



Tragedy doesn't strike up blues for enduring Omaha theater

By EMILY PYEATT
Staff writer

The creation of the Blue Barn Theatre, one of Nebraska's most influential artistic and theatrical houses, is a tale of trials and survival.

The Blue Barn Theatre in Omaha began in the late 1980s with a vision from three graduates of the Professional Theater Training Company at State University of New York at Purchase.

Their goal was to create a theater transcending the constraints of New York City's traditional market.

Thus, the Blue Barn began as a not-for-profit

organization to promote artistic collaboration of national and local artists.

In 1990, the three graduates, Kevin Lawler, Hughston Walkinshaw and Nils Haaland, joined forces to renovate an abandoned building in Omaha's Old Market. The Blue Barn opened offering Omaha's first coffee house, a unique theater and a home for acoustic musicians.

In 1997, the Blue Barn Theatre was forced onto the road and out of their Old Market location when the building they were using was sold.

Despite adversity, the theater thrived with the creativity and innovation of diverse locations.

Please see **BARN** on 10

New Releases



SHACK
"H. M. S. Fable"
London Records
Grade: C

SHACK's 1999 release, "H. M. S. Fable," is an exhibition of British rock of the past decade: catchy, cliché and difficult to call a "hit."

The band is a straightforward guitar-bass-drums outfit spiced with lackluster string arrangements, a concept the music industry has been overrun with in the 1990s.

SHACK is headlined by two brothers who have been rummaging through British rock since the '80s, looking for a chance at the charts. Michael and John Head's first band, Pale Fountains, dissolved in the middle of the '80s, and SHACK was born.

The first album by the new incarnation of the Head brothers, "Zilch," was poorly received

in the commercial world.

In 1991, they recorded a sophomore album, "Waterpistol," which landed in the lap of bad luck for four years. Soon after recording "Waterpistol," the studio where the master tapes were supposedly stored burned down. One tape survived but was left in a rental car in America.

The brothers released an album in 1998 under the name The Strands, which received decent reviews.

Now, John and Mick have returned as SHACK for another half-hearted pursuit at fame. "H. M. S. Fable" sounds more like a tribute to other British bands than an honest effort at originality.

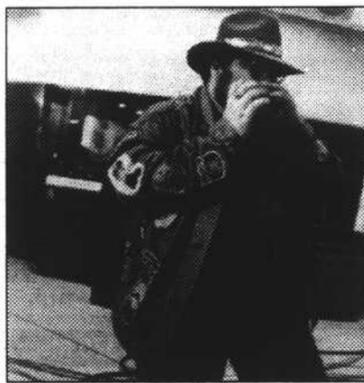
The final track, "Daniella," is a simple acoustic guitar and high-register vocal song that could have been found in the trash behind Radiohead's latest recording session.

The third track, "Pull Together," is an Oasis-esque composition featuring spacey vocal tracks and a straight rock beat that could put a rhythm machine to shame. And where would a Liverpoolian musician be without ripping effects off of Beatles' recordings?

On the positive side, SHACK's lounge-style song "Reinstated" includes a fittingly effortless trumpet track and a lazily flowing string section that create the most colorful tune on the entire album.

Besides that lonely track, the rest of "H. M. S. Fable" should have been released four years ago.

—Andrew Shaw



John Popper
"Zygote"
A&M Records
Grade: B-

Alexis De Toqueville once proclaimed, "Music is freedom, freedom is music, so leave me the hell alone."

John Popper proudly reflects upon this idea in his debut solo album, "Zygote."

Popper attempts to discover this freedom in an album filled with peppy little ditties, cheesy lyrics and the same ol' harmonica riffs that distinguish his place in modern blues music.

Popper, member of Blues Traveler and co-founder of The H.O.R.D.E. Festival, has played with bands and artists such as Ben Harper, Phish, Lenny Kravitz, Jerry Garcia and Rusted Root. Yet "Zygote" is Popper's first recorded solo work.

Popper has released six albums with Blues Traveler and plans on releasing another at the turn of the millennium. Selling more than 12 million records and winning a Grammy for "Runaround," Blues Traveler's has always had simple goals. One was simply to play in all 50 states.

This style of simplicity represents the band's free-spirited blues tunes and eventually led to the creation of The H.O.R.D.E. Festival. The Horizons Of Rock Developing Everywhere Festival idea originated in 1992, rivaling summer tours such as Lollapalooza. Mainstream acts such as the Smashing Pumpkins and the Dave Matthews Band were paired with solo artists and smaller bands for a festival celebrating the diversity in American music.

It is only normal for an artist to stray from a band to try out a solo career, but Popper's "Zygote" (a title fitting a beginning) falls short of his music with Blues Traveler.

Of course, the album allows Popper the freedom to discover new styles, yet those discoveries are not very strong or successful.

The track "Home" provides a ballad similar to Blues Traveler's "Mountain Wins Again," but with a cheesy Barenaked Ladies-type rap thrown in the middle: "Build a home, welcome home, feel at home, 'cuz it's your home."

Tracks toward the end of the album attempt the harmonica-drenched tunes familiar to Blues Traveler, but lame lyrics and some sort of psychedelic trippy guitar riffs are thrown in, leaving Popper and his "Zygote" with a disappointing debut.

—Emily Pyeatt

Upcoming Blue Barn Events

What: Blue Barn Garage Sale
Where: Old Market, 1207 Howard St. Omaha, NE
When: Sept. 25 & 26
Time: 8 a.m. - 9 p.m.

What: Fire: A Blue Barn Benefit featuring Dark Townhouse Band
Where: Dazy Maze, 521 S. 13th St. Omaha, NE
When: Oct. 2
Time: 9:30 p.m.
Cost: \$5