

Local concert jazzes up the holidays, big-band style

BY CASEY JOHNSON

Bing Crosby, Old Blue Eyes and most Christmas specials Elvis did always had Christmas music with a big band orchestra, and this year Lincolnites can hear local musicians perform it that way again.

The Nebraska Jazz Orchestra will fill the Cornhusker Hotel tonight with big band Christmas cheer with a concert titled "Christmas and All That Jazz," the orchestra's first concert of the 2000-2001 season.

The lists of acclaimed musicians who have played with the Nebraska Jazz Orchestra is impressive, and the orchestra has produced many musicians - including Rex Cadawallader,

Ryan Kaisor and Matt Wallace - who have gone on to national success.

Ed Love, musical director and saxophonist for the orchestra, said the reason the orchestra has been so successful is because of the members' immense experience.

"We are the only professional big band in the area," he said. "Every high school around has a big band, but we are the guys that never stopped playing after high school. So when people come to see us, they are going to hear a very high-quality product."

The Nebraska Jazz Orchestra has a new home at the Cornhusker Hotel, 333 S. 13th St., for this season; Love said the location should help draw a bet-

ter crowd. "This is more centrally located and closer in proximity to restaurants and things for people to do before or after a concert," he said. "It gives people a better opportunity to come out and enjoy an evening."

Pam Kalal and her husband, Jim, will be performing with the orchestra in the program.

Pam Kalal is a long-time professional singer who has sung and appeared in hundreds of radio and television commercials, she said.

She was the voice for the "How do they make it taste so good?" jingle on Robert's Dairy commercials. Her work includes a long-time stint on Godfather's Pizza commercials.

"We are the guys that never stopped playing after high school."

Ed Love
Lincoln Jazz Orchestra

Perhaps some of Pam Kalal's greatest success has come from singing background vocals for nationally recognized artists such as C.W. McCall and Chip Davis from Mannheim Steamroller. She performed with McCall on the hit title track for the movie "Convoy."

Jim Kalal, who will be performing with her tonight, also is a bit of a celebrity from commercials. He has appeared in televi-

sion commercials for Paul Gerber Auto Sales, Cox Cable and the syndicated television show "M.A.S.H." on Fox 42.

But tonight's show is not about commercials - it's about the music. Pam Kalal said she looks forward to performing with an orchestra because it is something she rarely gets to do.

"It is an honor to be asked to perform with (the Nebraska Jazz Orchestra) because they have so

PERFORMANCE PREVIEW

Christmas and All That Jazz

Where: Cornhusker Hotel
333 S. 13th

When: Tonight @ 7:30

Cost: \$15, \$7 for students

many great musicians," she said. "I have worked with some of them before, but to work with an entire orchestra is really quite a thrill."

Top films vie for attention on shelves at video-rental shops

■ "The War Zone," one of the best movies this year, skipped the theaters and went straight to the stores. Other high-quality movies follow suit.

BY SAMUEL MCKEON

The video release of the summer epic "Gladiator" is one of those "raid the shelves" moments at your local movie mega-rental store, where the 47 or so copies of Russell Crowe's glistening six-pack are swallowed whole by the barely-legal-to-drive set, who will freeze-frame the scene where Maximus guts that Bengal tiger over as many times as there are videos.

So woe the 11 p.m. video hunter, who's most certainly missed out on the prime cut of Rome, and maybe on the glut of "X-Men" cassettes, too. But not far from that metallic X is that one copy of Tim Roth's "The War Zone," stocked full as usual, waiting for the discerning mind to peruse its back cover.

And even then that viewer won't discover that one of last year's best films is contained inside, though it received zero press outside the major cities, much less a tiny run in the Lincoln or Omaha metro area.

There's a Blockbuster (or Hollywood, or Audio-Visual) full of movies toiling under such obscurity, even on the new-releases rack, which mostly covers 1999 and 2000 films released theatrically, along with a few sex-minded straight-to-video selections and pay-cable movies that

mainstream television audiences never tasted.

And the 1999 slate of films, some of the best in a few decades, still has a few quirky, unknown titles that escaped the mainstream despite of the success that artful, dramatic fare that "Being John Malkovich" and "American Beauty" enjoyed during their theatrical runs.

Here's a survey of the best that never came to Lincoln's theaters, along with a star rating of out of four for quality. Nearly all can be found in any of the three video stores listed above, though they're less likely to be available for purchase. Go online to make it a keepsake or gift.

"The War Zone"

Actor Tim Roth's directorial debut is reminiscent of Swedish genius Ingmar Bergman, and that's no faint phrase to throw around without reason. But "The War Zone" - a stunning, spare, gut-wrenching drama of family incest - is no faint film. Set against the bare English coastal countryside, it succeeds where many movies concerning rape fail - by transforming a morality tale into something larger, with implication and empathy involved. Here is one convincing portrait of an unspeakable act.

It starts with a relocated English family - a father, a mother, son and daughter - in search of a "fresh start" as the matriarch, played by Danish beauty Tilda Swinton (of "Orlando" fame). It's never made obviously clear what the fresh start entails, only that it includes the birth of another child into the family quite soon into the film, which

occurs in a panic sequence centered on a car crash.

It isn't long after that the 15-year-old Tom (Freddie Cunliffe, awash in adolescent acne) discovers, through the back window of the isolated family stead, the last bit of an intimate, naked act between father (Ray Winsome) and 18-year-old daughter Jessie (Lara Belmont, a young mirror of Swinton's physicality).

What follows is Tom's quiet, building journey through the gamut of painful emotions, and the equally quiet steps Jessie takes to stop the truth from arriving, for her escape to college is only months away, and there's the boyfriend to consider. And beyond keeping the secret, Roth does depict a family of fortunate relations; early scenes may as well be out of a Rockwell portrait. What Tom is up against is not only pain, but the very keystone of his nuclear structure staying together.

Horrible things have been done to Jessie, and yet, Tom observes, as do we, that she seems to have taken it in some sort of coping stride, to the point where her casual nudity in the presence of younger brother is no worry. Which isn't to say "The War Zone" has taken the father's side in the matter; rather it's simply an honest portrayal -

Winsome plays his character full of body and is caring and decent except for his one basic, appallingly indecent trait. We sense he acts out in spite of his better inclination not to.

That it plays so cold and understated makes the scenes of violence play more violently and better illuminates the pain of family rape. "The War Zone" becomes exceedingly hard to watch with feeling raw with hurt for the situation; one particular scene between Tom and Jessie is a test for how much built-up hurt an audience can endure.

Movies are rarely made like this, and even more rarely do

they find some sort of mainstream audience. And yet it's small and resonating well after the credits have run. Its straight, simple presentation is filmed poetry with a sad, endless soul of hurt. ★★★★★



"The Limey"

Before Steven Soderbergh made "Erin Brockovich," he made "The Limey," the best kind of crime film, a stylish, smooth action picture that features Soderbergh's style of telling the

story out of sequence. It's a picture a hard-boiled James Bond might like: shaken and stirred. Still tastefully dressed.

Terance Stamp, "Zod" from "Superman 2," is a Cockney ex-con named Wilson - a limey, as it were, who flies to LA simply to

know who's killed his daughter, and why. He encounters her ex-boyfriend, Terry Valentine, a showy record producer on his decline (Peter Fonda), along with an assortment of acquaintances and bagmen. Let it be said that Wilson quietly makes his way up the ladder of knowledge, all the way to the top.

Can a movie capture California any better? No, probably not, which makes Stamp's fish-out-of-water presence even better. Like Lee Marvin in "Point Blank," his Wilson just wants a few answers, not too many, then he'll be along. If only they'd offer the answers...

Soderbergh is one of best directors going, and his exceeding talent to cast and shoot gorgeous women of any kind - in this case, a beachy, California daydreamer who hangs around as Terry's girlfriend - shows again here. It's not just the story fool, but the style, and Soderbergh's got dibs on it, again and again. There's a crime picture this year any sweeter than this 90-minute smoothie, not by a shot long (that's Soderbergh for long shot). ★★★★★

"Felicia's Journey"

Atom Egoyan made a film much like "The War Zone" with his 1997 effort "The Sweet Hereafter," about the aftermath of small-town school bus crash. His follow-up was last year's "Felicia's Journey," a provocative, lush study of an Irish girl (Elaine Cassidy) who has run out of spurned loves and places to go and a serial killer Joseph (Bob Hoskins) who lives his day hours as lead chef at an industrial factory and quietly becomes her mentor and suitor, videotaping his exchanges with Felicia, just as he has other girls before her.

Egoyan has a specific talent to tell a story in fragmented time, rather than chronology, which works as a sort of mental framework operating outside the action events of the films. It is conventional to be viewed straight ahead, and yet "Journey," which spends a large amount of time doting on

Joseph's childhood with over-protective, neurotic French Julia Child of a mother, feels more like cinematic reactions, with instant flash-forwards and backwards, without change in film quality. It's challenging, but absorbing; the pieces come together well after the movie ends.

"Journey" is uncommonly lush and green, full of wide shots and abstract presentation. And yet it feels quite small, as Joseph quietly "nices" his way into Felicia's life, making up phony dead-wife stories, becoming her boarder in his elaborately tricked-up

home. It works to a fine conclusion, staying honest with its title: The movie is a journey, the key the girl, the killer, played with devilish understatement by Hoskins, a traveler within it. It helps make the conclusion come together. Pleasure for the entire film lasts much longer. ★★½

"Liberty Heights"

Barry Levinson is an accomplished director with two sides: the big budget showman ("Toys," "Wag The Dog," "Bugsy") and the smaller, more personal films he makes about his hometown of Baltimore ("Diner," "Avalon"). "Liberty Heights" released around last Christmas, is in the latter category, a story set in the 1950s, chronicling the love life of two Jewish brothers (Ben Foster and Adrien Brody) who choose separate paths toward love.

Ben (Foster) seems taken with the outwardly forbidden love of a black girl (Rebekah Johnson), the daughter of a wealthy, prominent doctor who's no more pleased than Ben's parents (Bebe Neuwirth and Joe Mantegna) are upon discovery. Van (Brody) veers in another socially unacceptable direction by courting the debutante beauty, appropriately named Dobbie, played by fashion model Carolyn Murphy in an uncommonly good acting debut.

While it isn't Levinson's best film, or his most entertaining, it contains the typical intelligent wit of a fine script and uses long period set pieces (a James Brown concert is particularly good) to fine effect. And Frank Sinatra lovers will find a kindred spirit in "Liberty Heights." ★★★

"The Minus Man"

A peculiar, strangely attractive drama about serial killer ("Rushmore" screenwriter Owen Wilson, in a fine dramatic turn) who works his way into small-town life and murders almost randomly, and without warning, by way of a small vial of poison he pours in a victim's drink.

Try to fit gloves on this movie, which co-stars Mercedes Ruehl, Brian Cox and Janeane Garofalo. Directed by Hampton Fancher (writer of "Blade Runner"), the movie seems at times shot deliberately bright, so the movie takes on almost a TV-movie quality. Many scenes, especially those that show the killer working as a mailman, seem almost hyper-real, as an odd jingling music plays on the soundtrack. Wilson is good, unassuming in his performance; he seems as perplexed at his popularity as we do.

And when he stumbles into troubles that might be beyond him, he conjures up fictional detectives, both his saviors and deepest critics. Weird, but it works. ★★½

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