

## 'Ragtime' an ambitious, disturbingly real epic

BY BILLY SMUCK

If you only plan on seeing one show at the Lied Center this season, this week's feature, "Ragtime," is not one to be missed.

The musical adaptation of E.L. Doctorow's novel highlights issues apparent at the dawn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century that still exist today despite the 100-year time span.

"Ragtime" portrays three different familial ethnic groups in a very stereotypical fashion. In the opening number featuring the titled song, the first group to be introduced are the white Anglo-Saxon Protestants who are dressed in white, which is symbolic for purity and innocence.

The family within this group includes Father, Mother, Little Boy, and

Mother's Younger Brother - none of whom have names because they represent a group during a time that was highly determined by gender and age.

The next bunch to share the stage are the blacks from Harlem. The two highlighted characters in this gang are Coalhouse Walker Jr. and Sarah, two lovers looking for a better life in a country that is supposed to be nearing a time of lessening prejudices.

Finally come the immigrants, mainly Jewish, who are dressed in rags and dirty, with their eyes wide open to the new possibilities that await them in America.

Tateh and his Little Girl are optimistic and also look forward to change in their new homeland of opportunity.

This prologue in Act I is an introduction to all the characters in what is

arguably the best number of the show.

All three groups are dancing together not in a fashion that portrays a harmonious melting pot but in a fashion that brings these ethnic and racially diverse groups together.

Instead, a mood of conflict and opposition is presented, which is relative to the tensions in America at a time that was cursed by the ugliness of bigotry, discrimination and intolerance.

From there, "Ragtime" dives further into the story, taking the audience through a number of different scenes that give credit to superb production design and bring to life a sequence of various events such as a political rally, a baseball game, union demonstrations and Atlantic City.

The superb cast of 43 has such presence on stage that, when supplemented

with their voices, commands the attention of the audience.

Like seasoning to go on the main course, real and prominent characters like educator Booker T. Washington, escape artist Harry Houdini, anarchist reformer Emma Goldman and mass production visionary Henry Ford are thrown into this cast that mixes fiction with nonfiction.

There aren't any real standout characters to steal the show, but Lawrence Hamilton as Coalhouse Walker Jr. comes close. That was made obvious by the audience's vocal response during the standing ovation.

"Ragtime" deeply explores human relations. Don't be fooled by the title - this isn't a show that only entertains and has good music. It provokes thought and examines the human condition on

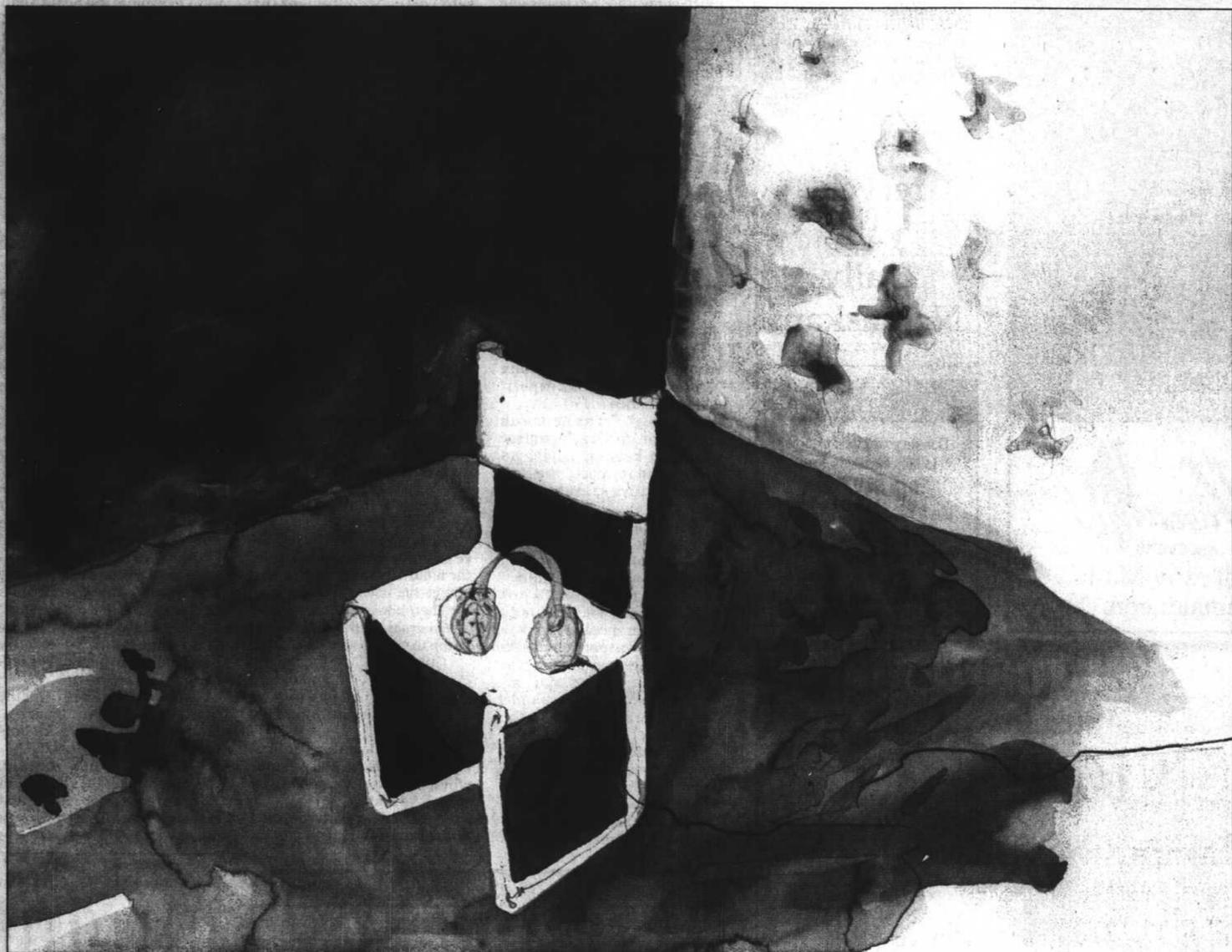
many levels.

It blends many moods and feelings, taking audience members through a whirlwind of varying emotions bringing them to laughter, tears and shock.

The musical collaboration of songs like "Journey On," "Your Daddy's Son," "Wheels Of A Dream," "He Wanted To Say" and "Make Them Hear You" are the ultimate triumph of this classical show.

So many elements were right on in this show that I can hardly complain. If forced to make a suggestion, a little more dancing would have been nice, but I'm only nitpicking really.

"Ragtime" is certainly a classic musical that can hold its own with the best of them. It is a masterpiece that can be musically adored for its magnificent beauty and equally appreciated for its disturbing depiction of real social issues.



Melanie Falk/DN

## The (un)sounds of silence

Music has become another outlet of noise for apathetic listeners

BY ANDREW SHAW

In Greg Kuzma's advanced poetry writing class, all the students were to write a poem and submit a copy to everyone in the class.

We all gathered our new anthology and curled up into our molded plastic chairs for some nice quiet reading time. It was so quiet you could hear the lights buzz and students' feet crush gravel outside the window.

After ten minutes, the first whispers were passed around the class like everyone's favorite "telephone" game, followed by stifled giggles and curious eyes scanning to see if anyone else found the silence amusing. When their eyes found acceptance from another pair across the room, they would explode into laughter, which grew from person to person until everyone was shouting in a vain attempt to erase the silence of the previous 10 minutes.

In George Wolf's gay and lesbian drama class, the students were given an assignment to read through "The Second Coming of Joan of Arc" and find a passage to act out.

While we did so, a recording of Norman Dello Joio's "Triumph of St. Joan" played on the stereo. Although I didn't concentrate on the music, it had a way of filling the recesses of my head, plentiful as they may be, and soothed me into a happy world of melodic noise.

In "Dancer in the Dark," Selma gets lost in her world of noise. The sounds of a passing train, heavy machinery and squeaking shoes turn into a full-fledged Broadway musical, fueled by Selma's wild imagination and need to escape from the realities of her impoverished life.

Once upon a time, music might have been used to pass down stories from generation to generation or record history in a memorable fashion, but since printing was invented, the song as a recording device has become obsolete.

In the time of widespread American protest, songs carried political messages against war and in support of

### Music Commentary

racial integration, uniting people behind a common goal. But Christina Aguilera doesn't have a political agenda; she just wants to shake her ass and make a buck (and she does a mighty good job of both).

But she also fills the silence of our lives, and that may be the most important function music has at the turn of the millennium.

In silence comes the pressure to make noise. Sometimes you fill the space with giddy laughter. The silence between two people can lead to the most honest conversations and the loudest fights. Other times, the silence is filled with thought, and nothing can be scarier than a head full of silent thoughts.

I think about the test I just took and whether I calculated the derivative of the function of g over the square root of h correctly. I think of that girl that never gets out of my head and how she never gets out of my head and wonder if my obsession with her is unnatural or uncommon and whether I should go see CAPS right away to confess my obsessive thoughts and purge the evil from my silent mind.

I think about the guy who lives two doors down who never opens his door but there's that strange smell leaking out that might be cat poop, might be marijuana, might be a Tyson's chicken dinner or might be a combination of all three. Sometimes I think about how much I miss my dog, love my family and how lucky I am to have grown up the way I did.

But I turn to the radio because thought has the potential for cognitive dissonance. Shaggy, Britney, Macy Gray, anything becomes better than the risk of thinking. The music fills that unconscious space before the space where thoughts are formed.

I remember listening to The Smashing Pumpkins "Mellon Collie and the Infinite Sadness," lying flat on my

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back in my parents' basement and truly listening to what Billy Corgan was singing to me. I remember how he knew my grief and how listening to "thirty-three" would make me cry because he said it was OK to feel the way I did.

But now the radio inundates the basic of primal thoughts, leaving me only with capacity to dance, drive or drink. Now it just complacently fills that void that might make me giggle or feel compelled to whisper to my neighbor, and my eyes glaze over.

I have become Selma, folding joyful beats and attracting people singing redundant and catchy melodies over the reality of life, hiding the silence that has the potential to make one insane, uncomfortable or inspired.

Music has been reduced to filling the silence of our lives.

And if you think that's frightening, how about

## Major dissects films

Students and professors agree that studying cinema is more than "watching movies."

BY CHRIS JACOBS

New programs bring new flair. With the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's installation of Film Studies and Production programs,

students have the opportunity to expand their academic horizons, and the classes are filling up.

"The film studies major is intended for people who understand that film has a strong historical, theoretical and critical construction," said Professor Wheeler

Winston Dixon, chairman of the film studies program. "We're looking for students who seriously want to talk about film as a discipline."

And it appears Dixon has found a few - about 50 - for the major that's been available for one year.

The Film Studies major is

Please see FILM on 6

## Reggae back at the Zoo

Award-winning Dread I Dread brings sound back to Lincoln.

BY CRYSTAL K. WIEBE

Dedication and a song written 15 years ago are setting up reggae band Dread I Dread for success.

The Minneapolis-based group will perform at 9:30 tonight at The Zoo Bar, 136 N. 14<sup>th</sup> St., for a growing core of Lincoln fans who should expect to hear the group's signature reggae/hip-hop sound in a mixture of old and new songs.

Lead vocalist Pee Wee Dread

lead vocalist Pee Wee Dread said while many of the band's songs have been around for years, the message

Please see DREAD on 6