

PI The Player

Producer Robert Shapiro visits UNL to lecture

BY LIZA HOLTMEIER
Staff writer

From the mail room to the corner office. From the chorus line to the star.

It's the quintessential Hollywood story. The talented, ambitious unknown uses his or her talent to climb to the top.

Robert Shapiro, who began his career in the mail room of the William Morris Agency and became known as an international film producer, has lived this Hollywood plot.

After rising through the ranks at William Morris and working for Warner Bros., Shapiro became the head of his own production company, producing movies like "Pee-wee's Big Adventure" and "Empire of the Sun."

Shapiro will present three lectures discussing his career experiences to the Lincoln public Friday. The lectures, which are part of the Ron and Chris Harris Lectureship Program, will be presented in the auditorium of the Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery.

Shapiro started his showbiz career after graduating from the University of Southern California with a degree in business. His first job was in the mailroom of the largest and oldest talent and literary agency in the world — the William Morris Agency. The agency, whose clients include stars like Arnold Schwarzenegger, Whitney Houston and Tom Clancy,

has offices around the world.

While employed with William Morris, Shapiro quickly climbed the agency's corporate ladder, becoming head of its tele-

vision talent department and vice president of its motion picture department.

In 1968, William Morris offered the 28-year-old Shapiro a job as managing director of its London office. Shapiro took the job, sold his house and packed up his wife and two kids.

thought, "If it doesn't work out, it will be the best vacation that I could never afford," Shapiro said.

Shapiro said his time in London was spent at the tail-end of London's swinging era. The movie and television business was flourishing, and the London fashion world was rivaling that of France.

"It was a happening time," Shapiro said. "It was an eye-opener for me."

While in London, Shapiro made connections with some of the entertainment business's biggest stars and continued to hone his representation skills.

In 1974, Shapiro moved back to the United States to become head of William Morris' international motion picture department. Shapiro stayed there for two years, counseling writers and directors about their material and how to get it made. But he soon tired of serving as an adviser.

"I realized I was sending my clients to all these great, exotic locations, and I only got to visit from time to time," Shapiro said. "I decided I wanted to exercise more of my creative juices."

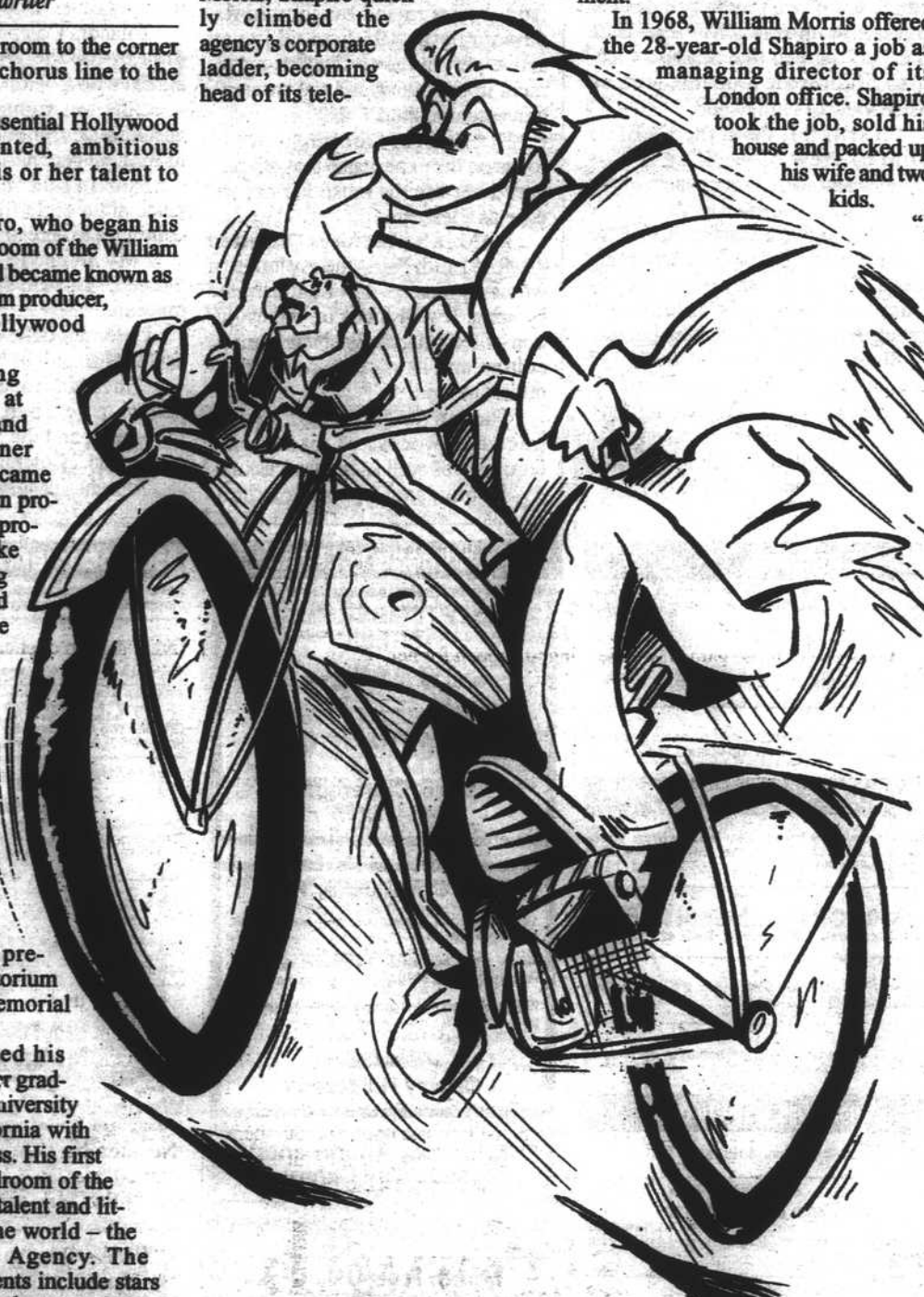
In 1976, Shapiro left William Morris without a contract or deal, determined to venture into the world of producing.

Shapiro formed his own production company — Robert Shapiro Productions. At the same time, Warner Bros. asked him to become its head of production. Shapiro served as president of Warner Bros. Theatrical Production Division for six years.

Some films the company produced during his tenure include "Hooper," the "Superman" series, "Private Benjamin" and "Chariots of Fire."

At Warner Bros., Shapiro maintained his close relationship with the writers, directors and actors.

"You still have to be conscious of the talent and be able to convince the



MATT HANEY/DN

Please see **PLAYER** on 10

Nothing held back by "Friends and Neighbors"

BY JEFF RANDALL
Senior editor

Movie Review

Neil LaBute is a sick man. The writer and director of 1997's "In the Company of Men" and the newly released "Your Friends and Neighbors" seems to be building a career out of films that make audiences squirm in their seats.

Filled with brash and uncompromising dialogue spat out by characters who are practically beyond redemption, LaBute's mastery of immorality is unrivaled in contemporary film.

But whereas the characters in "In the Company of Men" were based on the most extreme manifestations of sexism and cruelty, "Your Friends and Neighbors" is more subtle in its depiction of depravity, filled with characters who are, as the film's title implies, more realistic and everyday.

"Your Friends and Neighbors" builds its edginess around the suspicion that everyone in the audience has at least a hint of each of the character's flaws.

The film centers on two couples — Mary (Amy

Brenneman) and Barry (Aaron Eckhart); and Terri (Catherine Keener) and Jerry (Ben Stiller) — who are torn apart by both their infidelity and the sexual attitudes within their relationships. Meanwhile, Cary (Jason Patric) plays the cold-hearted bachelor who critiques their behavior, despite the fact that his own actions make those of his friends appear downright innocent.

And as far as a plot, that is about as far as "Your Friends and Neighbors" reaches. For the most part, this film is driven by the characters' conversations — whether they take place in a locker room, the workplace or the bedroom. And action takes a back seat to astute observation.

And the realism that drives these conversations is the most winning aspect of the film. Unlike the shallow realism of Quentin Tarantino and his legions of followers — who seem to believe realism should involve minute details but little depth — LaBute offers characters who divulge minute details in discussions

about the most personal of matters: namely love, hate and sex as a manifestation of both.

Hearing Jason Patric's character justify his horrific acts of degradation and manipulation toward women as a common course of events may sound extreme to the point of hyperbole, but it's also brutally honest.

And that honesty carries throughout "Your Friends and Neighbors." Whereas most directors would take a boys-will-be-boys attitude toward something as meaningless as a "who was your best lay" discussion, LaBute manages to uncover the seedy dishonesty that usually accompanies such talk.

The result is a film that plays out like a nephew of Stephen Soderbergh's "sex, lies and videotape," an unnerving work with unsettling characters and meticulously drawn-out moments that linger long after one has left the theater.

Neil LaBute is a sick man. But he makes illness into an emotionally riveting experience. And that not only makes the characters of "Your Friends and Neighbors" worthwhile, it may even offer them redemption.

Not bad for \$5.

Music



Hole
Celebrity Skin
DGC Records
Grade: C+

A song on Hole's latest release offers this food for thought: "If the world is so wrong — yeah you can take it all with one song."

True or not, that one song isn't on the album.

What is on the "Celebrity Skin," however, is a collection of 12 intricately written and luxuriously produced total pop songs. Gone are the days of power chords and screaming punk-style anthems about high school cliques. Arrived are clean and stringy chord progressions layered over obscure effects and noises.

The angst of "Live Through This" seldom rears its ugly head and when it does, it just isn't as ugly anymore. Songs like "Reasons to be Beautiful" and "Playing Your Song" seem to emanate a desire for decadence but end up sounding entirely out of place.

However, Hole's attempt to bury grunge rock with Courtney Love's late husband works throughout the album. The band has adapted to playing pop songs quite well and, though rebellious rock anthems like "Rock Star" and "Violet" are nowhere to be found, there are a number of tunes that take their places with a softer tone.

Songs like "Awful," "Boys on the Radio" and "Heaven Tonight" will have teen-age girls dancing in front of their mirrors like Molly Ringwald before you know it. They'll be shakin' around as they squeeze their teddy bears and smile at Johnny's yearbook picture, dancing their way into puberty.

Man I hope things work out between those crazy kids.

The lighthearted feel is kept throughout much of the album; and the lyrics, though generally dealing with sad topics, seem to indicate singer Courtney Love's desire to be happy. The feel-goodness of the album is almost sickening at times, and moms everywhere may even enjoy the noise coming from their daughters' rooms this time around.

Celebrity Skin starts off with the album's title track and first single. The song has a Veruca Salt feel to it, combining a few cleaned up power chords mixed with a lighter sing-songy verse.

The second track, "Awful," is by far the best song on the album. Love's vocals actually sound good and give the impression she can sing (don't worry, some of her other songs prove she can't). It features a catchy verse melody and rhyme scheme with an even more catchy chorus.

From here the album gets a little caught up in the effects, and the next few songs are somewhat

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