

Tribute to Teena

'Story' kicks off Ross film festival

BY SARAH BAKER
Senior staff writer

Intolerance, hatred and confusion surround us every day.

The feelings are especially strong for members of the gay and lesbian community, whose demands for equality still go largely unheard.

Only when the hatred swirls out of hand and leads to murder does the public seem to pay attention.

Before the homophobia-inspired murder of 21-year-old Matthew Shepard in Wyoming almost two weeks ago, Nebraska suffered its own tragic murder of a member of the gay community.

"The Brandon Teena Story," a documentary that focuses on a hate crime committed right here in Nebraska, is the first of the films being shown in The Return of the Gay/Lesbian Film Festival, which begins today on the University of Nebraska-Lincoln campus.

The film's directors, Susan Muska and Greta Olafsdottir, will be in Lincoln at the Bailey Library, 2nd floor Andrews Hall, tomorrow from 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. to discuss the making of "The Brandon Teena Story."

Tonight's showing of the film at the Mary Riepma Ross Film Theater in UNL's Sheldon Memorial Art Gallery marks the Nebraska premiere of the film.

The film festival is part of the celebration of Gay and Lesbian History Month and runs today through Nov. 1.

The documentary tells the true

story of what happened when 20-year-old Brandon Teena arrived in Falls City in 1993.

Teena became popular in the small rural town, earning himself a group of friends and even a girlfriend. But three weeks later Teena was brutally beaten and raped when two of his acquaintances found out he was actually a she.

A week later, these same two offenders murdered Teena, along with a woman and another man with whom he sought refuge in the days after the beating.

The film centers around the homophobia and intolerance that seems to be becoming more prevalent in the rural communities of the United States.

Muska, one of the two directors of the documentary, said the film focuses on the last, tragic weeks of Teena's life.

"What we wanted to look at was the attitudes that enabled this to happen in the first place," Muska said. "We wanted to see what the effect of something like this is."

Dan Ladely, director of the Ross Film Theater, said this film was chosen as the festival's opener for many reasons.

"The main reason was because it is shot entirely in Nebraska," Ladely said. "But also because these (hate crimes) are happening all over the country, and people have to start paying attention to this."

"I think this is a good way to educate as to how tragic and serious this sort of thing is," Ladely said. "When it happens, it affects us all and tears apart the fabric of our society."

With the Oct. 13 murder of



"WAVELENGTHS" IS DIRECTED by Patribha Parmar, whose work includes "Piece of Rage," a collaborative effort with Alice Walker.

Shepard, a University of Wyoming student and the victim of a crime much like the one in the film, the opening of the film seems an appropriate, if not sad, tribute.

Most believe Shepard's openly gay lifestyle was the reason for his murder. Shepard was lured out of a bar, brutally beaten and tied to a fence post to die.

The timeliness of the opening has not been lost on the festival's organizers, Ladely said, and the response on the UNL campus has been positive so far. "There may be some who are upset, but they haven't surfaced," Ladely said. "But I think the people who are upset are the ones who will stay away."

Ladely said he hopes a film like this has the potential to reach intolerant people, but he didn't know if it was enough to change their minds.

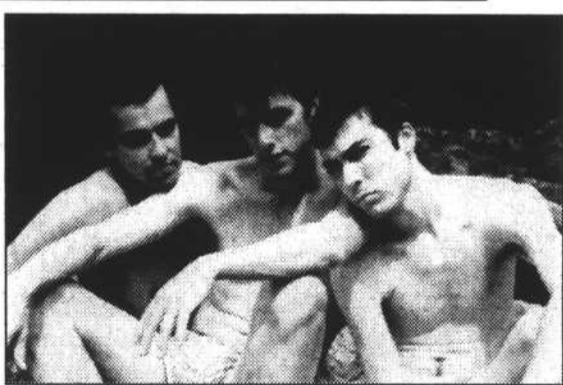
"If people who are intolerant could see films and open their minds a bit, I think we could make a lot of progress," he said. "It takes a tragic thing to happen to make people more aware, but at least, in the end, something good — that awareness — can come out of it."

The film, which has been critically acclaimed around the world, was the winner of the 1998 Teddy Award for Best Documentary Film at the Berlin Film Festival.

The quality of the film itself is another strong point, Ladely said. Although the movie was made on a low budget, he said the filmmakers made the best of the resources they had, turning out an "extraordinary" product.

Muska said she also believes the film will be well-received in Nebraska but realizes some may have a hard time with it.

"When we were in Nebraska working on the film, people wanted us to



ONLY 10 MINUTES IN LENGTH, "SPF 2000" runs with a collection of short films in "Boys in Love 2."

show some of the more positive aspects of the state," she said. "We liked Nebraska and look forward to going back, but that is not what this is about. We couldn't focus on the winning football team because it's not the point."

The scrutiny of the rural community was something Muska wanted as an integral part of the film, she said, and the examination of local culture should be a more commonplace occurrence across the United States.

"All communities have a dark side," she said. "People tend to be sensitive about their home base, but this film should be taken in context. It's not an attack; it's an examination."

Films like this one can help people recognize the elevated number of hate crimes that occur across the United States, she said.

Muska said she has been astounded by the universal appeal of the film, and she said a wide range of people have contacted her after seeing it.

"The story transcends regional, economic, race and class boundaries," she said. "It's a tragedy that anyone can relate to. It shakes basic emotions."

"The Brandon Teena Story" opens tonight at the Ross Film Theater, 12th and R streets, at 7:30 p.m. The filmmakers will be present for the premiere.

For more information, call the Ross at (402) 472-5353.

Theater

Aliens study humans in 'Formicans'

BY LIZA HOLTMEIER
Staff writer

Extraterrestrials may have a few questions when they encounter the human race for the first time.

They'd certainly be puzzled about the purpose of the Spice Girls and the insane obsession with college football.

But how would they view the manner in which humans treat each other or people's behavior in moments of trial?

"Last of the Formicans," a University of Nebraska-Lincoln Theatre play opening tonight in the Temple Building, 12th and R streets, attempts to answer this question and others.

In the play, a group of space aliens studies American culture by observing a dysfunctional Colorado family.

Cathy, a recent divorcee, has moved back in with her parents in Colorado after living in New York. Upon her arrival, she finds a world rivaling a nail-biting episode of "The X-Files."

Only in this version, the aliens try to figure out the humans.

As the play progresses, the aliens comment, in typical documentary fashion, on the human specimens' behavior.

Their conclusions call to question certain societal norms that the general population takes for granted: They discuss society's addiction to television, relationships within families and people's tendency to find the simplest answer to a problem.

"If you just step away and look at how we act, you see the things we do don't make any sense," director Ken Paulman said. "We just do them because we don't know any better."

Paulman said the show forces audiences to analyze why they behave the way they do. It also examines the value of American culture.

"It's not about Uncle Sam. It's not about normalness," said John Elsener, who plays an alien called #7. "It's about enjoying what you have."

The aliens present their commentary on the dysfunctional family over a television screen, further emphasizing the script's documentary style.

However, the use of video makes this play one of the more technically-demanding shows attempted by a Theatre director. Shows produced for Theatre generally demand only basic technical requirements: simple lighting designs combined with a minimal set. Theatre productions are entirely student-run and operate on a shoestring budget of \$100.

Because of the show's technical elements, combined with limited crew members, Paulman has been putting in 12- to 14-hour days in preparation for the show, his directorial debut for Theatre.

Elsener said the actors have been forced to change their acting approach because of the video and sound system.

"I had to learn to focus on the face and the voice and not on the body," Elsener said.

Despite the difficulties, Paulman said, the overall design emphasizes the idea of an omniscient, slightly removed, objective observer.

"Last of the Formicans" begins today at the Studio Theatre in the Temple Building, 12th and R streets, at 8 p.m. and continues through Saturday at 8 p.m., with a matinee Sunday at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$3 at the door. For more information, call the Temple Box Office at (402) 472-2073.

Schedule of screenings for the Return of the Gay/Lesbian Film Festival

Thursday, Oct. 22 — Saturday, Oct. 24

| Thursday | Friday | Saturday |
|--|--|---|
| 5 PM "The Brandon Teena Story" (90 minutes) with filmmakers in person | 5 PM "Dear Jesse" & "Monsters in the Closet" (97 minutes) | 5 PM "East Palace/West Palace" & "2 or 3 Things Are Holding Us Back" (102 minutes) |
| 7:30 PM Reception in SMAAG Great Hall | 7 PM "Boys in Love 2" (97 minutes) | 7 PM "High Art" & "The Girl's Navy" (107 minutes) |
| 8:30 PM | 8 PM | 8 PM "Women Make Movies" Shorts (125 minutes) |

Tuesday, Oct. 27 — Thursday, Oct. 29

| Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday |
|---|---|--|
| 5 PM "Dear Jesse" & "Monsters in the Closet" | 5 PM "Dear Jesse" & "Monsters in the Closet" | 5 PM "Women Make Movies" Shorts |
| 7 PM "The Brandon Teena Story" & "Wavelengths" (105 minutes) | 7 PM "East Palace/West Palace" & "2 or 3 Things Are Holding Us Back" | 7:15 PM "Dear Jesse" & "Monsters in the Closet" |
| 8 PM "Boys in Love 2" | 8 PM "High Art" & "The Girl's Navy" | 8:30 PM "The Brandon Teena Story" & "Wavelengths" |

Friday, Oct. 30 — Sunday, Nov. 1

| Tuesday | Wednesday | Thursday |
|---|--|---|
| 1 PM "High Art" & "The Girl's Navy" | 1 PM "High Art" & "The Girl's Navy" | 1 PM "Dear Jesse" & "Monsters in the Closet" |
| 3 PM "Women Make Movies" Shorts | 3 PM "Women Make Movies" Shorts | 3 PM "Dear Jesse" & "Monsters in the Closet" |
| 5 PM "Boys in Love 2" | 5:15 PM "Dear Jesse" & "Monsters in the Closet" | 5 PM "East Palace/West Palace" & "2 or 3 Things Are Holding Us Back" |
| 7 PM "Dear Jesse" & "Monsters in the Closet" | 7:15 PM "The Brandon Teena Story" & "Wavelengths" | 7 PM "High Art" & "The Girl's Navy" |
| 8 PM "East Palace/West Palace" & "2 or 3 Things Are Holding Us Back" | 8:15 PM "Boys in Love 2" | 8 PM "Women Make Movies" Shorts |

JON FRANK/DN