

# Play keeps young AIDS victim's memory living

By LIZA HOLTMEIER  
Senior Reporter

With the sagacity of a wise man and the energy of an 8-year-old, Benjamin created worlds out of his drawings, worlds where he could escape the reality of being HIV-positive.

For a while, Benjamin, a hemophiliac, died of AIDS-related complications in 1987. His father, David Saar, immortalized him in "The Yellow Boat," a play the University of Nebraska-Lincoln chapter of Students for Camp Heartland will present this week.

The production, co-sponsored by the UNL Department of Theatre Arts and Dance, will open Thursday at 7 p.m. at the WSI Hall, 1430 N. 10th St. All proceeds from the show will benefit Camp Heartland and the Nebraska AIDS Project.

Eva Nekovar, the show's producer and the president of UNL's Students for Camp Heartland, decided to mount a production of the play last spring during her Children's Theater class.

"This is the first play I've ever cried at while reading," Nekovar

## Theater

said. "I wanted to see the play performed here and to help with fundraising for Camp Heartland."

Camp Heartland is the nation's largest summer camp program devoted to the needs of children impacted by HIV/AIDS. Through charitable donations, the project subsidizes 100 percent of the transportation and camp costs for the children. Last summer, Camp Heartland held three one-week-long camps, two in a St. Louis suburb and one in Malibu, Calif.

Nekovar worked as a counselor at the St. Louis camps.

"It's the best thing I've ever done in my entire life," Nekovar said. "These children are amazing. They're adults because they've experienced so much in their lives."

Bolstered by her experiences with Camp Heartland, Nekovar returned to Lincoln determined to see the production to fruition.

She approached Timothy Scholl, director of UNL's Theatreix season, to direct the show.

"This is my type of play," Scholl said. "It has a story to tell, and it

has a unique way of telling it. Though it's theater for young adults, it's not just for kids. It's for older people and everyone in between."

Together, Nekovar and Scholl cast the play with UNL students and a high school student.

They chose Jude Hickey, a junior theater arts major, to play Benjamin.

"It's been challenging to play an 8-year-old who is also a hemophiliac and HIV-positive," Hickey said. "I can't manipulate the audience. I have to just be."

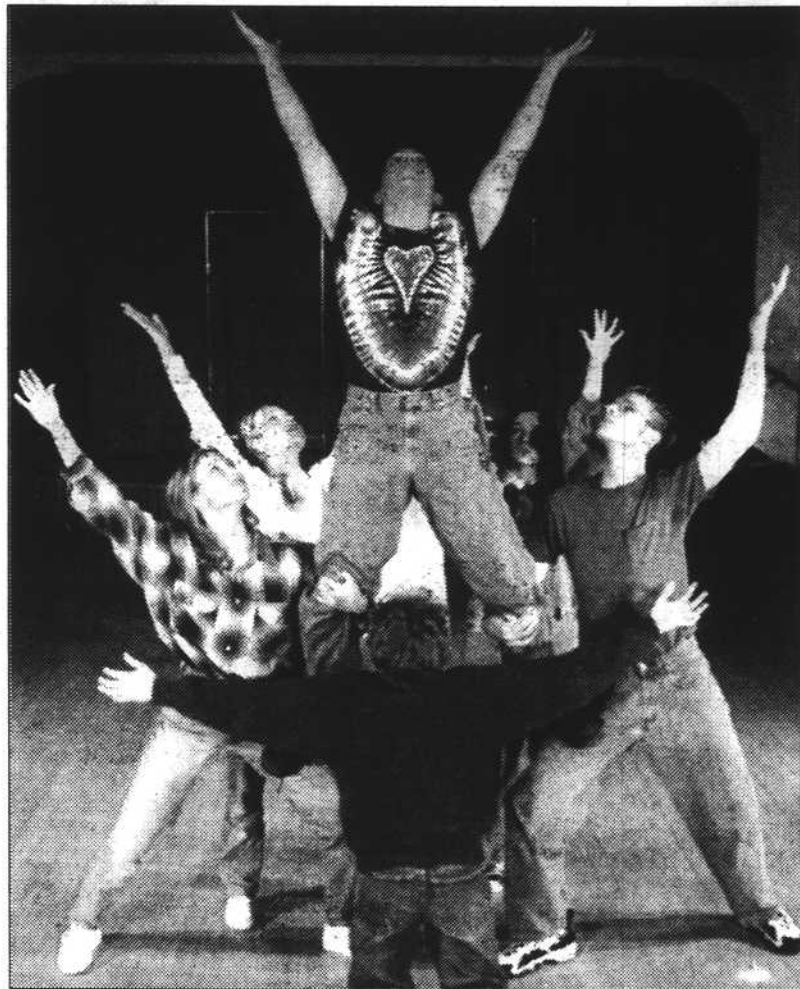
Scholl said subtlety was also the key in his directing.

"The first instinct is to approach (the play) differently because it deals with children," Scholl said. "But this play is not about death. It's a celebration of life. Benjamin has lived more in his eight years, four months and 29 days than I have in my 28 years."

Nekovar also emphasized the show's celebratory tone.

"You will be bawling your eyes out and then, two seconds later, the funniest things happen," Nekovar said. "This play is not about Benjamin's death. We want you to walk out with a smile on your face."

"The Yellow Boat" runs Thursday through Sunday at 7 p.m. and Sunday at 2 p.m. at the WSI Hall, 1430 N. 10th St. Tickets are \$5, and a half-hour discussion will follow each performance.



Nikki Fox/DN  
ACTORS STEPHANIE DEEVER (from left), Heather Harrison, Jude Hickey, Charlie Derr, Seth Swink and Anders Ukinski perform "The Yellow Boat" in the WSI Hall Tuesday.

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## 'User-friendly' opera opens tonight

By LIZA HOLTMEIER  
Senior Reporter

## Theater

Opera Omaha opens its season tonight with "Don Pasquale," a comic opera of mistaken identities by Gaetano Donizetti.

The opera begins with Don Pasquale, a rich old bachelor, thwarting his young nephew's plans to marry Norina, a lovely widow. Pasquale then masterminds his own wedding to a youthful beauty. Norina seeks revenge by dressing in disguise and pretending to wed Pasquale. She then proceeds to make his life miserable. Pasquale eagerly accepts the suggestion of an annulment, and his nephew gallantly offers to wed Norina instead.

Hal France, conductor and Opera Omaha's artistic director,

said the opera continued the company's attempt to broaden its audience.

"I think this is a very user-friendly season," France said. (This opera) is a very simple and lovely comedy taken to a higher level. It's a great introduction to the art form."

Liesl Jeffrey, Opera Omaha's marketing director, says the atmosphere of the Rose Blumkin Performing Arts Center, where the opera is performed, will add to the work's "friendliness."

"The Rose is a very intimate setting," Jeffrey said. "The back seats are very close to the stage. Since the opera is sung in English, the audience should feel a strong connection with it."

France added that Opera

Omaha's production of "Don Pasquale" was different because it is set in the American Old West.

Opera Omaha decided to change the setting after France saw a similar production with sets by David Gately at the Chautauqua Opera in New York. Opera Omaha hired Gately to stage-manage its show.

"I find the set to be wonderfully refreshing," France said. "It fits into the theme we started with 'Opera Goes West,' and the idea of opera's American roots. The opera is a whimsical finale to that idea."

"Don Pasquale" runs Wednesday and Friday at 7:30 p.m. and at 2 p.m. Sunday at the Rose Blumkin Performing Arts Theater. Single tickets run from \$10 to \$50, but students receive a 10 percent discount. For reservations, call (402) 346-7372.

## Travolta, Cage come to video in 'Face/Off'

By GERRY BELTZ  
Film Critic

This wasn't exactly the best week for new releases, but at least one decent film was in the bunch, as was a straight-to-video Disney flick sure to please the kiddies while the adults wrap the presents and stuff the turkey. The pick of the week is a comedy and was chosen for the recent "retro-flicks" season sponsored by the Douglas Theatre Co. All titles were released on Tuesday.

"Face/Off" (rated R) - Director John Woo ("Broken Arrow") once again brings his wild style of directing into play with this action-junkie flick.

FBI agent Sean Archer switches places with terrorist Castor Troy (Nicolas Cage) through an experimental technique where their faces are literally removed from the skull

and switched. However, when Troy comes out of his coma and assumes Archer's identity, the real ride begins.

Realistic? Not a chance. Lots of fun? Absolutely. "Face/Off" is the film to get this weekend.

"Gone Fishin'" (PG-13) - Ugh. I've had vaccinations that lasted longer than this one did at the box office.

Joe and Gus (Joe Pesci and Danny Glover) are a couple of buddies who go on a fishing trip, but end up facing one disaster after another, often with rather comedic results.

The plot and script are thin, but the chemistry between Pesci and Glover is pretty good. Flip a coin.

"Beauty and the Beast: The Enchanted Christmas" (all ages) - Hey, Disney didn't have to try to get Robin Williams back for this one; maybe it has a chance of succeeding! The whole gang is back, though

for some reason are back in their original forms of clocks and whatnot. Our antagonist this time around? An evil pipe organ, voiced by Tim Curry.

The kids will like it. Isn't that a good enough reason to rent it?

PICK OF THE WEEK - With all the classic films that have been running through Lincoln over the past four weeks, it would only seem natural to go pick up "Dead Men Don't Wear Plaid."

Steve Martin plays Rigby Reardon, a gumshoe on the case of a missing cheese maker, and along the way (through some wonderful editing and splicing) he is helped - and hindered - in his pursuits by the likes of Humphrey Bogart, Charles Laughton and Lana Turner.

The film is an absolute riot, and also stars Rachel Ward and Carl Reiner, who directed the film.

Check it out.

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