

State poet brings 'Poetry, Conversation' to campus

By **BRET SCHULTE**
Senior editor

As a grandfather, he loves to tell stories about his family. As a poet, his words describe the lives of millions.

William Kloefkorn, the Nebraska state poet since 1982, has published volumes of poetry in his lifetime and most recently a reflective volume of prose, a memoir titled "This Death by Drowning."

At 3 p.m. today Kloefkorn heads "Prose, Poetry and Conversation," a dialogue between the author and the audience framed around readings of his poetry and prose. Sponsored by Sigma Tau Delta, the undergraduate English organization, the event will last for two hours to encourage conversation and boost attendance.

"We hope that during this two-hour period people would come and go as they are able to," said Jacquelyn Sorensen, University of Nebraska English professor and sponsor of Sigma Tau Delta.

Sorensen knew the state poet from their days teaching together at Wesleyan University, where Kloefkorn had taught poetry from 1962 to 1997.

She said that Kloefkorn was a popular

instructor to whom students responded with enthusiasm.

"I've never had a student who wasn't impressed with him," she said. "I asked him a number of times to come talk to my classes. Bill came to talk, and students kept him talking so much in class that he only had time to read one poem."

His eagerness to chat played a large role in her decision to invite Kloefkorn to UNL for "Prose, Poetry and Conversation."

"I hope we get a lot of people because he's charming, he talks easy and besides, I like his work."

She's not the only one. People from coast to coast are familiar with Kloefkorn's poetry, which is published in houses in New York, Minnesota and in periodicals across the country. His most recent collection of poetry, "Treehouse: New and Selected Poems," was published in 1996 and includes personal favorites published in about 20 previous books.

Described by Sorensen as "intimate," Kloefkorn's poetry springs from personal history but is largely fictional in its final form. Mostly free verse, his narrative writing style is easy to associate with, his stories universal in nature. The accessibility of his work inspired his nomination

to a governor-appointed committee assembled to seek out candidates for the Nebraska state poet.

After reviewing a sample of his work and weeding through writings from dozens of applicants, the committee suggested Kloefkorn to the governor's office, then filled by Charles Thone. In 1982, he was appointed state poet for life by proclamation of the Legislature.

Since then, Kloefkorn has continued his writing and travels on a lecture circuit that most recently took him to South Dakota, Colorado and Utah.

He said that Miami is the next stop on his list. Until then, he will be occupying himself at home in Lincoln, where he still teaches a poetry class at Wesleyan. His talk today at UNL will focus on "This Death by Drowning," published last year by University of Nebraska Press.

The title refers to a near-death experience he had as a 5-year-old boy in rural Kansas where he grew up. He said he was chasing grasshoppers around pools of water while his mom and dad fished at a nearby pond. When a fleeing grasshopper jumped into the nearest body of water, Kloefkorn followed suit.

Kloefkorn doesn't remember the incident, but his mother told him that by the time his father had scooped him out of the pond he "was about gone."

"I've never had a student who wasn't impressed with him."

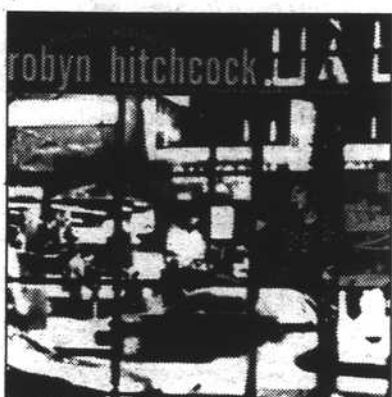
JACQUELYNN SORENSEN
UNL English professor

"This Death by Drowning" is a reflection of Kloefkorn's own mortality, which he said is something all writers must contend with.

Now 66 (but he claims to look 38) and a grandfather, Kloefkorn still relies on personal experience for inspiration to his poems, which he said usually begin from a "nub" of autobiography. From that "nub," he weaves the poetry that has garnered him national attention and earned him the lifetime position as state poet.

He plans to discuss poetry as well as prose in today's discussion and invites anybody interested in writing and literature to attend.

"Prose, Poetry and Conversation" will be held at the Dudley Bailey Library, 228 Andrews Hall, from 3 to 5 p.m.



Robyn Hitchcock
"Storefront Hitchcock"
Warner Bros. Records
Grade: B+

There's something pleasantly deranged about Robyn Hitchcock.

Hitchcock's music has earned a reputation over the years as a quirky blend of folk-pop genius, surreal lyrics and playful gleefulness. Hitchcock may like to think really deep, but he's never going to grow up.

"Storefront Hitchcock" is the compact disc accompaniment to the film of the same name. That film marks director Jonathan Demme's return to musical documentaries, the last having been the Talking Heads' "Stop Making Sense." But just because a big name's directing the film doesn't mean the music that goes along will be spectacular.

But Demme has a knack for picking the musicians who really are great.

Hitchcock's gift lies in his ability to not take himself seriously. In a time full of overly angst-filled tunes, Hitchcock has remained just slightly silly, enough to make you wonder if he's pulling your leg.

Most people couldn't pull off songs with such flippant titles like "I Something You" or "Alright, Yeah" with ease.

What aids "Storefront Hitchcock" in getting something new, though, is a bit of the person behind the music. And, yes, he really is as weird as the lyrics he writes.

Between "1974" and "Let's Go Thundering," he decides to pontificate

New Releases

on naming songs, and it weaves and rambles through all sorts of philosophy. What begins with him complaining on how little a song's title actually reveals eventually turns into him telling the audience how they could explode at any given moment, for no real reason.

And that's just the way he is, so it makes perfect sense.

Most of "Storefront Hitchcock" is acoustic, but the crystal-clear sound is a nice change from the occasional murkiness of some of Hitchcock's albums.

It's also almost only Hitchcock himself playing. On a couple of tracks, he does have some help, but there are never any drums or bass. For the most part, it's just Robyn and his guitar. That's as it should be, though, because Hitchcock has always been about the songs and the lyrics, not being flashy.

On a couple of tracks, Hitchcock also plays harmonica, and it's surprising how well he can while still playing guitar and keeping track of his lyrics as well.

Above all, "Storefront Hitchcock" has a very laid-back and casual attitude that carries throughout the whole album.

The only moment that could have been glossed over, however, is "The Yip! Song." After a few listens, the fast-forward button seems infinitely close on that one track.

Other than that, though, most of Hitchcock's best songs are hit here, although "Raymond Chandler Evening" isn't present, sadly. Interestingly enough, Hitchcock also covers a Hendrix song, "The Wind Cries Mary." And the surprising thing is that it works.

But that's the way Hitchcock is. He's constantly surprising his fans with sly lyrics and casual grace.

"Storefront Hitchcock" is a good place to start for anyone familiar with the devious musician and a nice addition for any old fan.

- Cliff Hicks

Stephen Hawking makes debut on 'The Simpsons' as himself

LONDON (AP) - Physicist Stephen Hawking, author of "A Brief History of Time," flew to Hollywood for a role in "The Simpsons" series and wowed Bart, Homer and Lisa, a British newspaper reported Sunday.

Hawking, who holds the Cambridge University post once held by Sir Isaac Newton, plays himself, complete with "supercharged wheelchair" and his distinctive electronic voice, reported The Independent on Sunday.

Hawking suffers from amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, also known as Lou Gehrig's disease, which affects the

motor skills, and he uses an electronic synthesizer to speak.

Bart, "an underachiever and proud of it," his father, Homer, and sister Lisa were "overawed" by Hawking, the newspaper reported.

"He comes in to make a commentary on the universe as a whole and intellectuals," producer Bonnie Patila said. "He plays himself. It's a show that has to do with intellectuals, and we don't know anyone more intellectual than him."

"Everyone wanted to meet him," Patila said. "We are all huge fans. He was great fun."



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INFORMATION TABLE

9 a.m. - 3 p.m.
November 16th - 18th
Nebraska Union

FILM SHOW

4 p.m.
Wednesday, November 18th
Nebraska Union

For more information call:
800/424-8580 (press #1)

