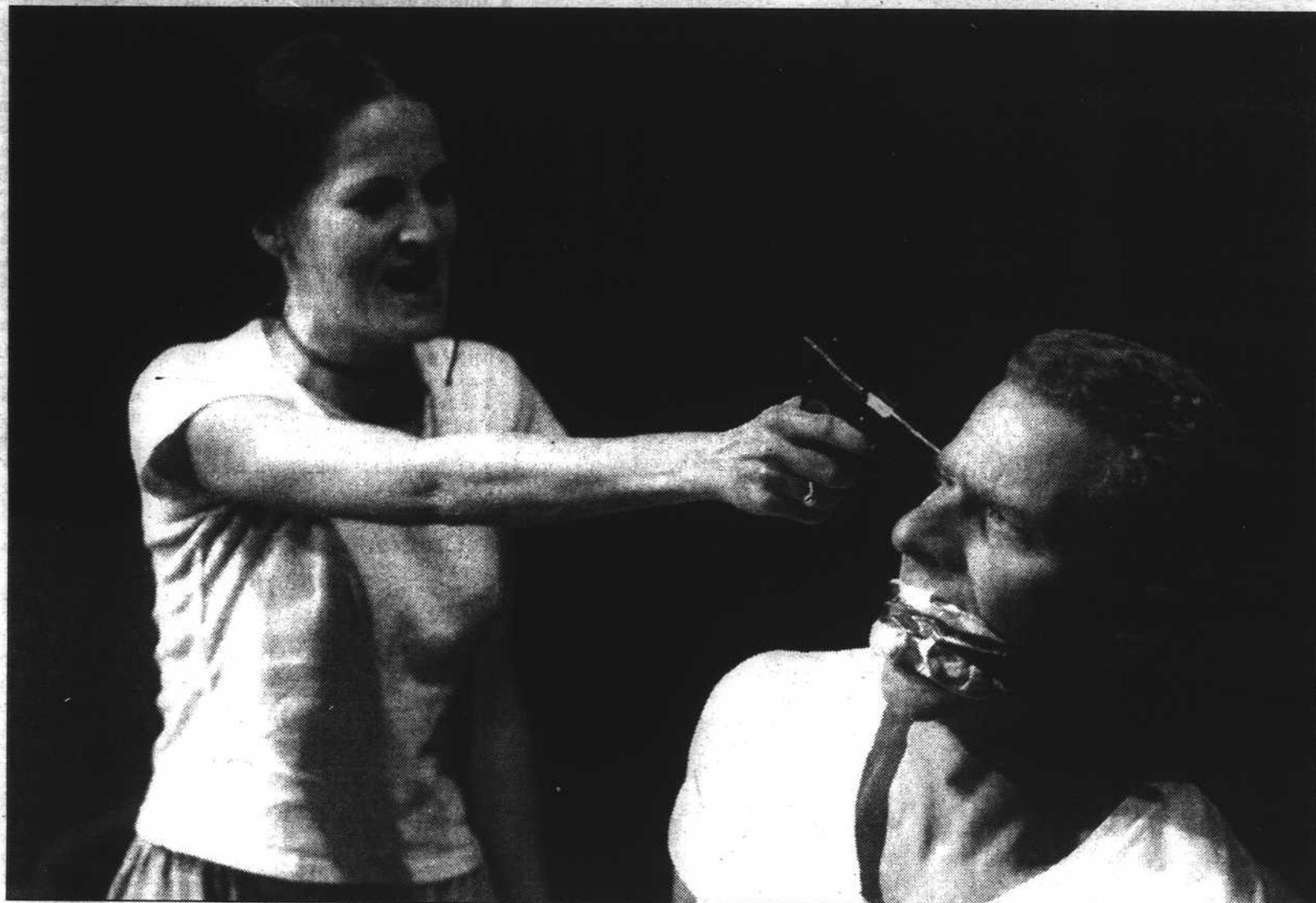


'Maiden' kicks off the Theatrix season



SANDY LEMEN, who plays Paulina Salas, holds a gun up to Jay Ryan, who plays Roberto Miranda, in "Death and the Maiden," a production that is part of UNL's Theatrix program. LANE HICKENBOTTOM/DN

Actors find challenge in portrayal of human rights abuses, atrocities

By JASON HARDY
Senior staff writer

It's the thrill of responsibility coupled with the desire to create. It's a right of passage. It's an opportunity to shine.

It's Theatrix. Theatrix is the student-produced organization of the University of Nebraska-Lincoln theater department. Tomorrow, it opens its fall season with a production of Ariel Dorfman's "Death and the Maiden."

Gregory Peters, a senior theater performance major who is directing the play, said because of Theatrix's limited budget, any production is difficult, let alone one as demanding as "Death and the Maiden."

But Peters' love for the script far outweighed his reservations.

"I've been wanting to do it for two years," Peters said. "The script is very challenging, especially with a low budget, but it's such a good play. It has a lot of things to say."

The play's plot centers on the effects of human rights abuses in a country emerging from a totalitarian dictatorship, not entirely unlike author Dorfman's native country, Chile.

The play's main character, Paulina, was tortured while doing time in prison. Paulina is married to Gerardo, played by Michael Dragen, who is investigating past human rights abuses.

Along the way, Paulina encounters her former abuser and is forced to deal with what happened to her years ago.

For Sandy Lemen, the theater performance major playing Paulina, the experience has offered her lessons she said she has yet to obtain from being in main stage productions.

"It pulls everybody together,

because it's all for us," Lemen said. "Greg is the first director I've had that pulled a lot from me. He pointed out a lot of things that I didn't know I did."

"I've been acting since I was 3, and no one ever said anything like that."

Peters said the play incorporated a number of universal themes and that Dorfman was an excellent storyteller.

"He has a really nice way of combining the message, or asking a lot of questions, while making it still very exciting," Peters said.

Lemen was faced with the challenge of accurately portraying Dorfman's lead character, a person who encountered atrocities hard for anyone to fathom, let alone recreate.

"It's very difficult because I'm

Theater Preview The Facts

What: "Death and the Maiden"
Where: Studio Theatre, third floor, Temple Building
When: 7:30 p.m. tomorrow through Saturday
Cost: \$4
The Skinny: Play explores the after effects of human rights abuses committed during a totalitarian regime.

playing someone who's been raped and tortured," Lemen said. "A lot of people who were abducted and raped still have feelings for their abductor."

"Finding things I liked about him was challenging, but it added a lot of depth to the character."

That's the kind of exploration and experimentation that Theatrix hopes to foster.

Blue Barn finds historical hotel for setting

■ 'The Hot L Baltimore' explores the societal decline that followed the decline of railroads.

By DANELL MCCOY
Staff writer

In the 1800s, the United States witnessed an economic boom. With railroads crisscrossing America, cities began popping up all over to cater to those who would be traveling through to reach their destinations.

"There were decades of opulence and money," said Kevin Lawler, artistic director at the Blue Barn Theatre. "The railroads made these cities, including Omaha and Lincoln, and built extraordinarily lavish hotels in them for the guests."

One of the hotels, The Paxton Manor, 14th and Farnam streets, was built in Omaha in the late 1800s during the boom. This weekend, the hotel will become the setting of the Blue Barn's production of Lanford Wilson's play "The Hot L Baltimore."

Around the 1960s, the railroad economy began to die.

"There was a decline of railroads," Lawler

said. "The economy declined as well, and these hotels just dried up and died."

Some of these hotels became boarding houses. Others were torn down.

"The Hot L Baltimore" tells the story of one such hotel: the Hotel Baltimore. After the economic boom, this once-luxurious hotel became a boarding house.

The story revolves around the characters who live in the once-lavish building and what happens when they learn it is condemned and to be destroyed. The entire story is set in the lobby of the doomed hotel.

"The Hot L is the story of these people and their lives and the friendships they forge," Lawler said. "It is them dealing with losing their home and doing what they can to survive."

What is so amazing and different about this performance of "The Hot L," Lawler said, is the place it is being performed.

After a fire last May destroyed parts of the building housing the Blue Barn, Lawler began looking for new spaces to perform until the damage could be repaired.

Originally, "The Hot L" was to open five days after the fire, but Lawler said he had to cancel the show and begin looking for other spaces.

Lawler said he decided he would first find a space and then choose a play that would work in

Theater Preview The Facts

What: "The Hot L Baltimore"
Where: The Paxton Manor, 14th & Farnam streets in Omaha
When: Nov. 4-6, 12-14 and 19-20 at 8 p.m.
Cost: \$12 for adults, \$10 for students and seniors
The Skinny: Bittersweet look at the history of one of America's former hotels.

that space.

"Someone mentioned the ballroom in the Paxton hotel," he said.

"I went there to look at it and immediately realized that the play had to be done there. The history of the Paxton exactly mirrors what is going on in the play."

The 14-member cast, which consists of all local actors, was rounded up to begin preparing for the show's opening tomorrow.

The show is scheduled for nine performances, tomorrow through Saturday, Nov. 12-14 and 19-20. All shows will begin at 8 p.m. in the second floor ballroom of the Paxton Manor.

For reservations and information, call the Blue Barn at (402) 345-1576 or visit their web site at www.bluebarn.org.



MATT HANEY/DN