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A&E

Suspense, special effects intriguing in Futz's 'Sorry, Wrong Number'

Second feature, 'Offending the Audience,' not your typical play

By JOHN FULWIDER
Theater Critic

Edge-of-your-seat suspense and an esoteric essay on theater. What more could one ask out of a double feature? Not much out of the first feature, to be sure. It's got drama. It's got emotion. It's got humor. It's got a cliffhanger ending.

And darn fine makeup. Rick Swaink stars as Mrs. Stevenson in his own production of "Sorry, Wrong Number," a short play by Lucille Fletcher.

Reclined on a sofa bed, the invalid Mrs. Stevenson spends the entire play talking on the telephone. She is trying to reach her husband, but the line keeps ringing busy. It is the past, when the operator had to patch calls through to "Transylvania 6-5000" instead of the seven-digit numbers used today.

Somehow, Mrs. Stevenson gets connected to a conversation between two men plotting a murder. A ghastly

murder! Why, how absolutely terrible! She simply must notify the police! So she calls the operator and asks her to try to replicate the mistake that connected her to the murder plot in the first place — instead of calling the police.

To say more about the plot would spoil the surprise. So on to the technical production.

The atmosphere of "Sorry, Wrong Number" is a treat. The program advertises the play as "in the time of radio and the place of black and white movies." And it's just that — everything is in black and white, from the phone to the curtains to Mrs. Stevenson's makeup.

In an unusual but quite appropriate twist, the dialogue is entirely on tape. Mrs. Stevenson's and the other voices have been tweaked a bit to make them sound like they're coming over the telephone line. The actor's lip-synching only occasionally looks like a Godzilla movie and is forgivable. The effect is especially good when the

The Facts

Plays: "Sorry, Wrong Number" and "Offending the Audience"

Stars: Rick Swaink and a cast of thousands

Directors: Rick Swaink, Amy Rohr

audience can hear Mrs. Stevenson's thoughts.

The second feature, "Offending the Audience," defies explanation. It has no plot. It has no characters. It has no setting. It has no dialogue. To reveal anything more than that it was directed by Amy Rohr and written by Peter Handke would ruin it.

So you'll just have to go see it. "Sorry, Wrong Number" and "Offending the Audience" play tonight, Friday night and Saturday night at 8 at Futz Theatre, 124 S. Ninth St. in the Mission Arts Building. Tickets are \$8 and reservations are strongly recommended at 435-6307.

Actors hope audience connects with play

By LIZA HOLTMEIER
Staff Reporter

Any two people in the world can be connected through only six other people. That's the foundation for the UNL Theatre Department's production of "Six Degrees of Separation" by John Guare.

"It's about the idea that all of us on some level are connected to someone else," said Michael Rothmayer, who plays Dr. Fine and has served as associate director for the production. "No one is really a stranger to anybody."

The play revolves around a young con artist, Paul, who enters the lives of Ouisa and Flan Kittredge by claiming to know their son at college. The Kittredges invite Paul to stay the night, and make surprising discoveries the next morning.

The play has been confronted with a variety of challenges throughout production.

Mitchell Strong, who plays Paul,

was hospitalized for a week because of heart problems. Strong said he was feeling better, but is still struggling to overcome the weakness from his illness.

The production has also received a great deal of local media attention because of a full-frontal male nudity scene. Local television stations KETV and KOLN have covered the story.

Cast members are hoping the audience will focus on the overall meaning of the play, rather than the 30-second scene.

"I hope the audience takes what this play is about," Rothmayer said. "It's about art. It's about relationships. If they can get that out of it and get past all the media hubbub, then we'll have done our job."

Colby Coash, who plays the Hustler, said he hoped the audience members would identify with the wants and desires of the play's characters.

Strong agreed and said, "This play is so deep. It could hit home for a lot of people."

The play also has challenged the cast with its distinct and complex characters.

"Finding the rhythm and tempo of these characters has been difficult because these are very slick, sophisticated New Yorkers," Rothmayer said. "That's something that's very foreign to the typical Nebraskan or Midwestern actor."

Strong, though originally from New York, has also been challenged by his character.

"The character I'm playing is so technical," Strong said. "Paul lies a lot and you never know what he's thinking one minute and why he's thinking it."

"Six Degrees of Separation" runs tonight through Saturday and April 15 through 19 in the Howell Theatre of the Temple Building. Tickets are \$6 for students, \$9 for faculty, staff and senior citizens and \$10 for all others. Tickets can be ordered by calling the box office at 472-2073.

Buscemi takes on many roles in 'slice-of-life' film

By CLIFF HICKS
Film Critic

All that acting talent — and he can write and direct, too.

After actor Steve Buscemi had done just about everything, from little bit roles (look quick and you'll catch him in "The Hudsucker Proxy" and "Pulp Fiction") to strange films gone mainstream (by now, most people have seen "Fargo"), he wanted a change of pace.

"Tree's Lounge" stars Buscemi — in his writing/directing debut — as the main character, Tommy. And Buscemi's talent in both these new jobs is just as exemplary as his acting talent.

Tommy is an out-of-work mechanic, and at the beginning of the film, he appears to be the kind of person any of us could become with enough bad luck — unemployed, living above a bar and filching money from his family.

As the film progresses, and more and more of Tommy's past is revealed, things subtly start to develop a different tone.

The unusual thing about "Tree's

Lounge" is that the film really doesn't judge anyone, simply letting the audience tag along for a section of these people's lives.

Part Raymond Carver, part Tennessee Williams, the story is driven by characters. Traces of Carveresque dialogue litter the film, as people talk in choppy, back-and-forth conversations.

The characters really tell the whole story, though. Their thoughts, their hopes, their dreams — all of this about Tommy, and some of the other characters, is revealed through them. The audience gets no insights other than what the characters allow.

The cast is a virtual who's who of indie film actors, the list too long to name. All of them put in great performances, and cameos by such big names as Samuel L. Jackson help, too.

If the film has one flaw, though, it is the ending, which drops one final piece of information and closes. It's haunting, but thinking back, it seems like Buscemi wanted it that way — not a movie, but a slice of life. Still, it seems the slightest bit awkward.

"Tree's Lounge" is not an active film, so viewers should not expect to

The Facts

Film: "Trees Lounge"

Stars: Steve Buscemi, Anthony LaPagella

Director: Steve Buscemi

Rating: R (Language, Violence)

Grade: A-

Five Words: "Trees Lounge" is subtle classic

go in and see car chases, shoot'em-ups or notorious mobsters. It's a nice, quiet film about realistic people in a realistic world.

It's a film about hope and depression, love and separation, innocence and cynicism, alcohol and ice cream. It's a film to watch by yourself to feel sad, or to hold someone's hand and be happy that you aren't in the film. Overall, "Tree's Lounge" is a fantastic film that should be caught before it vanishes.

"Tree's Lounge" shows tonight through Saturday and April 17 through 20 at the Mary Rieppa Ross Film Theater.