

Task force examines local music scene

Key venues, musicians not included in discussions

By Jason Hardy

Staff writer

It is not uncommon to hear University of Nebraska-Lincoln students and other Lincoln residents talking about great concerts and events they've seen recently.

But seldom do those events actually happen in Lincoln.

In January, Mayor Don Wesely formed a Concert/Entertainment Task Force to study ways to improve concert and entertainment opportunities in Lincoln. The group has been meeting every two weeks since then and recently has created a survey to gain the input of Lincoln residents on the issue.

The survey, which can be found at <http://www.ci.lincoln.ne.us/city/mayor/cic/media/033100a.htm> asks questions such as "What types of music would you like to see more of in Lincoln (circle all that apply) alternative, blues, country, folk, gospel, jazz, Latin, Metal, new age, oldies, pop, rap, reggae, rock, swing, other."

The task force hopes the questions will shed some light on what many see as a dismal concert climate. As of yet, however, members of the task force say they have found limited results.

"We haven't reached any conclusions yet," said Diane Gonzolas, man-

ager of the citizen information center, a division of the mayor's office. "At this point we're still investigating. Maybe there will be more follow-ups after we give our report to the mayor."

In mid-May, the task force will present the mayor with a report detailing its findings.

To compile these findings, the task force split into five subcommittees: one for creating the survey, one for researching Lincoln's existing venues, one for researching UNL's concert involvement, one for finding possible corporate support and one to research the proposed Pinewood Bowl.

Gonzolas said that until each of the subcommittees had finalized its results, the task force would have relatively no idea as to its options.

The task force has among its 23 members Doug Kuhnel, executive director of Pershing Auditorium, Tim Sheridan, program director of KIBZ radio and C.W. "Butch" Hug, director of events for the UNL Athletic Department.

The task force does not include any proprietors of local bars which have regular concerts.

Duffy's Tavern, Knickerbockers and The Zoo Bar, all of which have at least one band or performer per week, and anyone listed as a local musician

are all absent.

"I don't think there was a conscious effort to leave them out," said Jennifer Brinkman, an aide to the mayor who helped compile the task force. "The meetings are open to the public and, if they had some interest or expertise to share with us, we'd certainly like to hear it. Just because they aren't a member of the task force doesn't mean we don't want their input."

Nevertheless, neither Andy Fairbairn, who books shows at Duffy's Tavern, nor Zoo Bar owner Larry Boehmer had heard of the task force.

Jim Ritzman, the task force's chairman and a representative of Arjay Advertising, said he was open to outside interests but also said he felt the task force was constructed fairly well.

"It might look like we should have certain people on there, but I think the parameters that people look at when they bring in entertainment are certainly represented," he said. "There's a certain format when you look at booking entertainment. We spent quite a bit of time having subcommittees analyze (the format). If there was a Duffy's representative or a Pershing representative, it doesn't make any difference. It's still the same parameters you have to deal with."

Heath Macomber, the task-force

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Jim Ritzman
task force chairman

member in charge of investigating the options of corporate sponsorship, is also the co-founder of Hamada Enterprises, a local promotions group.

"We haven't really launched anything yet. Right now we're working with the university to figure out where we can have national acts come play," he said. "The task force for us is just finding out who the players are in Lincoln. Hopefully within the next year, you'll recognize us on campus."

Macomber cited venue size as one of Lincoln's chief entertainment problems.

"It's a whole different ball game doing shows at Knickerbockers than at Pershing. When you involve ticket charging and mass advertising it gets pretty involved," he said. "I don't think Lincoln has the facility to bill large national acts. I don't think we have the population to do it either."

Gonzolas said after viewing the results of the survey, the task force

would probably be able to narrow its focus.

"What we started out with was 'why can't we get the bigger shows?' and that was our initial focus," she said. "But I don't think that's the total focus of this task force. (The subcommittees) brought in ideas that maybe Lincoln can't support those types of big concerts, and maybe we should concentrate on smaller venues."

For Duffy's concert-booker Fairbairn, the problem isn't a lack of entertainment opportunities, it's a lack of people utilizing the opportunities already available.

"It would help a lot, in terms of getting people out to see big music, if people in Lincoln would go see some of the smaller shows," he said. "It's a really hard town to get support, especially with the college students. There's 25,000 students, and it feels like none of them care about live music."

Students take stage at 'Fiddler' debut

By Josh Nichols

Staff writer

Professional entertainers from all across the world consistently grace the stage at the Lied Center for Performing Arts.

Last night, students who probably have grown accustomed to UNL's Temple building and Kimball Hall had their first opportunity to show their stuff on the Lied Stage.

They did so in the University of Nebraska Hixson-Lied College of Fine and Performing Arts production of "Fiddler on the Roof," which they will perform all weekend.

Not only are students getting the opportunity to expand onto a larger stage, they also get to work with an established, professional entertainer.

Joseph Gallo, from Branson, Mo., will play the lead role of Tevye the dairyman.

Charles Bethea, executive director of the Lied Center for Performing Arts, said the reason he brought in a professional performer was to provide a strong character for the large role.

Bethea said Gallo fit the part well and has done an excellent job.

Bethea also mentioned that having him in the performance has been a wonderful experience for the students who have had an opportunity to work with him.

Director of the performance, William Shomos, agreed.

"It's been a real blessing for us," he said. "They've learned so much from his talent."

Judging by Gallo's record, he has plenty of experience to share.

He has been in numerous regional theatrical productions including "Hello Dolly," "Destry Rides Again," "Damn Yankees" and "Anything Goes."

He has been in several Branson productions as well as performing a solo act throughout the country.

Blessed with a rich baritone, he has numerous recordings along with nominations in 1997 and 1999 for the All American Entertainment Award for vocalist

PREVIEW Fiddler on the Roof

WHERE: Lied Center for Performing Arts
WHEN: Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m., Sunday at 2 p.m.
COST: \$28, \$24, \$20, half-price for students
THE SKINNY: University students get opportunity to take the Lied stage.

of the year and gospel artist of the year.

In the press release for "Fiddler on the Roof," he said, "I am very excited about the opportunity to fulfill a lifelong dream of playing Tevye and am looking forward to working with the staff and performers at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln."

The story of Tevye in "Fiddler on the Roof" has a long history.

The character first came about in the stories written in Yiddish by a popular fiction writer called Sholom Aleichem in the late 19th century.

The stories were passed around and began to appear in numerous publications until 1953, when Arnold Perl took the stories of Aleichem and other Yiddish writers and made them into a series of short plays.

Soon Perl made a full play about just Tevye, which prompted Joseph Stein to make the Tevye stories into a musical, which he called "Fiddler on the Roof."

Shomos said the Lied performance has been done in the style of Marc Chagall, a Jewish painter who lived in Russia.

That style is very colorful and vibrant, he said.

The message is that despite the poverty and oppression the Jews were experiencing during that time, they were still able to see their lives as rich and colorful.

For the College of Fine and Performing Arts, doing a production in the Lied Center is a biennial affair.

Two years ago, they did "Oklahoma."

Houston's actions scrutinized

■ The singer has come under fire for no-shows and allegations of drug use.

NEW YORK (AP) — Does Houston — Whitney Houston — have a problem?

There was that allegation of marijuana possession in January, a much-discussed absence at last month's Oscars, and a disjointed magazine interview.

On Monday night, the superstar singer is scheduled to perform at Arista Records' 25th anniversary party.

Given the tumult in her personal life in recent months, her appearance will be heavily scrutinized.

"WHERE WAS WHITNEY?" asked the New York Post after the diva's performance at the Academy Awards was canceled amid a report that she was "totally out of it" during a rehearsal with Burt Bacharach.

The same question applied after Houston failed to appear at the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame dinner three weeks earlier. Houston was scheduled to help induct Clive Davis, the music impresario who signed her to Arista in the early '80s.

"Whitney is in good spirits and looking forward to Monday's event," says her publicist, Nancy Seltzer, who had earlier blamed a sore throat for the Oscar incident and "voice prob-

lems" for the Hall of Fame flameout.

But the bad news continues. The upcoming People magazine features a cover story about "Whitney's Troubled Times." Citing anonymous sources, it suggests a drug problem — an allegation Houston has denied in the past.

"If a performer gets a reputation for being unreliable or canceling at the last minute, that's a problem," says Richard Johnson, a veteran Houston watcher at the Post. "It seems that's been happening with Whitney Houston."

Houston's husband of seven years, singer Bobby Brown, has his own litany of woes: a 1995 Betty Ford Clinic visit for alcohol abuse, a 1997 report that he punched Houston in a Honolulu parking lot, and a 1998 five-day jail term for drunken driving.

The bad publicity is a relatively new experience for a gospel singer's daughter, the all-American girl whose 1991 version of "The Star Spangled Banner" improbably turned Francis Scott Key into a best-selling songwriter.

The recent rash of incidents began in January, when airport security officers in Hawaii said they found a half-ounce of marijuana in Houston's bag. Rather than wait for police to arrive, the 36-year-old Houston boarded her flight and left the islands.

Adding to Whitney's woes was a cover story in the May issue of Jane magazine.

The piece described an "extremely unfocused" Houston showing up four hours late for a photo shoot.

Once there, the singer responsible for 11 No. 1 singles had "trouble keeping her eyes open" and intermittently played an imaginary piano, according to the story.

Whitney's explanation: She had just arrived from a visit to the dentist to repair a cracked tooth.

During an interview for Jane, Houston tossed around four-letter words, compared meeting the president to hanging out with a junkie ("They're just men, you dig?"), and denied having a "lesbo" affair with her executive assistant.

Seltzer said the article was not "a fair portrait of Whitney Houston as I know her."

Wrong, says Daily News gossip guru Mitchell Fink.

"Look at her behavior over the last few years," Fink says. "If you did a timeline over the last few years, you'd see that this particular pattern of behavior is not at all shocking."

The problems and tabloid rumblings have had little effect on her recording career. Houston's 1998 album "My Love is Your Love" was a platinum seller and spawned several hit singles: the title track, "Heartbreak Hotel," "When You Believe," "It's Not Right But It's OK."

In May, she will release a greatest-hits album that is expected to top the charts.

O'Rourke's has kept its homey feel

BAR from page 9

not out of place. They are talking, laughing and smoking cigarettes in a corner table. Sunny's hair is blonde, and Flag wears his long gray hair in a ponytail.

Sunny has been coming to O'Rourke's for a few years, and that's more than enough time to get comfortable. She said the flowers drew her to O'Rourke's, pointing to a vase of fresh flowers on the bar.

"How many bars do you go to do you see fresh flowers?" she asks. "That's what's kept me coming back."

Sunny calls O'Rourke's patrons "true people" who say hello every time they see you.

"The variety of people here is great," she says, "from college-age to as old as dirt like I am."

"There's a lot of regulars, and we're

all friends," Flag responds. "We have a chapter of the old farts club here. Nobody wants to be president. Everybody wants to be secretary of the treasury."

The staff contribute as much as the customers, McLeese said. A few of the bartenders, such as McAndrews, have worked for 10 years, and McLeese said he couldn't have done it without them.

Thanks to regulars and the staff, O'Rourke's is approaching its 20th anniversary, but it hasn't changed much since it opened, McLeese said. He said the only real changes are better business, 14 beers on tap instead of the two it started with and CDs in the jukebox instead of the old 45s.

"People know what to expect when they come in here," he said.

McLeese said O Street has changed even if his bar has kept the same spirit.

"How many bars do you go to do you see fresh flowers?"

Sunny
O'Rourke's regular

It's home to a lot more bars, but McLeese said that doesn't worry him.

"The bar owners all get along," he said. "We're not out pecking to see who's doing business and who's not doing business."

McLeese wouldn't have to peek even if he wanted to. O'Rourke's has withstood the test of time, becoming an O Street staple.