

Lincoln poets work to find voice

By Jason Hardy
Staff writer

As in most college towns, Lincoln has a fairly active music and arts scene. Just about any day of the week, one can find a musical performance or some kind of visual arts exhibit to attend.

Still, it seems, there is something, or rather some things, missing. Things like poetry slams, poetry readings or even poetry discussion groups are noticeably absent from the local arts community.

With each passing night it increasingly becomes obvious that the poets of Lincoln have little or no voice, and the question inevitably becomes: Why?

"It doesn't do you any good to write and write and write and let it collect inside a file box, which so many people do," said Rebecca Christensen, a local writer. "It's very disappointing."

Christensen, who has lived in Lincoln for about a year and a half and has had poems published in numerous publications, said when she first came to Lincoln, she was surprised at the local poetry scene, or rather, the lack thereof.

"Part of it is that in Lincoln, Nebraska, everything requires funding. Also, local publications are so slim as far as challenging people to submit stuff that's going to shake things up. It's a town where you kind of have to do it yourself," she said.

The environment creates obstacles. "So I think a lot of it is lack of motivation. It could happen if people were more motivated to do it. We're just not pulling together like we need to.

"It's like if they're serious about being a writer, they're not serious about staying here."

Eventually the question always takes the form of a "which came first, the chicken or the egg" debate. With local poetry, however, one wonders which was lacking first, local poetry or local support?

According to local poet Adam Pomajzl, it's a little of both. He said many Lincoln poets don't actively seek out opportunities to read or publish their work, but the ones who do aren't exactly embraced by the community, either.

"A lot of people have hopes and

dreams of getting out of Lincoln that they forget that there could be a scene here while they're still here," Pomajzl said.

"Once that scene becomes available, I think the community will get more involved. But so far what I've seen is just not strong enough to be something that would be continually going on. There's not enough push to support local poetry and writing."

For Pomajzl and Christensen, the only outlets for their work have been created by their own ambitions.

Pomajzl recently has published a short book of poetry he paid for

himself, and Christensen has been seeking agents to represent her work. However, even with small steps like these comes a more uphill battle.

Since his book, "Two Days From Honesty," published by Infusion Publishing, was finished, Pomajzl has had a surprising amount of trouble finding places to sell it. Aside from a local

bookstore, A Novel Idea, 118 N. 14th St., and his own mail order business, Pomajzl has had little to no luck.

"It's just really hard to get your book into stores," he said. "A lot of the local businesses have been cut out by stores like Barnes

Christensen has found equally disheartening results in her quest for quality representation.

"A lot of major publishing houses won't touch it with a 10-foot pole. But I'm a writer, not a salesman, so I'm getting an agent," she said. "But the type of work I do is not common, and an agent would rather receive a historical romance or a Stephen King-esque novel."

readings in Lincoln does a lot to stifle the quality and productivity of local writers.

Still, there has been some progress. Both Club 1427, 1427 O St., and The Coffee House, 1324 P St., hold occasional open mic-type poetry readings. In January, LOCALincoln, a community arts support group, held a poetry reading as part of a music and art show. Nevertheless, support, even from the poetry community, has been relatively lackluster.

Colin Egger, a local poet and employee of The Coffee House, said The Coffee House is open upon request to hold poetry readings, but people rarely come forth to participate.

"It's disappointing because I know a lot of people that write, and I know a lot of poets, and it's like they just read (their work) in whatever class they have, and every once in a while there'll be one (poet to read) at the Coffee House," Egger said. "When we do have (readings) they're kind of off and on. The last one I saw, the whole room was full of all different kinds of people, so I think the more often people would read, the more support there would be."

Christensen agreed the Lincoln community and its writers need to work at providing a more embracing environment for the arts in Lincoln.

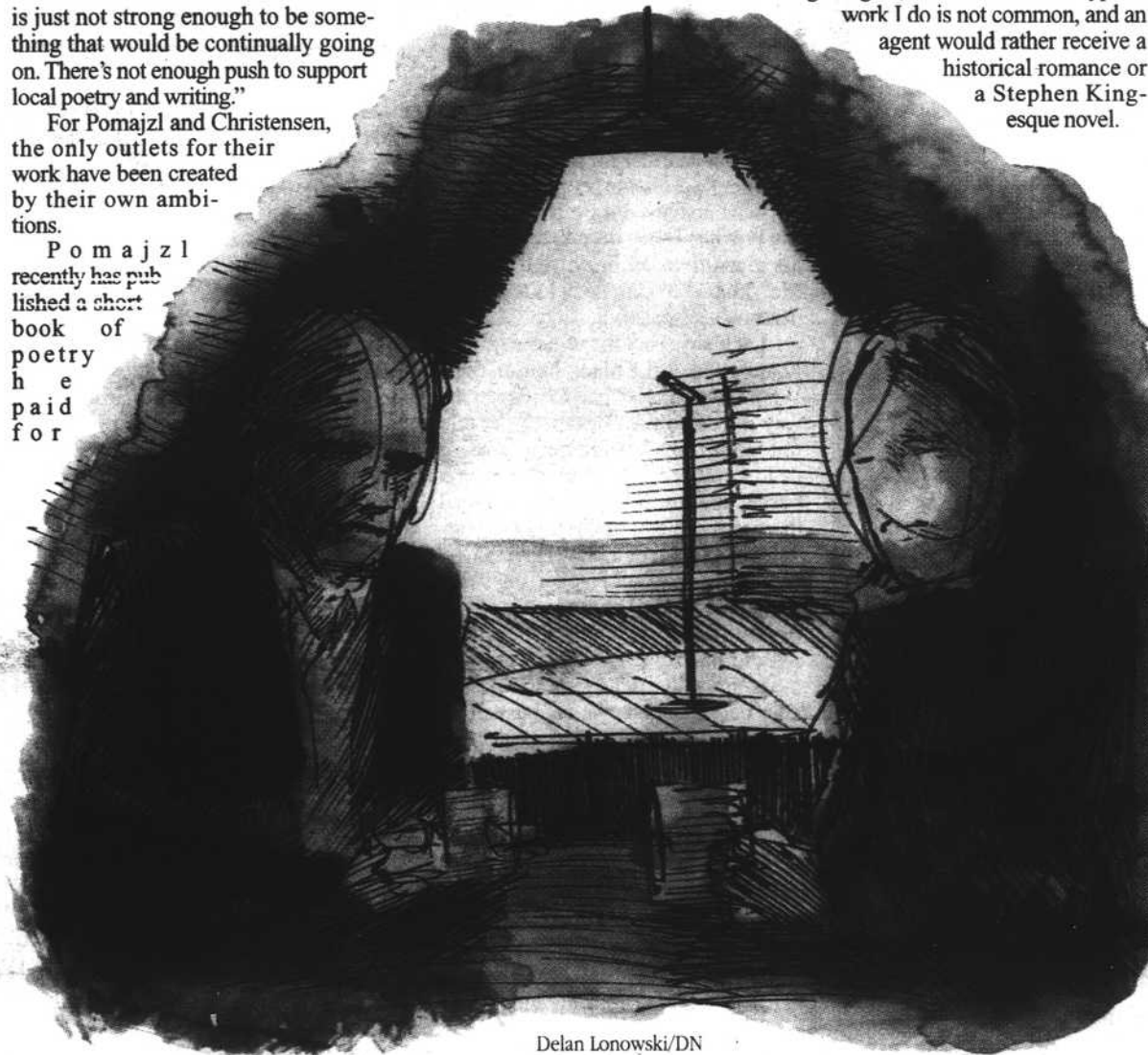
She said if this goal were accomplished, it would benefit both Lincoln's writers and the city itself. Christensen and Pomajzl said they hoped to organize poetry discussion groups and readings themselves but agreed that it would take more than that.

Slowly, however, things seem to be moving in the right direction.

"It seems like a lot of other people lately have been recognizing that there is talent in Lincoln, and they've been trying to get it out there," Christensen said.

"Lincoln is kind of behind in promoting local arts, but there are a lot of places that are now promoting visual art shows; and, as we start allowing visual artists to display their work in environments that don't require funding, it will all tie together.

"But, of course, that's still just the first step."



Delan Lonowski/DN

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and Noble or Hastings, and they have a hard enough time keeping up with them, so it puts a strain on them to take a chance with poetry.

"It's kind of like pulling teeth. It's sad because I'm sure there are so many more talented Nebraska poets than are being represented."

"I've found 200 agents, and maybe a quarter would look at it and maybe 10 percent of those would sell it if they thought it was worth selling. Most are from California or New York."

Even when local poets are able to publish work on their own and find representation nationally, the lack of poetry

— MOVIE REVIEW —

'Hanging Up' disconnects viewers

By Samuel McKewon
Senior editor

Let's get two things straight about "Hanging Up," as the movie's trailers, posters and press material would have us believe otherwise.

■ This is not a comedy. I found five laughs in the movie. There might be a few more. In reality, the screenplay written by Nora Ephron (adapted from her sister Delia's book) is sad, and, at times, disturbing. Granted, it's all false disturbance, but I am certain "Hanging Up" will not be mistaken for bubble-gum joy.

■ There are two stars in this movie, Meg Ryan and Walter Matthau. Diane Keaton (who plays Georgia and also directs) and Lisa Kudrow (Maddy) have almost useless roles in this movie. They're the sisters of Eve (Meg Ryan), and all three are daughters of Matthau's bitter and dying screenwriter, who enjoys calling his daughters to annoy them with stories of John Wayne.

Actually, he bothers only Eve, which is the entire point: This movie would work much better with Eve as an only child, but, alas, we must live with the stories of the sisters we don't care about.

It's pretty easy to see why

"Hanging Up" got jettisoned out of the holiday movie lineup in favor of a middle February date — critics would have skewered it.

Critics are skewering it now, too, but at least this over-sentimental, rather boring drama of a dysfunctional family doesn't stink so badly when compared to the rest of the shabby fare out there right now.

But the lack of decent movies at this time of year doesn't make "Hanging Up" any better, either.

While Keaton and the Ephron sisters would like this movie to be about many things — the letting-go of a parent, the disconnection from loved ones — it ends up being largely about how many times Ryan can tug at her mop-top hair over her father's illness, which we never learn about but know to be deadly.

Dad's already moved into a hospital and has written "It's too late" on his admittance form, leading Eve, the middle sister who's always been his caretaker, to think Dad's on the verge of blinking out.

Considering how Matthau's character is portrayed in flashbacks, his death wouldn't be such a bad thing. A drunk capable of firing off emphatic and accusing one-liners, even to his daughters, Matthau is forbidden by

Eve's husband (Adam Arkin) ever to step in their house again after crashing their son's birthday party.

Georgia, a magazine mogul, and Maddy, a soap opera actress, cannot (or does not want to) find the time to visit him. And Mom (Cloris Leachman in a cameo) left long ago.

So, it's basically Eve, Dad and the phone, with a highly annoying subplot of a car accident shoved somewhere in between. There's obvious hints of a teary sister reunion concerning their father's hospitalization. Will it happen? God help you if you can't figure it out 30 minutes in.

"Hanging Up" is poorly executed in nearly every way — writing, directing, editing, et al. It's a mathematical impossibility, of course, to hate Meg Ryan for any lengthy period of time onscreen — she's damn near 40 and still looks 28 — and her character is most clearly drawn.

Matthau is fine, too, considering he has to play an oaf with only a mild sense of humor. Every other character has the depth of the numerous pumpkins Keaton piled on the set.

This is Ryan's fourth collaboration with one of Ephron's sisters and was part of Nora's biggest success to date in "When Harry Met Sally." Strangely, 11 years later, neither has



made a better movie. And "Hanging Up" is nowhere near that caliber. It isn't even decent.

And while I am resigned that some people (mostly women) might be sucked in by the false charm of "Hanging Up," many more won't. They'll be able to see, with clear eyes, that this movie strikes not one note of reality in its running time. It's a schmaltzy dud in almost every way.

REVIEW Hanging Up

STARRING: Meg Ryan, Walter Matthau, Diane Keaton, Lisa Kudrow
DIRECTOR: Diane Keaton
RATED: PG-13 (minor cussing, major boredom)
GRADE: D
FIVE WORDS: Ought to be "Walking Out"