

Condensed 'Romeo and Juliet' takes Lied stage

■ An acting troupe uses local talent to provide a quick, accessible version of the classic romantic tragedy on Valentine's

BY DIANE BRODERICK
Staff writer

Its name conjures up the story of star-crossed lovers who would rather die for love than live without it.

And since William Shakespeare first penned the tale of "Romeo and Juliet," it has taken many forms, including innumerable stage and film versions.

With support from the Lincoln Community Foundation, local artists will present their own version on Valentine's Day, when the Lied Center for Performing Arts, the Lincoln Community Playhouse and the Lincoln Symphony combine to present an adapted version of "Romeo and Juliet."

The collaboration, titled "Romantic Rhapsody," is unprecedented, said Rod McCullough, the executive director of the Playhouse. The three-pronged effort involves artistic, administrative and technical staffs from each of the organizations.

The synthesis doesn't stop there, said Jeth Mill, the executive director of the symphony. It is also a collaboration of art forms.

"I think we're really kind of creating a new form," he said. "It kind of has operatic proportions, but there's no singing."

The foundation of the production is the original play "The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet," adapted by Robin McKercher, the Playhouse's artistic director. But its singularity lies in its incorporation of dance and music.

"It's a collage of works by a lot of people who have taken the theme of 'Romeo and Juliet,'" McKercher said.

"I wanted to create a world where it all fits and seems in sync."

McKercher shortened the play into its most well-known moments, what he calls "Romeo and Juliet's Greatest Hits" or "The Classic Illustrated Version of 'Romeo and Juliet.'"

If it were read straight through, it would probably be about 45 minutes long, he said. But with all the extras, it runs about two hours.

Please see **ROMANTIC** on 10



LANE HICKENBOTTOM/DN

THE ACKNOWLEDGED intellectual of the two, Tad Lauritzen-Wright stands in the foreground with his painting on the left. Although he generally works alone and enjoys studying art and culture, he occasionally works with his friend and co-artist George Sisson, standing behind him.

Different Brushstrokes

Mixed approaches net similar results for artistic duo

BY JEFF RANDALL
Senior staff writer

When looking at the works of Tad Lauritzen-Wright and George Sisson side by side, comparisons are inevitable.

All of their pieces reach out to the viewer — some intellectually, although even more do so physically. All of their pieces betray a naïve, even amateurish, tone. And most of them are more engaging than the average work by a local artist.

But in person, Lauritzen-Wright and Sisson are decidedly different artists. Lauritzen-Wright is a professional and eternal scholar; Sisson forces himself to find time for painting and has yet to graduate from college.

The two former art-school classmates have an exhibition running

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TAD LAURITZEN-WRIGHT
artist

through the end of February in the gallery at Aardvarx, 700 O St. The exhibit features nearly 30 pieces, a quarter of which are collaborative works between the two artists.

“When we work together, it goes well,” Lauritzen-Wright said. “We bounce off each other, I guess you could say.”

An initial glance at the team's works would defy that description. Several of the pieces are busy and filled with contrasting and conflicting images.

But upon stepping back and tak-

ing it all in, one realizes this is the case in many of the duo's individual works, too.

“Typically, a person will look at something hanging on the wall for 10 or 20 seconds,” Lauritzen-Wright said. “I try to force them into staying longer, keeping them as a prisoner of sorts.”

One of the works in which Lauritzen-Wright achieves this feat is “Philosophy of Beauty,” a mixed-media word puzzle in which rows of painted letters become words and catchphrases such as

“ENCHANTRESS,” “MUD PACK” and “CUTE AS A BUG.”

Lauritzen-Wright's attempts to change the typical art viewer's habits are a reflection of his approach to art. While he is dedicated to creating, he spends just as much time studying — everything from Basquiat and Karol Appel to Jack Kerouac and William Burroughs.

“I'm always reading, always looking at what others are doing or have done,” Lauritzen-Wright said.

On the other side of the room, Sisson talks about his own way of creating.

“I don't look around at what other people do,” he said. “Studying art really bugs me.”

But Sisson, who prefers to work without any direct influences, will admit to one obvious artistic ancestor: Pablo Picasso.

“When I was a kid, he was the

Please see **ARTISTS** on 10

'Payback' delivers some action, little else

BY CLIFF HICKS
Senior editor

At the very least, Mel Gibson hasn't lost the bad-ass touch audiences haven't really seen since “Lethal Weapon,” but it's a shame it had to return with a film such as this.

“Payback” isn't by any means a bad film, it's just not a great one.

The film dates back a while, being based on the novel “The Hunter,” which, in turn, inspired the film “Point Blank.”

But that was 1967, and “Point Blank” probably hasn't been seen by most of the people who'll fill the theaters for “Payback.” The chances of them reading the novel is yet slimmer.

It starts out simply. A sadistic criminal named Val (Gregg Henry) has a

problem — he's fallen out of grace from the organization he works with called The Outfit. He needs to buy his way back in, so he enlists the aid of a hardened criminal named Porter (Gibson). They rob an Asian gang and get away clean, taking the briefcase back to their meeting point. Val needs \$120,000 to buy his way back into The Outfit.

It's not enough.

There's only \$130,000 in the case, and Porter wants his share — \$70,000, which Val isn't going to give to him. So Porter is shot and left for dead, but like all dogged rough guys, Porter survives. Time passes, Porter recovers and slowly prepares to come back.

The opening sequence of Porter rebuilding himself from scratch is perhaps the best scene in the film, filled with little sneaky tactics and dirty

Film Review The Facts

Title: “Payback”
Stars: Mel Gibson, Gregg Henry, Maria Bello, David Paymer
Director: Brian Helgeland
Rating: R (violence)
Grade: B-
Five Words: “Payback” — mostly flash, little substance

means. This series of events is well-scripted and shot, keeping tight on the important events, with the camera moving along with Porter. Unfortunately, the rest of the film can't keep the same kind of quick-cut energy, fading out a touch

as it progresses.

Perhaps the opening sequence is just out-of-sync with the rest of the film. The film is full of bleak and washed-out colors, a sort of noir feel done in color.

There's also a definite retro approach taken, as everything is a throwback to the late '70s or early '80s. From the cars to the firearms, there's nothing from the '90s here. And instead of bright colors and pretty shots, we focus on the city.

This is because, most notably, “Payback” is an urban film. It could practically be called “A Thug's Life.” It's not about the big people in the city, not at first anyway — it's about the little folk no one thinks about — the commoners who are looked at as just another person on the street.

The script, while linear, is well-writ-

ten, with a few sharp plot twists in the right place. But whoever wrote some of this dialogue needs to be deported not only from Hollywood, but from writing in general.

Usually the occasional corny line can be glossed over. But there are simply *so many* corny lines in “Payback,” they almost take over the movie.

This isn't to say there's not humor laced throughout, but they shouldn't have tried so hard. Too much of what is intended to evoke laughter just summons groans.

As for hype about the film's “over-the-top” violence, it's just that — hype. The violence is neither gratuitous nor showy, merely what is called for.

All this aside, “Payback” is still a fairly solid actioner and good Saturday afternoon cheap-seats entertainment.