

# Big River serves as more than trite musical comedy

By CHRIS IRWIN  
CONTRIBUTING REVIEWER

The University Theatre has pulled together a delightful production of Roger Miller's *Big River*. This high-energy musical, based on Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, is very demanding to put onstage, but the cast, crew and production staff have risen to the occasion.

The show propels itself with some strong singing and resists the temptation to make *Big River* a meaningless and trite musical comedy.

Director Philip Burton manages to convey some human elements in *Big River*, especially in the second act. The first act of the play is a bit typical of musical comedy, with a lot of exposition and character introduction. The songs are fun, but lack the depth of some later numbers.

The second act is where the play hits its meaningful stride. Though the action of the story slows some, any lost momentum is more than compensated for by increased depth.

It is in the second act that the slave Jim, played by junior Daniel Johnson, shows himself to be more of a man than many of the white men he and Huck, senior Colin Creel, encounter.

Johnson's portrayal, though at times a bit thin, delivers a strong portion of compassion. Creel has moments which display Huck's accelerated maturity well, while maintaining his role as an entertaining narrator.

The plight of the slaves shows itself in some touching scenes and songs, including "The Crossing" and "Free at Last." Johnson's passionate voice, which is the strength of his performance, gives form to the slaves' hopes and frustrations.

The musical also examines the strength of friendships. Huck's inter-

actions with Jim and Tom Sawyer, played by sophomore Jim Frazier, reveal how much he thrives on friends and his determination to succeed. Frazier provides the energy for their camaraderie in his movements and fast speech, but in so doing sacrifices some lines of dialogue.

At the same time, the falseness of other relationships comes through in the characters Pap, played by senior Rob Warfield; Duke, played by senior Brad Leon; and King, played by junior Kenneth Thompson.

As Huck's drunkard father, Warfield entertains the audience while revealing his ineptness as a parent.

Leon and Thompson make a delightful duo as Duke and King. Leon's fluid movements make him a convincing snake, like a con artist, and Thompson's roughness makes King's false eloquence more convincing.

The other characters fill out the story unobtrusively. The result is a

show with a cast of thirty-six which does not feel so large. This comes from a commitment to focus.

The large company and supporting characters rarely steal the focus from where it is intended to be. While some of the company does detract, most fulfill their mission by complementing the action rather than trying to create it.

*Big River* at times moves more slowly than it should. The script seems to motivate most of the songs, but the performance leaves some of the numbers a bit unexplained.

For example, "Leavin' Not the Only Way to Go" is a beautiful ballad sung by three good singers, but a lack of depth in the previous scene makes the song seem hollow.

The significance of the kiss Huck receives from Mary Jane, played by junior Mary McElwee, is lost in Creel's performance.

See Musical, Page B6



Huck (senior Colin Creel) and Jim (junior Daniel Johnson) share a moment in the Mainstage Theatre's production of *Big River*.

## KIDS shocks with frankness



Courtesy of Excalibur Films

Telly and the rest of the gang stroll through New York City in Larry Clark's movie *KIDS*. The film focuses on the everyday activity of the teenagers, who engage in unprotected sex and abuse drugs in an unrestrictive environment.

By BRYAN THOMAS  
OLD GOLD AND BLACK REVIEWER

Director Larry Clark's super-hyped *KIDS* can be summed up in two words: shock treatment.

It is the fictional documentary of a day in the life of a group of New York City teens and pre-teens. During the course of this typical day, these typical kids engage in their typical activities of sex, drug use and violence.

They are the indestructible youth. The city has become their playground, while the neighborhood playground has become the center for their drug deals and violent turf confrontations.

But perhaps the most shocking element of this movie is the way it was filmed. It is quite clear that Clark was not working with a large budget. The sound quality is poor, the camera angles are simple and the editing is far from fancy.

It is this very stark rawness of the film that puts the subject matter into perspective. It says: This is real. This is happening.

The actors are not people who we've seen before, and we most likely will not see them again. They are just kids. They are lanky and awkward. They mumble and giggle. Yet their characters are racing each other to adulthood on the nightclub and house-party proving grounds.

These kids are simultaneously seeking guidance and escape in a world where 10-year-olds are smoking pot and the only form of real parental advice comes from a dirty old man who drives a cab.

Whether Clark is successful in accurately portraying a day in the life of New York teenagers is not for us to say. In fact, it is irrelevant. What is important is the fact that he has brought a number of touchy subjects to light.

It refuses to let viewers ignore the topics of safe sex and drug and alcohol abuse as they relate to minors. It leaves a lasting impression. It lingers.

Walking out of Pugh Auditorium, I caught bits and fragments of student reaction — "disturbing" and "chilling" were commonly used. Clark employed several bold, slap-in-the-face techniques, and it was obvious that, by the end of the movie, he got his message across.

Because of its explicit nature, *KIDS* is one of those movies that parents don't want their kids to see and kids don't want their parents to see.

One of the unfortunate ironies of the film is its NC-17 rating. That means that Clark's target audience is left standing outside the movie theater while middle-aged America watches the movie and says, "Wow, kids See *KIDS*, Page B6

## Secret to showcase Isbin's classical skill

By SETH BRODSKY  
OLD GOLD AND BLACK REVIEWER

Classical guitarist Sharon Isbin does not waste any time — she can't afford to, for she is too possessed with an inexhaustible passion for her instrument and all of its possibilities.

Whether through her establishment of guitar departments at the Julliard School of Music and the Aspen Music Festival, her provocative and exciting collaborations, her groundbreaking recordings or her endless pursuit of new music for the guitar and scrupulous re-examination of older music, Isbin is a musician with a mission.

As the second performer in the Secret Series, Isbin will give the university a taste of her musical intensity when she joins forces with Brazilian percussionist and composer Gaudencio Thiago de Mello in a concert at 8 p.m. Nov. 11 in Brendle Recital Hall.

The remarkable program will consist entirely of Latin American and Spanish music, featuring such guitar landmarks as Albeniz' *Asturias* and Barrios' *La Catedral*, as well as several original compositions by de Mello himself.

Isbin's ambition manifested itself at an early age; she started taking guitar lessons at the age of nine, while her family was living in Italy.

"I had no interest to pursue a career in it until I was fourteen, (when) I won a competition and played with the Minnesota Orchestra in front of 10,000 people in two days. ... I decided that, hey, this is even more exciting than building my cloud chambers and launching my model rockets, so I decided to go full speed ahead in guitar," she said.

This same sureness of direction has become invaluable in Isbin's adamant crusade to expand the classical guitar's limited repertoire with new works.

She has commissioned more *concerti* for

guitar and orchestra than any other guitarist, as well as numerous solo works; Cuban composer Leo Brouwer's *El Decameron Negro*, written specifically for Isbin, and which she will perform in the concert, has already become part of guitar's standard repertoire.

"It takes a lot of guts," Isbin laughed, when asked what is involved in commissioning a composer to write for the guitar. "I learned not to take 'no' for an answer. It takes resourcefulness and creativity to approach a composer in the right way, and you have to make them believe that it is not only beneficial for the instrument to write for it, but something that will make them grow and will be very exciting ... however, the position is one that requires a great deal of arm-twisting."

Isbin believes the guitar must have an active life in new music, if simply because it is still a "young" instrument. She said, "The guitar is at (most) in its adolescence ... the rate of expansion has been dizzying."

"Thanks to the efforts of Segovia, Bream, and Williams, who have encouraged composers to write for the instrument, I feel that I'm very much wanting to continue that tradition, and by doing so, I'm not only expanding my own horizons, but that of the instrument for generations to come."

"It is my responsibility to make that kind of contribution, and I've been very lucky to have not only wonderful pieces written for me, but the opportunity to record them, so that (they) can be something to be shared all over the world."

Isbin has found one such composer in Thiago de Mello, who will perform some of his own works with her in Saturday's concert.

"Thiago is an actual Indian from the Amazon rain forests in Brazil, and he is a remarkable person."

"I've worked with him for a number of years ... he's a composer and arranger, (and) See *Isbin*, Page B6

## Faculty, guests collaborate to honor famed composer

By KARLIE ANDERSON  
CONTRIBUTING REVIEWER

Béla Bartok, one of the true pioneers of 20th century music, will be honored Nov. 19 with a faculty showcase comprised solely of his music. The concert, which will take place at 3 p.m. in Brendle Recital Hall, is appropriately titled "Basically Bartok" and commemorates the 50th anniversary of the composer's death.

Bartok's monumental achievements as both a collector of Hungarian and Rumanian folk music and as an innovator in his own right are represented vibrantly in this program, which features many of the faculty from the university's music department as well as guest artists from the Winston-Salem community.

The program of "Basically Bartok" is diverse, incorporating an intriguing array of presentations ranging from video to percussion. The first half of the program emphasizes Bartok's anthropological side, with a short presentation on folk music and dance by Pamela Howland, an assistant professor of music, followed by three sets of pieces based on either folk melodies or folk idioms.

The first work, titled *Hungarian Peasant Suite*, features Kathryn Levy, an instructor of music, on flute, and Howland on piano, in a group of songs and dances based on Hungarian folk music characteristics.

This is followed by selections from Forty-Four Duos, performed by violinists David Levy, an associate professor of music and the department chairman, and an instructor of violin, Mark Hartmann.

The final set of pieces, Rumanian Folk Dances, represents Bartok's settings of actual folk song melodies in an art-song format, featuring Kathryn Levy on flute, Stephen Jones on oboe, Linda Julian on clarinet, Jon Julian on bassoon and Robert Campbell on French horn, in an eloquent transcription for woodwind quintet by Mark Popkin of the North Carolina School for the Arts.

As if this fascinating potpourri were not enough in itself, the second half of the program takes on the gargantuan Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion, described by Peter Kairoff, an associate professor of music, as "one of the great monuments of 20th century music."

It is monumental in every aspect; one look at the score could frighten off all but the most seasoned and courageous of performers. This piece is representative of

Bartok's meticulous attention to pattern and form in an original composition which can be called nothing but "pure Bartok."

The piece is performed on this program by Kairoff and Louis Goldstein, a professor of music, both on piano, and Massie Johnson and guest Christopher Deane, on percussion.

Kairoff and Goldstein describe the piece as a high-wire act that they would be performing without a safety net, an understandable statement considering the level of complexity in both rhythm and harmony that is set forth within the piece.

Beyond the technique, however, lies an irresistible drive and excitement surrounding an atmospheric and See *Bartok*, Page B6

## 311's unique blend of music makes for exciting concert

By CAYCE BUTLER  
EDITORIALS COPY EDITOR

"More than country music comes out of the Midwest," the band 311 said in their press release. Hell, yeah. The Nebraska-grown, L.A.-based band rolled up a fatty of a show at the Millennium Friday night as their fusion of funk, punk, reggae and rap was in full bloom.

Climbing from hard-hitting distorted riffs and in-your-face and down-your-throat rap to plateaus of funky melodies and airy guitar, the band performed "like good sex," as lead vocalist Nicholas Hexum refers to their unique style.

No one was bored. Everyone was exhausted (with the exception of the amazingly well fit quintet). And the

marathon 26-song set left the crowd sweaty, dazed, even a little bruised: hit by a truck but ready to get right back on the road.

The band started out a little tentative, as the tag-team rap of SA Martinez and Hexum was noticeably slow on the show's opener "Homebrew," but they quickly found their groove, slamming the 18-something crowd by the third song with a bullet-fast, bass-heavy "Hive," cut off their newest release self-titled *311*.

For the rest of the show, they played the audience like another instrument: bodies swaying and grooving one second then thrashing and jumping the next, at their musical command.

The extreme stylistic changes — from funk-ed up hip hop with a reggae twist to driving metal — both be-

tween songs and in the songs themselves seemed natural, not forced, and the many tempo changes led by drummer Chad Sexton were seamless.

Their energy rivalled Duke Power but was not over done. Sexton's powerful percussion and the guitar work of Timothy J. Mahoney and bassist P-Nut never overwhelmed the vocals of Martinez and Hexum, which routinely switched from intricate rhymes to reggae-laced melody.

Pulling surprises as well as musical punches, Martinez transformed the beautiful, melodic "8:16 a.m.," off of *Grassroots*, into an upbeat jam with some masterful turntable work. During "Taiyed," Mahoney displayed his skills, pulling out a gorgeous solo that sounded almost like a sweet cry.

Hexum was tight-lipped in between songs, only introducing a few songs simply by title. He did however stop to "sing" the praises of marijuana, one of the band's favorite subjects, dedicating "My Stoney Baby," a funky little love song which Mahoney enhanced with a full, resonant tone, to "all the ladies out there who like to smoke pot."

To the delight of the crowd, they gave a sneak peek at their upcoming release "Who's Got The Herb," which will be featured on *HEMPILATION*, a compilation to benefit the National Organization for the Reform of Marijuana Laws and the only song performed that was not readily recognizable off of one of their three releases. The swanky, sultry tribute to pot showcased Hexum's poppy ability and was

a welcome rest from the driving set.

I must admit I thought that Hexum had smoked a little too much when he introduced "Do You Right," a tune recorded on *Music* with Hexum crooning a poppy chorus and a soft-edged sound, as a song to slam to.

They rocked the Millennium with an incredible amount of power while still managing to capture the integrity of the song. And the crowd did slam — my roommate got a shiner under her eye and her shoe ripped off in the frenzy.

Their music lost almost nothing in performance. Although some of Hexum's skillful dance-hall style rap found on their recordings did not find its way on stage, the energy and hard-edged funk given to the set more than made up for the loss.



Courtesy of Capricorn Records

Members of 311 impressed fans with their high-energy, 26-song set at the Millennium.