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Air Force musicians revel in emotion

The men and women of the U.S. Air Force are a brave lot who defend our country, bomb the hell out of enemies around the world and boldly give classical music concerts.

There's nothing like the serene sound of classical music to provide inspiration during ceremonies or before invading a foreign country. The Air Force Strings play music for either occasion. Tonight, the string ensemble will show us our tax dollars at work when they give a free concert at the McDonald Theatre at 8 p.m.

It's difficult to imagine the terms "classical music" and "Air Force" being used in the same sentence, but the Air Force Strings is an accomplished group of musicians who play a repertoire that ranges from classical to bluegrass tunes. The 22-person ensemble has played for every American president since Eisenhower. All the musicians are graduates of respected universities and music conservatories.

The Air Force Strings is an interesting dichotomy of military protocol and emotional music. The promotional material is full of military-speak, including sentences such as: "A key element of (the Air Force Strings') mission is to entertain audiences at high-level protocol events in a formation known as the United States Air Force Strolling Strings." Ouch. That's enough military jargon to make my brain explode.

Once the group begins playing, however, the universal language of music overwhelms the stilted language of government bureaucracy. These musicians revel in musical displays of emotion unheard of elsewhere in the military. Their inspiration comes from the genius works of Bach and Beethoven, not the moronic "Let's Roll" slogan emblazoned across the fuselages of Air Force fighter jets.

On occasion, the ensemble puts away their music and strolls through the audience, playing their tunes by memory — it's their way of making the music up-close and personal.

Tonight's concert is worth attending because of the group's dedication to musical perfection and because they play for free (unless you count the billions of taxpayer dollars funneling into the Air Force, but that's another matter). For non-classical listeners, the concert offers a good introduction to chamber mu-

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Peter Hallinan
Better than beer-bonging

The 'Razzle Dazzle' of 'Chicago'

The famous play "Chicago" brings tales of murder and fame to the Robinson Theatre this month

Ryan Bornheimer
Senior Pulse Reporter

The Bob Fosse-inspired choreography. The sexy costumes. Songs such as "All That Jazz" and "Razzle Dazzle." There's no mistaking the musical "Chicago." And this month, Eugeneans will get a taste of Broadway when the acclaimed production makes its debut at the Robinson Theatre.

Set in the Roaring '20s, "Chicago" tells the story of Roxie Hart, a chorus girl who kills her faithless husband. Acting as her own defense, with the help of lawyer Billy Flynn, Roxie is acquitted of murder. During the public spectacle, both Roxie and another murderess on death row, Velma Kelly, vie for the spotlight and the headlines, each hoping the publicity will catapult them to fame, freedom and successful stage careers.

"Chicago" was written by celebrated playwrights Fred Ebb and Bob Fosse. Music is composed by John Kander, with lyrics by Fred Ebb.

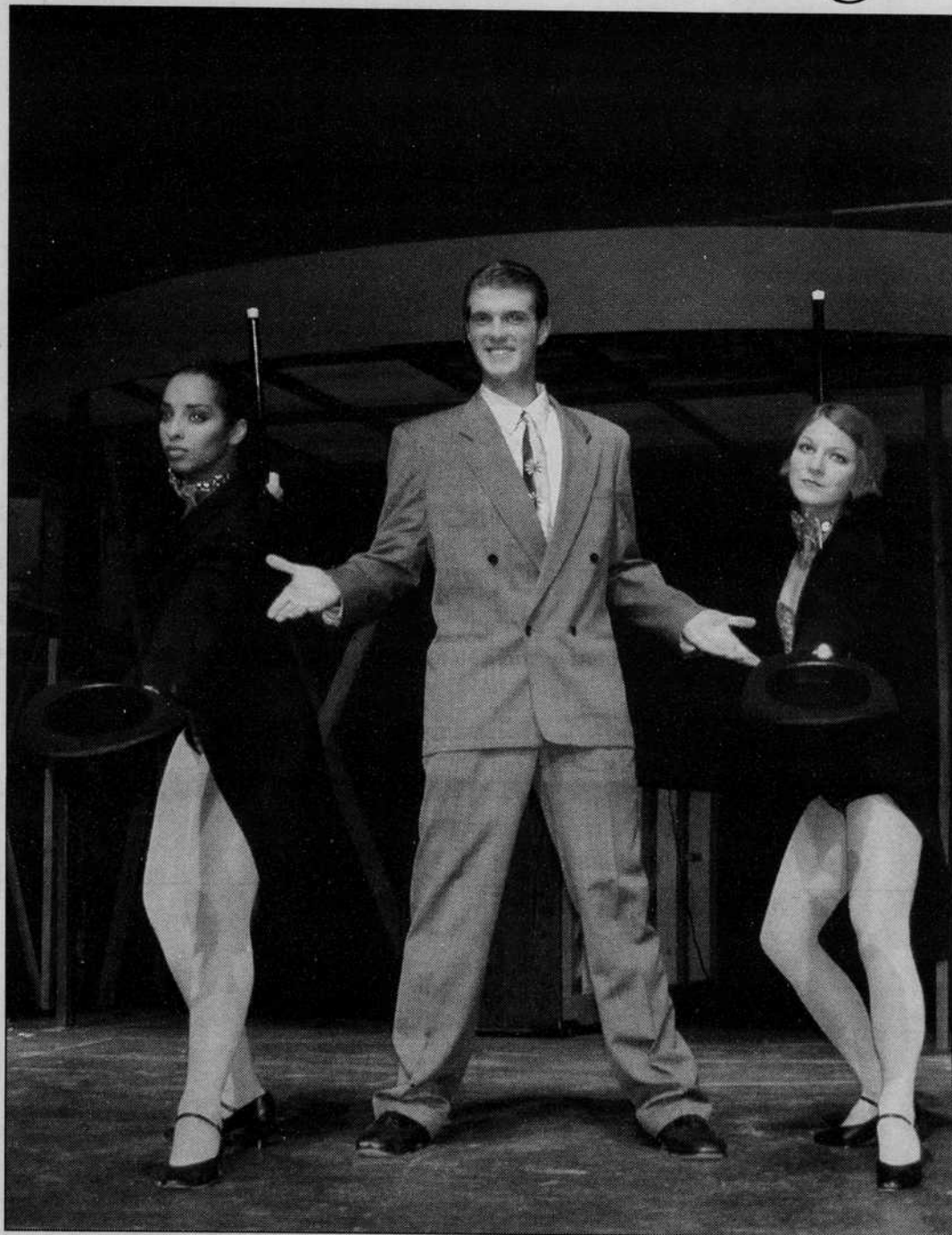
The musical fantasy is being staged by the University Theatre and the University School of Music. Directed by theater Associate Professor Jack Watson, "Chicago" offers students working on the show an opportunity to tackle a large-scale production.

According to University Theatre Development Director Joseph Gilg, it's one of the few times the University Theatre has worked so closely with the School of Music in producing a show.

The production boasts a six-piece musical combo directed by music Adjunct Assistant Professor Mark Kaczmarczyk. The combo will be on stage, not in the pit — integral to the visual dynamics of the show. According to Watson, "Chicago" has "a truly fine musical score that offers wonderful opportunities for the student performers."

But bringing any show to the stage is a long process. "Chicago" is no exception.

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Jeremy Forrest Emerald

(From left) Yasmin Ravard, Nathan Loveless and Kimberly Bates will perform in "Chicago" at the Robinson Theatre.

Hypocrisy abounds in Aguilera's CD

CD review

Aaron Shakra
Pulse Reporter

"Irony" abounds in Christina Aguilera's obligatory annual new album "Stripped," but calling it irony might be putting things lightly. "Hypocrisy" is probably more accurate.

Allow me to explain. The recording "artist" graces the current issue of Rolling Stone, clad in nothing but a guitar, when she doesn't even play the instrument. The name of her new album is "Stripped," while every picture of her has her face and body full of makeup, and is obviously airbrushed. Maybe she was talking about her clothes, but those don't come off, either.

Consider the redundantly titled "Loving Me 4 Me," a simple story about Aguilera and her lover. Hints of the genuine come out as she sings "Stripped of all make-up / No need for fancy clothes / No cover ups, push ups / With him, I don't have to put on a show," but when considered in the context of the image she flaunts — yes flaunts — in interviews, music videos and album covers, "hypocrisy" comes out as the best description again.

Of course, this is nothing to hold against her. Aguilera probably doesn't realize her own homogeneity. She claims and flaunts her individuality in the lyrics of "Stripped" and on magazines such as "Rolling Stone," but neglects to realize or address the fact that she is only able to do so because she meets the acceptable standards for what society deems "physically attractive." The question raises itself: How successful would she be if she were considered "ugly" by the majority of her listeners?

What we have here is a fast food recording. It sounds nice to the ears, it looks nice to the eyes, but once consumed, leaves the viewer congested and unhealthy.

To her credit, she writes and "composes" the songs on "Stripped," but somehow it's hard to imagine that she was somewhere in a studio arranging piano, string and drum and horn and guitar sections for these songs.

A suggestion that is worth mentioning but will certainly go unheeded: Stop releasing albums with assembly line lyrics and production; take a break, disappear and change.

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Courtesy photo