

# 'Mind' meditates on machismo

By LIZA HOLTMEIER  
Senior Reporter

## Theater

The frozen haunches of a dead deer lay on the stage.

The man who shot the deer struts with pride around his kill, as women gasp in horror nearby at the unnecessary death. The deer is skinned, but the meat is never eaten.

This scene, while common for the families of zealous Nebraska hunters, is actually from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln theater department's production of Sam Shepard's "A Lie of the Mind." Director Paul Steger says it is representative of what he calls the "purposeless pioneering spirit that still exists in America."

"Shepard talks about violence and machismo," Steger said. "He says it's silly to question whether or not machismo should or should not exist. It exists. The question is how you choose to live with it."

"A Lie of the Mind," which opens tonight, explores the changing roles of American men and women and the consequences of breaking away from tradition. It deals with the psychological and physical savagery that exists in many relationships by depicting characters trapped in a cycle of conflicts.

The play revolves around two families connected by the marriage

of one couple's son to the other's daughter. The play begins with the daughter, Beth, being tended to by her parents after a savage beating from her husband has left her brain damaged.

Her husband, Jake, sends his brother, Frankie, to Montana to see if she is dead or alive. Beth's father, mistaking Frankie for a poacher, shoots him in the leg and takes him prisoner. While Frankie begins to fall in love with Beth in Montana, Jake is nursed by his possessive mother back in California.

"Shepard tends to be a rather intense experience," said cast member Robert Hurst. "At the beginning of the play, (the characters) are already at the end of their ropes. They're in such dire straits that they don't really have time to reflect on things. They just do it."

Steger said this lack of reflection time contributed to the realism of the characters.

"It's the best acting exercise there is," Steger said. "It's the closest thing to real human behavior you can get. In life, you usually don't have time to think when you're responding to others."

In order to help communicate the play's emotions and themes, the production relies heavily on music.

"All music touches on things we can't put into words," Hurst said. "The music in this show touches that indescribable thing the actors can't communicate alone."

Steger described the music as American and said it includes Tracy Chapman, the Indigo Girls, the Red Clay Ramblers - who were featured in the original Broadway production - and Patsy Cline.

"It's this happy-go-lucky music that reinforces the idea that home is a haven," Steger said. "But in truth, home can be even more twisted than the outside world."

While the show raises a number of questions about relationships and preconceived notions of home and family, Steger said, Shepard did not necessarily provide the answers.

"The show is shattering because the fact is that we don't have any answers either," Steger said.

Hurst added that the audience should feel as if they have been kicked around like the characters.

"What Shepard wants is a gut experience, not a mind experience," Hurst said.

"A Lie of the Mind" opens tonight at 8 in the Studio Theatre. Tickets for the performance are \$5. The show continues Saturday and Nov. 4-8 at 8 p.m. Tickets are \$6 for students, \$9 for UNL faculty and staff and senior citizens, and \$10 for all others. Call (402) 472-2073 for reservations.

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# 'Secret Garden' blossoms locally

By LIZA HOLTMEIER  
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## Theater

For 3½ months, Robin McKercher worked on Broadway helping to make "The Secret Garden," a Tony Award-winning production.

For the last two months, he has worked as a director and set designer to bring the same passion and glory to the Lincoln Community Playhouse's production of the same musical.

This weekend, audiences will see the results. "The Secret Garden" opens Friday at the Lincoln Community Playhouse, 2500 S. 56th St.

McKercher said his current work was directly influenced by the time he spent as a painter for the original Broadway production. There, he worked extensively with scenic designer Heidi Landesman, who won a Tony for her work.

"It's one of those experiences that you look back on and say, 'Wow! I can't believe that I did that!'" McKercher said.

The Broadway production garnered two other Tony Awards besides Landesman's in 1991: Daisy Eagan, who played Mary Lennox, won Featured Actress in a Musical and Marsha Norman, who wrote the book and lyrics, won Best Book for a Musical.

The show was also up for Best Musical against "Miss Saigon" (by the creators of "Les Misérables"), "Once On This Island," and "Will Rogers Follies."

### Doing it his way

McKercher said the biggest challenge of working on the LCP production was facing the fear that it might

not live up to his expectations.

"I think the biggest challenge was knowing that I could be disappointed while trying to make my dream of the show come alive," McKercher said.

These fears were quickly calmed after casting for the show began, McKercher said. About 120 girls auditioned only for the lead role of Mary Lennox.

The part went to Anna White, who has appeared in seven previous LCP productions.

"Daisy Eagan (who played the part on Broadway) would have serious competition with Anna," McKercher said. "She inspires the whole company. From the minute the curtain goes up to the minute it goes down, she involves everyone."

"Anna is very talented," agreed Jim McKain, who plays Archibald. "She gives everything she has to the cast and the audience."

McKercher added that the LCP production was stronger than the Broadway production in many ways.

"There were some kinks that never got worked out in the Broadway show," McKercher said. "The characters were two-dimensional and the inclusion of the dreamers made the action seem disjointed."

McKercher tried to improve these areas for the LCP production. His first step was to get the script from the first touring company production of the musical rather than the from the Broadway show.

He also tried to make the characters more sympathetic.

"I want the audience to feel like they are watching themselves," McKercher said. "These people are full of sorrow, yet they have that spark

of life that can transform everything."

Cast members said McKercher invigorated them with his passion.

"He has so much enthusiasm," explained Danny Johnson, who plays Fakir. "He helps the cast understand and appreciate the complexity of this show."

### No room for gloom


The musical is based on the novel of the same name by Frances Hodgson Burnett. It tells the story of Mary Lennox, a recently orphaned girl sent to live in her embittered Uncle Archibald's oppressive house on the Yorkshire moors. Still mourning the death of his wife, Archibald wants nothing to do with Lennox and leaves her in the servant's care.

At first spoiled and unruly, Mary begins to change when she experiences the joy of bringing her dead aunt's secret garden back to life.

Mary also makes friends with her young cousin, Colin, who is bedridden because he believes he is dying. Through their experiences in the garden both children bring life back to the gloomy estate as they find new strength in themselves.


The story and the musical have the same basic plot line and characters. The musical, however, focuses more on the relationships between Archibald, his brother, Neville, his wife, Lily, and the ghosts of those who died of cholera in India.

"The Secret Garden" will run Sunday, Nov. 6-9, 13-16 and 20-23. Curtain times are 7:30 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays; 2 p.m. Nov. 2, 16 and 23; and 7 p.m. Nov. 9. Tickets are \$23 for nonmember adults on Thursdays and Sundays and \$25 on Fridays and Saturdays. Tickets are \$9 for students. Call (402) 489-7529 for reservations.



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