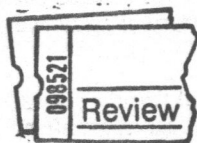


# Local artists' plays differ in effectiveness

By Larry L. Kubert  
Journal Reviewer

Although challenging, reviewing a theater piece written by a local artist is baneful because you are damned if you like it, and damned if you don't. If such a play is given favorable comment, the critic is not being honest and is being superficial and undemanding; or if the commentary is negative, the critic is being unjustly harsh, with too-high expectations.



Both accusations perhaps could be applied to the reviews of two one-act plays written by Lincolinites

and now on stage at the Lincoln Community Playhouse Lawrence A. Enersen Gallery Theatre.

The two plays, "The Weeping Water Cafe" and "For Friends," while both dealing with changing human relationships, are distinctively different in their effectiveness.

Opening with David Boles' "The Weeping Water Cafe," the evening shows early potential as this tale of death and rebirth progresses. In the storeroom of a small-town cafe, a young man who lives in a world of dreams, simple, hardworking Donnie (Jim Hanna), is confronted by Ed (Devon Schumacher), a violent drifter carrying on an obliviscent crusade, who brings an undesired exhibition of honesty and reality into Donnie's life.

The play demonstrates a gritty boldness and sincerity indicative of Boles' previous works, but without some of the polish. Although Boles, who also is the play's director, usually uses his stage space well, he occasionally allows the

Jan. 9, 1987

two actors to spread too far apart, creating a non-communicable vacancy and void between Ed and Donnie.

This separation works well in emphasizing the differences between Ed and Donnie, but unfortunately also diminishes their effectiveness in communicating.

Hanna and Schumacher give able performances in their roles of societal symbols, but some of their mundane actions — such as the fight and knife scenes — are halting and ungainly, breaking the playwright's mood.

Basically, "The Weeping Water Cafe" is an insightful exploration into death, existence and acceptance, the purposes of living, dying and simply trying.

Unfortunately, Valerie Lynn Marino's "For Friends" doesn't fare quite as well. Indeed, its very title is a harbinger of the production and play's major problem: it is too personal and exclusive, with little universality.

With the casting of Marino in the play's leading role of Leigh — who writes a deeply personal play about her friends Fran (Lynda Donovan Videtich), Susan (Lynette Lee Forney), Patti (Judi Donaghy), Alex (Sandra Nicolai) and Olivia (Carla Hill) and their inner relationships, secrets and love of the theater — director David Russell has made a critical error.

Not that Marino is a poor actress — on the contrary, she, Videtich, Donaghy and Hill are often very effective in the piece — but Marino's intimacy with the script is impossible to remove.

What results is a play that has displaced the theater's "fourth wall" from between the performers and the audience because of the cast's familiarity with the piece.

"The Weeping Water Cafe" and "For Friends" will continue their runs at the gallery theater in the Lincoln Community Playhouse, 2500 S. 56th St., Friday and Saturday with curtain at 8 p.m. and a Sunday matinee at 2:30 p.m.

# Playhouse's one-acts explore relationships

By Jeff Bahr  
of The Lincoln Star

Jan. 9, 1987

Relationships are the common denominator in two one-act plays that opened Thursday night at the Lincoln Community Playhouse.

The first play, "The Weeping Water Cafe," deals with the relationship between two very different young men. The second, "For Friends," is a play within a play that looks at the bonds between six women.

Both plays, staged in the playhouse's Lawrence A. Enersen Gallery Theater, were written by Lincoln authors.

"The Weeping Water Cafe," written and directed by David Boles, is the superior of the two. It is the story of two men who have little in common but learn to understand one another and ultimately become friends.

Jim Hanna plays Donnie, a cafe manager whose life is exceedingly uncomplicated. The only things that concern him are the cafe, his ailing Aunt Thelma and Donny Osmond, whom he regards as "the greatest superstar to ever walk the earth."

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## Review

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His new assistant, however, is another matter entirely. A drifter who delights in antagonizing his superior, Ed (Devon Schumacher) is a complex soul whose life was irrevocably altered in the fourth grade, when he just missed qualifying for a gifted-students program. He now drags around a trunk filled with the bones of dead animals, with whom he identifies because they, too, saw their lives "snuffed out."

They make an unlikely pair: Donnie, a simple man who cares about "Puppy Love" and purple socks, and Ed, a guy who's obsessed with heroism and tragedy. But they both have their stories to tell. And, by the end of the play, each man has earned the respect of the other.

Boles' script has a few problems, but the production is generally well done, and intellectually satisfying.

"For Friends" was written by Valerie Lynn Marino, who also has a role in the play. She portrays an author who's written a play about five of her friends, who also happen to be actresses. The play includes a song and a raucous birthday party at which any number of adult gifts are distributed, but it is the quieter moments that are most successful in "For Friends."

The women talk about acting, their lives, their families, their disappointments and their men. At the end of the play, the women debate whether the author's perception of them is, in fact, the truth. They must also decide if they want their most intimate secrets featured in a play.

The women's comments are perceptive enough to make "For Friends" worth seeing. But the play, which will appeal to the disillusioned divorcee, is not a total success, in part because it drags on a bit too long.

"The Weeping Water Cafe" and "For Friends" continues Friday and Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 2:30 p.m.