his junior and senior years of college.

"I finally felt like I was doing what I needed to do," he said. "It gave me an inordinate amount of joy."

Then he discovered the Autoharp.

"I went immediately into another zone," he said. "The guitar fell by the wayside. I went from practicing five and six hours a day to practicing 14 and 16 hours a day."

And, Bowers said, his passion for the Autoharp hasn't diminished.

In addition to practicing hours each night, Bowers performs at coffee houses, schools, theaters and music festivals throughout the country and the world.

He said his performances were mixtures of story, song and foolishness. Gospels, fiddle tunes and "songs that told stories with real beginnings, middles and endings" are among his favorites.

"I think fiddle tunes are the end-all-be-all of great melodic music," he said.

He has completed four compact discs and has another four in the making, including Christmas, children's and gospel albums.

Fans of Dr. Demento may be familiar with Bowers' rendition of "The Scotsman Song," written by Mike Cross.

The song, Bowers said, answers the age-old question, "What DOES a Scotsman wear beneath his kilt?"

After five years of winning the stringed-instrument, open category of Frets Magazine's reader's poll, Bowers was inducted into the magazine's First Gallery of the Greats. In 1993, he was the first living inductee into the Autoharp Hall of Fame, joining such Autoharp greats as Maybelle Carter, Sara Carter and Kilby Snow.

Bowers had no regrets about his decision to pursue music 30 years ago. But he did have other regrets.

Twenty years ago, Bowers let his sweetheart, Katharine Russell Thompson, slip away.

Today Bowers' joy is complete. He refers to his current 90-day tour as a celebration tour because on Dec. 25, Bowers made Katharine

See BOWERS on 13



Courtesy of Scott O'Malley & Associates

Autoharpist Brian Bowers will play at the Joyo Theater tonight.



Courtesy of the Starkweathers

The Starkweathers, a Kansas City, Mo., band will play at Knickerbockers Saturday night.

The Starkweathers combine country, rock and politics

By Dawn Brunke
Staff Reporter

The Starkweathers will offer a unique blend of country and rock 'n' roll at Knickerbockers, 901 O St., Saturday night.

Vocalist and bassist Mike Ireland said the band has its political side, something not usually found in country music.

"We didn't really set out to be a political band. But I'm not surprised at it," Ireland said. "It is what we talk about and get angry about."

Their song "Burn the Flag" has probably caused the most controversy and has caught many people's attention. In their hometown

of Kansas City, Mo., members were assaulted by a group of skinheads during a performance of the song.

"The song is not about just going out and burning any flag indiscriminately," Ireland said. "It's a warning against any leader, symbol or group that wants you to follow them blindly instead of thinking for yourself."

The band's name also causes some controversy.

"We didn't choose this name to outrage people or to support what he did, but because we can understand why he did it," he said.

See STARKWEATHERS on 13

'Rosencrantz' crazy, fun — just like death in a box

Characters' confusing conversations are a joy

By Jeff Randall
Theater Critic



The University of Nebraska-Lincoln Theatrical production of Tom Stoppard's "Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead" Thursday night was a wordy and bewildering exercise in chaos.

Tony Heffner and Amy Gaither-Hayes played Rosencrantz and Guildenstern respectively, or was it the other way around? To tell the truth, even the characters themselves weren't sure of their names. This confusion is just one of the many bizarre twists that playwright Stoppard threw into this play, based on the mirror-like servants from William Shakespeare's "Hamlet."

Heffner and Gaither-Hayes both gave terrific performances as Hamlet's confused and philosophical childhood friends. Heffner, who actually was Guildenstern, stole most of the comic moments while Gaither-Hayes took the straight lines generously as Guildenstern.

Rosencrantz and Guildenstern were onstage throughout the play, watching an eclectic gallery of characters from "Hamlet" stroll on and off the stage, in and out of

the audience. The appearances of these assorted characters, although designed to bring life to the otherwise dialogue-loaded performance, were mostly unwelcome distractions from the witty banter between Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Both the performances and the writing in the "action scenes" seemed to break down, as the confusion and rapid movement distracted from Stoppard's strong use of words. Much like Samuel Beckett, Stoppard is an expert in witty and introspective dialogue rather than the typical dramatic fare. It is the scenes in which he attempts to move away from or complicate this dialogue that fail most frequently.

Heffner and Gaither-Hayes did a masterful job with Stoppard's fast-paced words, when given the chance. They were able to hold the audience's attention throughout the performance. Their discussions, covering topics such as the complicated technicalities of probability to the disadvantages and advantages of death if trapped in a box, contained countless genuinely comic lines. Nearly every one of these was delivered with effective timing and presence, making for a highly entertaining and truly funny performance.

And even if you don't enjoy the performance, the pre-show and intermission pre-recorded blues extravaganza is entertainment on its own.

"Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead" will show tonight at 8, and Saturday at 2 p.m. and 8 p.m. in the Studio Theatre, on third floor of the Temple Building. Tickets are \$2 and are available only at the door.