

Play's humanity falls flat

By LIZA HOLTMEIER
Theater Critic

Theater

The audience at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln theater department's production of "A Lie of the Mind" fared about as well as the play's characters. After three hours of violence and insanity, both groups left the theater confused and beaten.

The play, written by Sam Shepard, begins with Jake telling his brother, Frankie, that he may have killed his wife, Beth. Frankie travels to Montana to check on his sister-in-law's condition while he and Jake's mother proceed to lock Jake up in his old bedroom at home. Meanwhile, Beth's brother, Mike, watches over Beth until she is transported to her parents' home to recover.

The main problem with the production is that many of the actors fail to communicate the complexity of these characters. While Shepard accentuates the characters' eccentricity, he depicts them as essentially human in their trials and tribulations.

Consequently, the audience should have mixed emotions about these characters. They should love them for one reason and hate them for another. Unfortunately, the actors resorted to one-dimensional portrayals, leaving the audience members to follow their initial reaction to the characters. Only the women come out of this play with any semblance of humanity.

Eric Moyer, who plays the paranoid, wife-beating husband Jake, begins the play with an honest,

poignant portrayal of a man torn between pain and rage. The actor allows his character's inner turmoil to manifest through his body and voice. But as the play progresses, Moyer loses the contrasts of his character. He becomes more and more evil and less and less human. By the end of the play, the audience no longer identifies with any part of his character.

Like Moyer, Ryan Johnston begins the show with a truthful depiction of Frankie. In the scenes with Moyer, he gives shape to the complex relationship between Frankie and his brother. Once his character is separated from Jake, though, Johnston loses his link to Frankie's motives. Thrown into the pool of insanity that is Beth's house, Johnston's character struggles to maintain his allegiance to Jake. Johnston fails to solidify this struggle, and his final outcry seems ill-founded.

Moirá Reilly gives the best performance in the show as Lorraine, Jake's protective mother. A life of hardship and tragedy has made this woman hard herself. But Reilly does not allow this character to become a wall of discipline and anger. Through her spontaneity and diverse range of emotion, she gives the most real and human portrayal in the play, allowing the audience to see the pain and torture underneath the hard exterior.

Ken Paulman gives another of the play's one-dimensional portrayals as Baylor, Beth's gruff, insensitive

father. Stooped and cranky with a biting tone, Paulman's character remains stagnant to the end, even during his energetic show of patriotism.

Robert Hurst plays Mike, Beth's loving and smothering brother. Hurst's weakness is that he begins the play too violently. From the moment the lights go up, he is already impatient with Beth's talk of her feelings for Jake. Consequently, he has nowhere to go. He does not allow the audience to see Mike's progression from protective brother to violent revenge-seeker. The contrasts that should be evident between Mike at the beginning of the show and at the end fail to materialize in Hurst's depiction.

Erin McLaine's performance as Meg, Beth's flighty-yet-observant mother, is another of the show's few highlights. Though her character may seem like a flake, McLaine lends the sensitivity and compassion needed to humanize the play. She also provides the comedy needed to break the play's tension.

Kristin Hensley gives a solid performance as Beth. She portrays the character's conflicting emotions and creates a real rapport with McLaine's character. Unfortunately, the men in the play give her little off of which to play, and she seems to lack depth when in their presence.

"A Lie of the Mind" continues Tuesday through Saturday at 8 p.m. in the Studio Theatre in the Temple Building. Tickets are \$6 for students, \$9 for faculty/staff/senior citizens and \$10 for all others. Call (402) 472-2073 for reservations.

Dance majors fight to save degree from possible end

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major. "There had been a similar rumor in the spring, but we thought everything had been taken care of," Schwenger said. "I was totally not expecting it this time."

In response to the recent speculation, UNL dance majors have written a letter addressed to art supporters at large. The letter states that a proposal has been made by the College of Fine and Performing Arts to cut the dance major.

Asking art supporters to write letters to the chancellor and vice chancellor of UNL supporting the dance program, it hangs on a bulletin board outside Mabel Lee Hall 304, where dance students regularly practice. An accompanying note says the formal letter will be sent Nov. 5 "to arts supporters across the country in hopes of saving our program."

Hofeditz responded by saying that no formal proposal has been made.

"As soon as there is something substantial, we will notify the faculty and students," Hofeditz said.

The one and only

The UNL dance program is currently the only one in Nebraska offering a dance major. If the program is cut, prospective students like Prettyman will have to go out of state to major in dance.

Prettyman said if the College of Fine and Performing Arts cuts the major, she might turn to her other top

choice, the University of Kansas.

"It would be easier to make the decision if the UNL program was going to continue to grow," Prettyman said. "I would like to stay close to home."

The UNL dance program began in the 1920s as part of the physical education department. The original curriculum included classes in folk and interpretive dance. Later, classes in rhythm fundamentals, clogging, square dancing and social dancing were added.

Dudley Ashton was responsible for implementing the dance major during the dance explosion of the 1960s. Ashton first implemented it through the College of Arts and Sciences and then helped move the major to Teachers College. As the program matured, it was enlarged to include modern, ballet, jazz, tap, and ethnic dance as well as folk, social and square dance. In 1983, the dance major joined the department of theater arts.

While cutting the dance major mostly would affect the university community, it could also affect the entire Lincoln dance community by eliminating a strong central force locally dedicated to increasing dance's exposure, Schwenger said.

However, despite the rumors and the repercussions of their becoming reality, Schwenger says morale among the dance majors remains high.

"Right now, we're trying to be strong and stick together," she said. "We feel like we're one against the world."

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