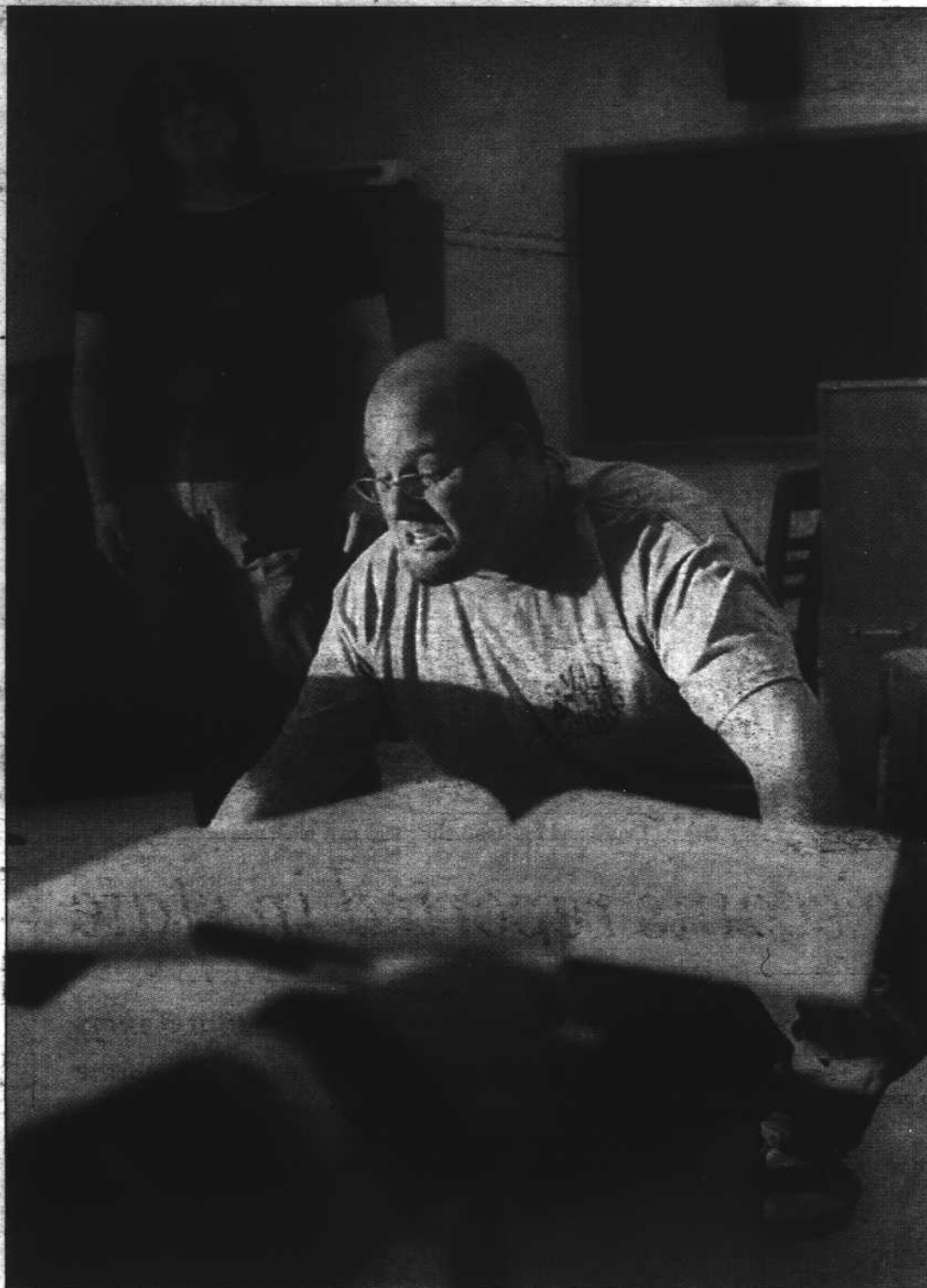


FREE STAGE INTO THE BAR



STORY BY JASON HARDY

PHOTOS BY SHARON KOLBET



LEFT: DURING A REHEARSAL of the American opera "The Face on the Barroom Floor," vocal performance major James Hardin sings while fellow performer Anne Gray looks on.

ABOVE: A CAST MEMBER examines music in preparation for the weekend performance at Crane River.

'Barroom' opera to be performed at Crane River

To a large number of students at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, opera probably isn't a major priority.

Chances are they'd just rather spend their money on beer.

This weekend, they can finally do both.

The UNL School of Music is bringing the panache of opera into the relaxed atmosphere of the Crane River bar and restaurant with a production of Henry Mollicone's "The Face on the Barroom Floor."

For director Ariel Bybee, an artist in residence and lecturer for the School of Music, putting the opera on in a bar was never in question - deciding on which bar was the only problem.

"This opera is supposed to be done in a bar, exactly as we're doing it," Bybee said. "We're concerned about sound quality, and we've never performed here, but one of the reasons we chose Crane River is because it has high ceilings.

"Also, the way the bar was set up is perfect for an audience, and the owners of Crane River

have been very excited to have us there."

The opera itself has become one of the most frequently performed American operas

and was written to be performed in a bar in Central City, Colo., during the early 1980s.

The story begins in present day and flashes back to a 19th century bar scene. As the opera moves forward, the audience hears two stories of love, passion and everything that comes in between, ultimately making an eerie connection between the past and present.

For members of the cast, the interesting story and the unique setting make this production something quite special.

"I love it. In-your-face opera is always fun," said Jennifer Booth, a senior music education major in the production. "It kind of forces you to do your job, because when the audience is way out there, there's a lot of stuff they can't see. Up close, you really have to watch what you do."

Not only is this production taking place in a bar, the cast will be using the actual surroundings instead of a fabricated set. Bybee said it provided the actors with a lot of opportunities to be creative with their environment.

"Oh, they love it," she said. "This is very fun. They're going to crawl over the bar and really use the space there."

Bryce Weber, a junior music education major in the opera, said being immersed in an actual setting allows for a more realistic performance.

"Generally, there is more of a line (between the production and the audience)," Weber said. "But this is great because you get to use the whole building. There's nothing left to the imagination."

Bybee said the quality of the production is taken very seriously, but the tone of the piece is

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ARIEL BYBEE  
opera director

still pretty playful.

"Even though there is a lot of honky tonk bar music, it gets more serious," she said. "So it's serious music, but it's a fun story."

She said that in keeping with the relaxed feel of "The Face on the Barroom Floor," the \$5 cover charge gets each audience member coffee, dessert and entrance to the event, which starts at 10 p.m. on both Friday and Saturday.

Bybee said depending on how the production goes, she'd love to put it on at different bars around town.

"I'd love to do it for the rest of the year," she said. "Or maybe even make it a yearly tradition."