

Tim & Chance

Play melds six one-acts into comedy

PREVIEW

All in the Timing

By Josh Nichols

Staff writer

Imagine a play that involves six short skits with subjects as diverse as a man trying to pick up a woman in a restaurant, three monkeys trying to type "Hamlet" or a man walking around with an ax in his head not willing to accept the fact that he has died.

Incorporate dancers in between scenes performing to swing, '70s Bob Fosse and '90s hip-hop music.

"How could a director and cast ever do this?" one might ask.

Well, if the questioner were to talk to those involved in the university theater department's latest production, they'll tell you, "It's 'All in the Timing.'"

Premiering tonight at 7:30 in the Howell Theatre, the UNL theater department will present David Ives' comedy of six one-acts, "All in the Timing."

The six short scenes, each approximately 12 minutes long, have nothing in common with one another except for one shared principle — timing.

The first act, "Sure Thing," is set in a cafe similar to the one seen in the television sitcom "Friends," said Gretchen Kuhr, stage manager for the performance.

The open set with a sofa sitting in front of a brick wall simply involves an interaction between a man and a woman.

In the beginning, the man tries to pick up on the woman. When he fails, a bell rings, allowing him to start over and try again.

This happens repeatedly, interrupting the individuals' stammers, blunders and missteps.

This happens until eventually they get it right.

The second act, "Words, Words, Words," enacts an old tale that said, given enough time, three monkeys will eventually type "Hamlet."

In this scene, one gets to see what the three monkeys would talk about.

The three monkeys, played by Eric Underwood, Heidi Maus and Jeff Barwig, do not wear monkey costumes, but one can immediately tell they are monkeys.

"They are wearing little clothes like monkeys would wear, and the female monkey is wearing a baby doll kind of a dress," Kuhr said. "It's absolutely hysterical."

The story line is based on the conflicting

views the monkeys have about the task they have set out to do.

Eric Underwood, who plays the monkey Swift, is not happy with the experiment.

"I am the one that thinks this is a totally dumb idea and a waste of my time," he said. "I am trying to persuade the other two that they should join in a collaboration against the doctor that is holding us."

Jeff Barwig's character, Milton, disagrees. "Milton thinks we've gotten a sweet deal," he said. "He's happy we're not in Africa swinging

from branches, because here the monkeys are provided free food, lodging and a safe environment."

The third monkey, played by Heidi Maus, tries to make peace between the other monkeys, but stays out of the conflict.

Because of this, she eventually ends up typing "Hamlet."

Kuhr said this scene contains vibrant colors and a tire swing for the monkeys to swing on.

After the monkeys, the focus returns to a man-woman relationship in "The Universal Language."

The theme involves Dawn, a girl with a stuttering problem, who sees an ad in the paper for a language school.

She and Don, the teacher who created a comical language known as Unamunda, develop a relationship that leads to love.

The act is about the two interacting in this

up language.

After a short intermission, which will feature a performance by a magician, "Philip Glass Buys a Loaf of Bread" will be performed.

The scene has carefully selected Philip Glass' "Einstein on the Beach" music and includes "amazingly creative, artistic costumes," Kuhr said.

The story involves a celebrated composer who experiences a moment of internal crisis while in a bakery.

Kuhr described the "incredibly original" scene as having no story line, yet at the same time having one.

This act had to be carefully choreographed and involves the actors magically appearing on stage by use of a lift.

"The audience will be blown away," Kuhr said.

In the fifth on-act, "Philadelphia," a man has fallen into a strange, altered world.

While speaking to a man in a restaurant and explaining to him that he has not received anything he has asked for the entire day, the man responds by telling him that he is in "Philadelphia," a world in which you get the opposite of what you asked for.

He must then learn the process of acting the opposite of how he has learned things are supposed to be.

In the final act, "Variations on the Death of Trotsky," a Russian revolutionary wanders around with a mountain-climbing ax literally sticking out of his head.

He must accept the fact that it is there and, in the end, does accept it and walks off into the light.

Timing is the central theme in all of the acts, but they all also deal with love, Kuhr said.

The fact that "All in the Timing" deals with six different individual one-acts with no actors overlapping has been a challenge for everyone involved, Kuhr said.

But the challenge was a result of the director's wanting to do something different.

William Grange, associate professor of theater, arts and dance, who is directing "All in the Timing," said the show let the cast do a lot of original things.

"We wanted a show that we could do a lot with and wanted something that was very flexible," he said. "It's a very funny show, and it has stuff in it that I am very interested in."

"I believe you need to do something that is entertaining. People don't just come to the theater to think," he said.

Part of Grange's effort to better entertain involves dancers performing during set changes.

According to the cast, there are no blackout moments in the entire performance.

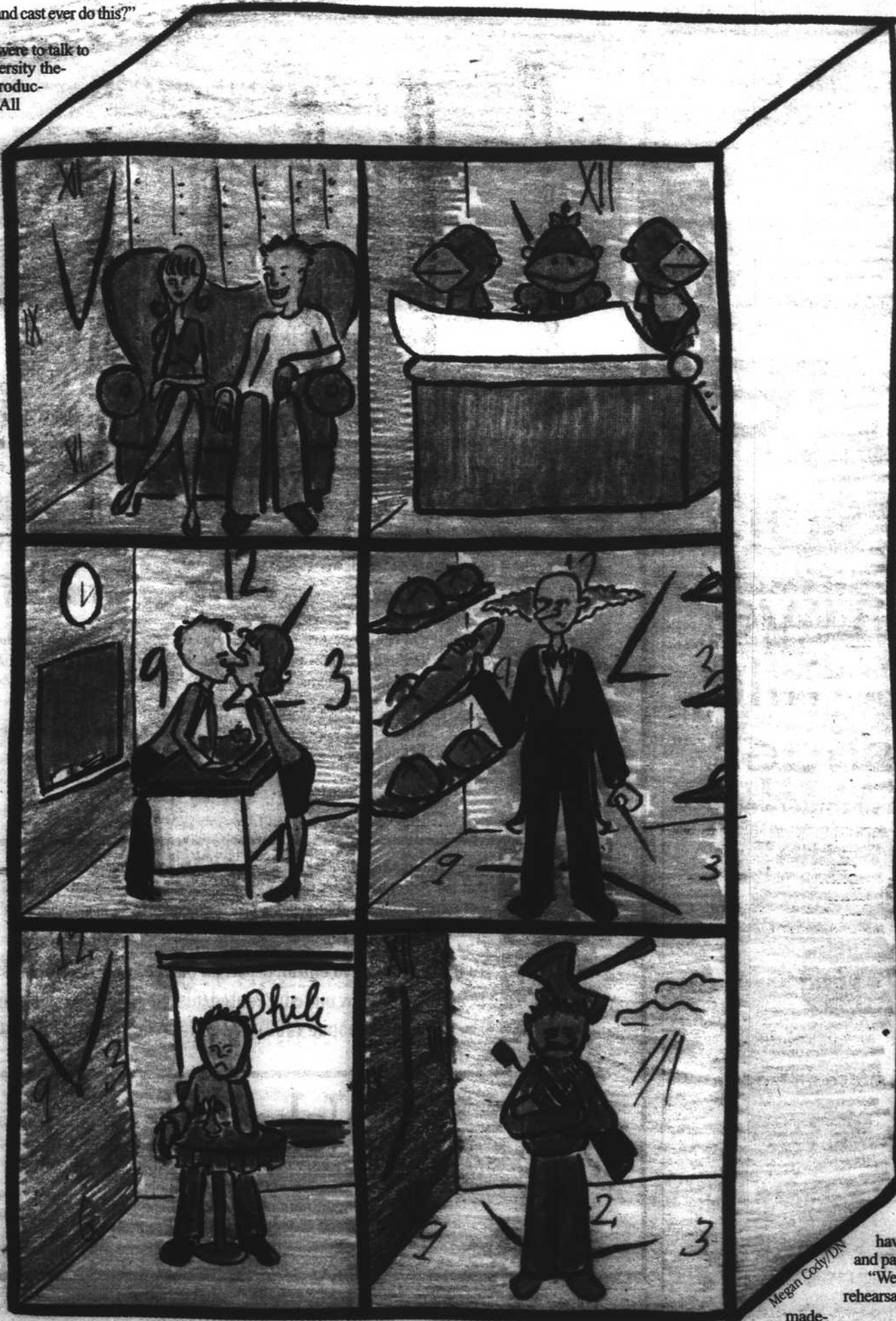
The variety of music from different time periods coincides with what is going on in the one-acts and continues the theme of "All in the Timing."

Grange said going away from the traditional blackout between sets is a "challenge to the artistry of the theater."

Also, Grange said he has taken a hands-off approach to this production in order to "tap into the energy that students have."

Because of this, the cast members have learned to answer their own questions and pay attention to timing.

"We've been saying ever since the beginning of rehearsal," Kuhr said, "It's 'All in the Timing.'"



Megan Coody/DN made-