

Moester to perform in concert

By DANELL MCCOY
Staff writer



Moester

Known to much of the Lincoln community as chancellor of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, James Moester's talents extend beyond the toils of campus administration.

Tonight, Moester will show off his musical background and extensive education at the Lincoln Symphony Orchestra's concert, "Baroque Banquet," at Kimball Recital Hall, 12th and R streets.

Moester's wife, Susan, a professor of music at UNL, will also perform.

"The chancellor and his wife are performing with the intention of emphasizing the link between the university and the Lincoln Symphony," said Jeth Mill, executive director of the Lincoln Symphony. "Moester serves as a member of our board and he supports our mission."

Moester earned his bachelor's degree in music with honors from the University of Texas. He earned his doctorate of musical arts at the University of Michigan.

Culture The Facts



What: James and Susan Moester with the Lincoln Symphony Orchestra
Where: Kimball Recital Hall, 12th and R streets
When: Tonight at 7:30
Cost: \$30, \$24, \$18 and half-price for students
The Skinny: Big guy breaks out organ for the masses

In 1966 he started at the University of Kansas as an assistant professor and chairman in the department of organ. He was then promoted as dean of the department of fine arts.

He was dean of arts and architecture at Penn State. And before coming to UNL in 1996, Moester was vice-president of academic affairs at the University of South Carolina.

Until 1993, the UNL chancellor was an active performer and had earned an international reputation as a concert organist.

Tonight Moester is a soloist in Handel's Concerto in B Flat Major, while his wife is a soloist for Handel's Concerto in F Major for Organ and Orchestra.

Moester and his wife aren't the only performers tonight to be connected to UNL.

Other talents include a duet performance with Dennis Schneider and Darryl White.

Schneider, who is celebrating his fiftieth year as a professional musician, is a former professor of music at UNL.

Previous to that, he taught at the University of Denver Lamont School of Music and is the former artistic director of the Jazz by Design music series in Denver. Schneider is also the founder of Pretext, a jazz quartet.

His successor, White, is a professor of music at UNL.

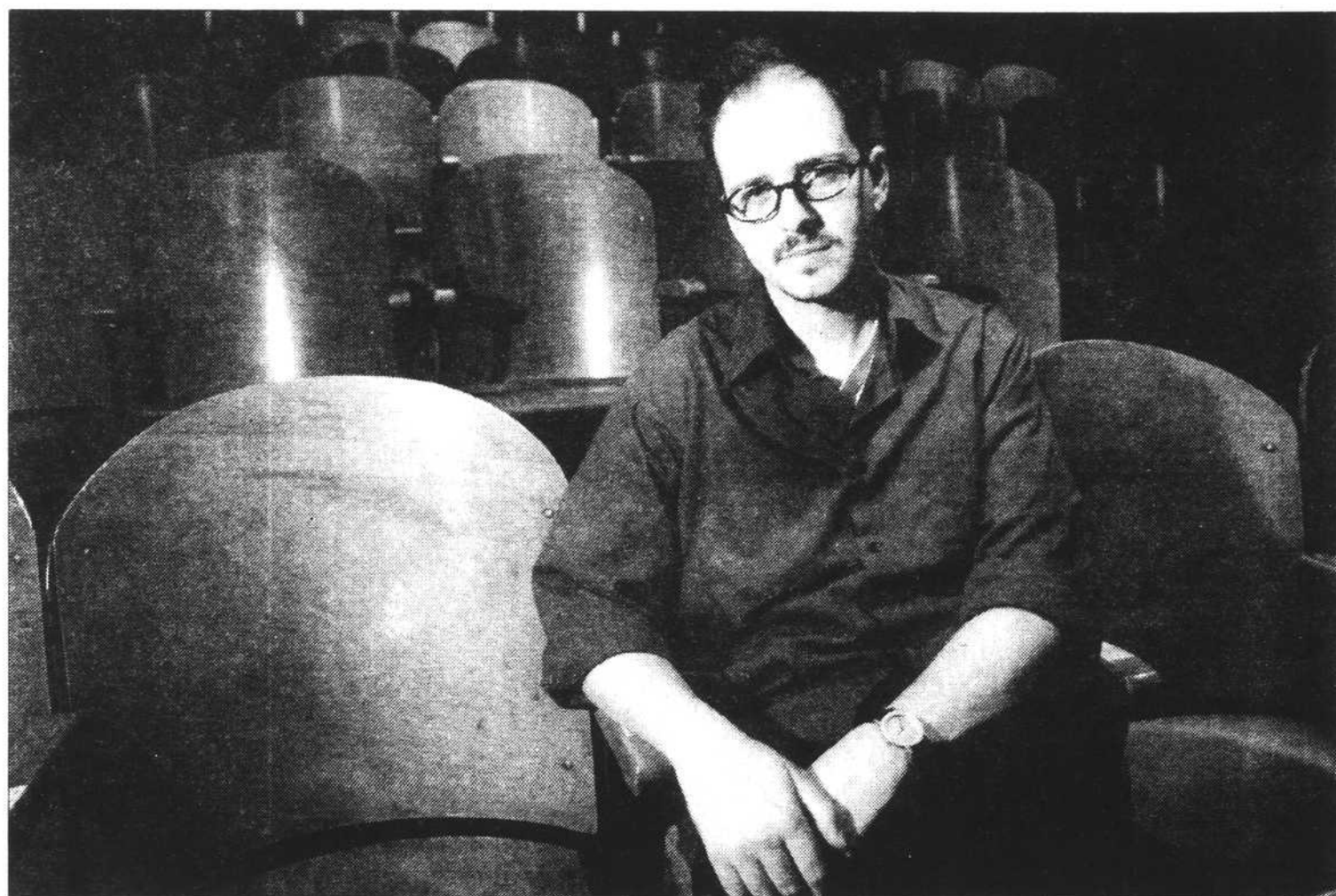
Together, they will perform Vivaldi's Concerto for Two Trumpets with Schneider as a soloist.

Kenneth Slowik, artistic director of the Smithsonian Chamber Music Society and a leading authority of Baroque music, will be the guest conductor for the performance.

"Baroque Banquet" will be the debut performance of Moester and his wife with the symphony. It will also be one of the few concerts Moester has performed since 1993.

"We know Moester as a musician," said Mill. "But not a lot of the community knows his connection to music or his musical background."

Tickets are available by calling the Lincoln Symphony at (402) 423-2211.



MAX SPARBER, the cultural editor of the Reader, wrote the play "Minstrel Show," which has been professionally produced. It has been nationally acclaimed after first being put on by the Blue Barn Theatre. Although the Blue Barn produced the first showing, it was performed at the Douglas County Courthouse rotunda, the site of the original lynching.

The Reader and the Playwright

With applause from coast to coast culture writer

Max Sparber has turned an Omaha tragedy into a success story



Story by Bret Schulte
Photo by Scott McClurg

The theatrical program was designed to pull kids off the street and out of homeless shelters and get them involved in the arts: a sort of escapism and enlightenment all in one. Despite the efforts of Sparber and others, the program fell apart when many teens failed to take it seriously and an aging Winters balked at the stark realism of the company's productions.

"She obviously wasn't comfortable around these teen-agers," Sparber said. "She was a little frightened that these plays were getting a little too close to real life and so she withdrew her support."

After moving around, returning to the West Coast and then leaving California dreams behind for good, Sparber, then 27, settled in Omaha on the advice of friends and quickly got involved in the city's pop and fine culture scenes.

The plot

It wasn't long before he stumbled across the story of the William Brown lynching and started transforming it into a two-man dialogue exchange between visiting minstrels from the South.

Sparber's fictional characters represent a very real period in American history, and one that is often ignored in cultural chronicles. Minstrel shows throughout the South and penetrating into the high North demonstrated the creativity and richness of the oral history tradition through theatrical shows, spontaneous comedy and elaborate storytelling. It was also a preservation of culture and means

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Sen. Ernie Chambers decried it as racist and called for a boycott. The Omaha World-Herald praised it as "Pick of the Week," and audiences in Denver, New York and California leapt to their feet at every curtain call.

The play is called "Minstrel Show: The Lynching of William Brown," a retelling of the blood-curdling 1919 Omaha lynching of a black man accused of raping a white woman. Told through the confessions of two fictional black minstrels who shared a jail cell with Brown, "Minstrel Show" sparked conflict and adoration for its portrayal of the long-neglected minstrel tradition and its interpretation of the events leading to Brown's murder.

On Sept. 28, 1919, a frenzied crowd of a few thousand people stormed the Douglas County Courthouse and dragged out the rheumatic and aging Brown, whose guilt was questionable to say the least. As the sacked courthouse burned in the background, the crowd dragged Brown's stripped body through the streets, hanged him from a light pole at 18th and Harney streets and riddled him with bullets.

He was finally burned on a pyre of railroad ties, and drug through streets once again before

army troops arrived to disperse the mob.

Although not mentioned in the play, it's interesting to note that the incensed crowd had also attacked the protesting mayor and lynched him along with Brown; he was saved and resuscitated by a handful of police officers.

Introduction

Max Sparber, a Minneapolis native and current cultural editor for the Omaha weekly paper, The Reader, penned the play after only 2½ years in the city. His first play to be professionally produced, "Minstrel Show," received wild reviews on both coasts and is being geared up for a new season in larger venues in both California and New York.

Despite the sudden flush of success, Sparber spends most of his days at The Reader, where he labors over art, film and music reviews along with assigning and editing all the paper's cultural content.

Covering Omaha's cultural scene may seem a little beneath a burgeoning playwright whose first performed work was nominated for an Oppenheimer Award, but Sparber's first love was culture coverage and at The Reader he pursues it with a rare zeal.

With a peal of calm earnestness, Sparber comfortably rattles off his mission at The Reader: "What we try to do here is open the arts up for the reader and provide a more critical voice for the reader that is both positive and negative."

"The Reader has a very active role in the arts and culture of Omaha. It offers critical analysis and critical support."

Sparber rose rapidly to the editor's desk after a year and a half as a film critic and culture reporter for the paper. He is undaunted by the fact that reviewing movies and critiquing modern art are not general activities for someone with a religious studies degree, which he acquired from the University of Minnesota in the late '80s.

At U of M, he followed up on his high school hobby of collecting and writing plays and screenplays. His first published writing appeared when he was a culture writer for the college newspaper, The Minnesota Daily.

Rising action

Having graduated with creative writing never far from his mind, Sparber chose the path that so many writers follow: the one that leads to Los Angeles and the doorstep of Hollywood.

"That was when I completed my first screenplay," Sparber said. "I worked in a theatrical program started by Shelley Winters, an old-school Hollywood actress ... kind of a nutty old woman right now."