

Dance department to perform annual spring concert

DANCE from page 12

Zero," another piece by Kane. Set to music by Sweet Honey In the Rock, this postmodern piece plays with partnering and the use of weight.

"It's about support and helping each other out," said Brandy Miller, who stars in the act.

Kane choreographed the dancers running and falling in order to create a more pedestrian-looking dance.

"I wanted it to look as if I'm just a real person, and I'm dancing. I fall, and I get up," Kane said.

Finally, the concert includes "Femme Zeppelin," choreographed by Steinweis and featuring three other local dancers. Steinweis said the piece celebrates the many facets of femininity and how women can be strong, sensitive, serious, silly and sexy at the same time.

Though the pieces vary in style, an overriding theme exists between many of them. A number of the pieces explore the quest for expression in a world that tends to suppress women's voices. The pieces also celebrate the power and support women give each other.

For these reasons, Kane and Holcombe said, the concert reflects the atmosphere in the dance program.

"We've seen the group come together," Holcombe said. "You walk into the studio, and they're cheering each other on, and morale is high."

The dancers' optimism can be seen in the triumphant ending of "Ladies Speak."

"By the end of the piece," Miller said, "we're just throwing our feelings in your face."

'Happiness' laughs at humanity's dark side

Black comedy asks audiences to find humor in everyday misery

BY JEFF RANDALL
Senior staff writer

When Andy Kaufman used to stand up on a stage and antagonize his audience to the point of imminent violence, people not only raised their fists and threw their glasses of water, they also laughed — although sometimes they didn't know it.

And now that Kaufman is long gone from the face of the earth, another unlikely comic hero has taken his place. That hero's name is Todd Solondz.

A writer and director whose penchant for oddball characters is second only to his love for visually antagonizing audiences, it seemed unlikely that Solondz would ever become a hit with audiences — critics were a different story.

Solondz's first feature film did just that. "Welcome to the Dollhouse" was a thoroughly unsettling and subversively funny film about a young girl's dealings with the three things that tormented her most: her family, her classmates and puberty.

Audiences either loved or hated it; Critics mostly did the former. And nearly everybody wondered what Solondz would do next.

Fortunately, he did "Happiness." "Happiness" shocks and appalls even more than its predecessor, and it also raises laughter from dark places that one might not even know existed.

As a result, the production company that had helped make "Happiness" dropped the film soon after seeing the completed product. And after being released independently, it deservedly made dozens upon dozens of Top Ten lists for 1998.

More of an ensemble work than "Welcome to the Dollhouse," "Happiness" is centered on the lives of three sisters (played by Jane Adams, Lara Flynn Boyle and Camryn Manheim) whose love lives are in different stages of shambles.

Joy (Adams) has just broken up with one in a series of loser boyfriends (the latest being Jon Lovitz). Helen (Boyle) is so desperate for love she starts looking for sincere romance with an obscene phone caller (Phillip Seymour Hoffman). And Trish (Manheim) is happily married to a psychiatrist (Dylan Baker) who carries on a secret obsession for intimate relations with young boys.

Comedy doesn't seem like it would really fit into this cast of characters. And for most directors, it wouldn't. But Solondz isn't like most directors.

Whether it's with demeanor, naivete or wry dialogue, Solondz's characters lighten the mood just enough to bring out laughter, but never enough to make you forget just how dark and disturbed they really are.

Not that Solondz's unflinching approach to the characters' lives would allow anyone in the audience to

Film Review The Facts

Title: "Happiness"
Stars: Lara Flynn Boyle, Jon Lovitz, Jane Adams, Phillip Seymour Hoffman, Dylan Baker, Camryn Manheim
Director: Todd Solondz
Rating: NR
Grade: A
Five Words: Comedy that makes you squirm



COURTESY PHOTO
BILLED AS THE ultimate black comedy, "Happiness" by filmmaker Todd Solondz opens today at the Ross.

forget.

He stays with moments that other directors would have the decency to cut away from, and that's what makes his films more realistic and disturbing than your typically depraved USA late-night movie. He tempers the tell-all approach of Jerry Springer with the brazen artistry of David Lynch and the humanity of Frank Capra.

"Happiness" is not a film for the squeamish or the easily offended. It's not a film to which you want to take a first date. And it's not a film that's going to have audiences around the country standing up in their seats and cheering.

But that's exactly why it is a great film.

"Happiness" opens today at the Mary Riepma Ross Film Theater and runs through Sunday, and March 11-14.

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Dance The Facts

What: Spring Dance Concert
Where: Johnny Carson Theatre, 11th and R Streets
When: Thursday-Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 7 p.m.
Cost: \$6 for students, \$8 for UNL faculty, \$10 for general admission
The Skinny: Concert features UNL dancers at their strongest and most diverse

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