

O'Neill brings back memories of old America

By Pauline Villapando
Staff A&E Writer

Whatever happened to the good ol' days when Ma' stayed home to watch the kids while Pa' went to work and apple pie was the thing to eat?

Whatever happened to the American dream? It seems that it's all been traded in for cellular phones, beepers, fast cars and the latest technological toys.

The Las Vegas community was transported back to those days of old when UNLV students from the theatre department performed Eugene O'Neill's classic play, **Ah, Wilderness!**, last weekend at the Judy Bayley Theatre.

The play depicts an era in American history when families laughed more than they argued and children played with sticks and stones rather than computers and handguns.

When the lights went down, the instrumental version of the "Star Spangled Banner" played loudly through the speakers. As the lights dimmed, the family appeared singing the patriotic tune. When the musical was over, they all cheered and waved around miniature US flags.

The stage was decorated with numerous props that created a facade of the perfect home. From the small, cozy living room to the soft net hammock, wooden swing and picnic tables lying quietly still outside the yard, all blended together to form a realistic setting.

"The scenery and the way they have it set up is impressive," commented Bill O'Donnell, 56.

'The play depicts an era in American history when families laughed more than they argued...'

It was the morning of July 4, 1906 at the Miller home, which was situated in a small town of Connecticut, overlooking Long Island Sound. The cast member's clothing made a fine indication of the time period. The women wore long, heavy skirts and stuffy ruffle collars, while the men were finely dressed in slacks and overcoats.

The Miller family was busy making plans for the July 4 evening celebration.

It was another ordinary holiday as the men blew away on their pipes and cigars while the women gathered to chat. From the very beginning, each character transformed into their perspective roles.

Nat Miller (Kent Bearden) was the calm, laid-back father figure. On the other hand, Essie Miller (Amy Ross), his wife, was the typical over-bearing, outspoken, over-protective and nagging mother. Sid Davis (Jason Johnson), Essie's brother, was a bachelor who liked to joke around, drink and gamble. And finally, Lily Miller (Destiny Teasley), Nat's sister, was the sweet and quiet, old maid who was satisfied with being alone.

The Miller children consisted of Arthur (Thomas Turner), the pompous older brother, who attended Yale and was only interested in women and football; Richard (Scott Johnson), the rebellious, poetic intellectual anarchist; Mildred (Kelly Roth), a nosy, immature flirt who likes to tease her brothers; and Tommy (Eric Deloretta), the curious and innocent youngest of the Miller clan.

The plot surrounds the twisted and dramatic love life of Richard



Jason Johnson (left) and Kent Bearden star in "Ah Wilderness."

Miller who is romantically involved with Muriel McComber (Joanna Durso). After receiving a letter from his one true love that stated she never wanted to see him again, Richard's heart breaks instantly. All of his hopes he placed on the beauty of love were shattered into a bitter sea of despair.

"That little coward," Richard yelled. "She can't do this to me, I'll show her!"

Richard screams as he angrily stormed off the stage. Although he is under age, that same night he

drowns his sorrows in gin and hooks up with a prostitute, Belle (Lara Van Liere).

But before things get out of hand, Richard shows his gentle side and refuses to sleep with her because he was saving himself for Muriel. Finally, after hours of worrying about his parents, Richard comes home in a drunken stupor.

The next day he sneaks away to have a secret rendez-vous with Muriel. She explains to a heartbroken Richard that her father made her write the letter.

He then brags about his alcoholic escapades the night before and blames everything on her for writing the letter.

After playing mind games and calling each other's bluff, the two finally unite and dream of their future honeymoon together while setting the stage for some mushy love lines.

Everything turned out alright in the end, even when Nat punished him for coming home "soused" the previous night. The play closes with Richard and Nat having a father-to-son talk about "women and desires of the flesh."

Although the beginning lacked action, the audience quickly adapted to the humor and acting expressed by the cast.

"I thought it was pleasantly entertaining," said O'Donnell. "The actors are doing a great job."

Many thought O'Neill, the playwright, did an excellent job in portraying life during that time. Back then, simplicity was a way of life and family relationships were seemed to have been a top priority. "It's really realistic," added sophomore Henry Heren.

"The older generation's views on the younger generation that is."

The audience was favorable in regards to the acting abilities of Sid Davis (Jason Johnson), Nat Miller (Kent Bearden) and Richard Miller (Scott Johnson). All three added some comic relief combined with a tone of seriousness to their characters.

O'Neill did an excellent job in portraying the life and values of the early 20th century. But he is not unknown in the literary world. With the success of **Ah, Wilderness!** even with today's modern audience, one can see why O'Neill won the Pulitzer Prize in Drama four times and was the only American Playwright during his time to win the Nobel Prize for literature.

Chinese orchestra chimes the Orient into 'City of Lights'

By Jason Sheehan
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The sounds of "Viva Las Vegas" took a back seat Friday night as instruments rarely heard in American orchestras bounced off the walls at the Artemus W. Ham Concert Hall.

The National Traditional Orchestra of China, touring the U.S. for the first time since its inception in 1960, appeared to have placed the audience in a trance by playing a series of material near and dear to their hearts.

When Conductor Hu Bingxu stepped onto the podium, excitement filled the air. The concert began with the clashing of a gong, followed by the roar of a bass drum.

"The General's Command," arranged by Peng Xiu Wen, barked out orders using a bombardment of instruments as its driving force. Once the string instruments joined in, a thunderous but pleasant roar filled the concert hall.

The orchestra shifted down a few gears in its second piece, "Spring on a Moonlit River," arranged by Qin Peng Zhang. The rapid change of tempo seemed awkward at first. But once the but-



Chinese orchestra cellist Hai-Ye Ni

terfly-like sounds of China put everyone in a trance, all seemed well.

Once the love-fest concluded, the audience showed approval with a standing ovation. At this time, the crowd had no idea that the best part of the show was yet to be revealed.

"Reflections of the Moon," by Hua Yan Jun, was highlighted by cello soloist Hai-Ye Ni's precision as she played every note with ac-

curacy. Crescendos (gradual loudness) and decrescendos (gradual softness) were played as well. Due to Ni's brilliant hymns, the overall tone of this piece made the crowd feel like they had been transported to China for a night of musical excitement.

Every cello in the orchestra, including Ni's, may have looked unfamiliar to peering eyes that are used to seeing modern-day cellos.

Instead of having a compact structure, these cellos resembled a giraffe, with long necks and narrow bodies. The sound that came from these unusually-shaped instruments was crystal clear without a single fluctuation of sound.

Ni first became an International star when she was honored as the youngest winner ever of the prestigious Naumburg International Competition. Winning this award allowed Ni to move closer to her goal of becoming a world-famous cellist.

After a successful recital in New York and an enlightening education at the San Francisco Conservatory and Julliard, Ni performed at the Kennedy Center and Carnegie Hall's Weill Recital Hall. She has appeared in various orchestras such as the San Francisco Symphony and the Hong Kong Philharmonic.

In addition to performing live, Ni will be releasing her first solo CD later this year. Based on the amount of positive press Ni has received, her recording should do quite well in the open market.

Ni has been closely compared to Chinese legend Yo-Yo Ma. "That girl plays with spirit, searching and personal strength," Ma told

the *South China Morning Post*.

Yet another comparison was made by *The Washington Post* which wrote, "...cellist Hai-Ye Ni sounded like the youthful Yo-Yo Ma."

Before the intermission, The National Traditional Orchestra of China played "Ga De Mei Lin: Symphonic Poem" by Xin Hu Guang. The majority of this piece closely resembles something people hear played on a daytime soap opera. It has all the elements: love, hate and overwhelming conflict.

In the middle of this piece, the audience is thrown for a loop. Sounds of a soap opera are quickly replaced by something that resembles the theme to "The Lone Ranger." There were no horses or Indians on stage, but through the use of the imagination one would swear they saw something prancing in the concert hall. The power of a spectacular orchestra, such as this one, can easily carry audiences into unforeseen dimensions.

After an image of "Silver" trotted off the stage, the orchestra reverted back to its soap opera sounds and concluded the piece in