

ARTS

Collection focuses on New Mexico

New Mexico Plays, edited by David Richard Jones, is published by UNM Press.

by Ingrid Wentzel
Arts reporter

Original New Mexican drama is coming into its own. Or so it seems from a look at *New Mexico Plays*, a new book by David Richard Jones.

Jones, a UNM English professor as well as a playwright and director, put together this collection of six plays by New Mexico playwrights. He saw both a need and an opportunity to promote and celebrate theater and drama that is purely New Mexican.

All six plays are written by native New Mexicans except one, by a 20-year transplant. All take place here and are about contemporary subjects and characters we are likely to know (or be).

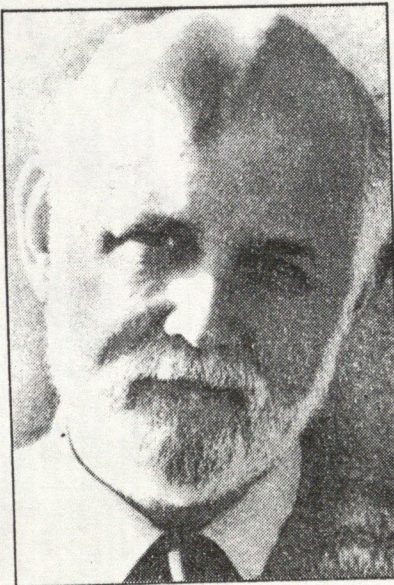
The plays Jones has chosen are far-removed from folklore or the archetypal religious images often associated with the Southwest.

Three of the playwrights are Anglo, three are Hispanic. Two are women, four are men.

E.A. Mares, Nancy Gage and Grubb Graebner are all graduates of UNM's English Department. Mares will be teaching in the General Honors Program this spring.

Denise Chavez received her MFA from Trinity College in Dallas and has been involved in New Mexico theater since the 1970s. Rudolfo Anaya is a professor of English at UNM and a novelist of international acclaim. His play *Who Killed Don Jose?* is a mystery revolving around a wealthy Hispanic. It breaks stereotypical images of what New Mexicans are by avoiding such subjects as poverty or oppression among Hispanics.

Mark Medoff arrived in Las Cruces in 1967 to teach English and drama at New Mexico State University. His *When You Comin Back Red*



David Richard Jones

Ryder? is a blend of myth and social criticism and is his most durable work.

The plays are linked and grounded by the state as a physical and cultural entity. Settings include the familiar and the classic to New Mexicans, from Albuquerque's Old Town to the state penitentiary to Sandia Base and Santa Fe Plaza.

Even with their strong regionalism, though, many have traveled far, and well.

Chavez's *Plaza* made it to Scotland and Medoff's *Red Ryder* played New York at the same time as another of his plays, *Wager*.

Jones examines the history and origins of New Mexican theater in his introduction to the book.

He describes early influences, from the Spaniards in 1540 to the advent of independent community theater in the 1930s.

The 1960s and '70s saw an upsurge of funky little theaters that paralleled New York City's Off Off Broadway movement.

It was in this time that uniquely New Mexican theater began to develop.

In 1977, a Puerto Rican New Yorker, Jose Rodriguez, established La Compañia de Teatro de Albuquerque, using the 18th-century spelling of the city's name.

In 1979 Rodriguez commissioned a trio of plays by local, visible writers for the company, and all three of those writers are included in this anthology.

Then, in August 1984 the New Mexico Repertory theater made its debut in Albuquerque, Santa Fe and Los Alamos with Mark Medoff's *Children of A Lesser God*. It was a landmark moment in New Mexican drama. A professional company presented actors from New Mexico and both coasts in a world-famous play that had been written and premiered in Las Cruces.

In the summer of 1984, New Mexico theater seemed to have reached a solid and broad maturity. La Compañia de Teatro de Albuquerque was presenting Denise Chavez's *Plaza* in New York and Edinburgh.

Medoff was in Los Angeles exporting his second play for deaf actress Phyllis Frelich, *The Hands of Its Enemy*.

Patrice Martinez, a protegee of Jose Rodriguez, was winning prizes at London's Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts where she had been accepted as the first Hispanic student from the United States.

Jones reflects on the course of New Mexican theater over the years, saying, "New Mexico's arts of drama and performance have retained contact with the natural, communal, and spiritual roots sustaining their growth from the area's earliest days."



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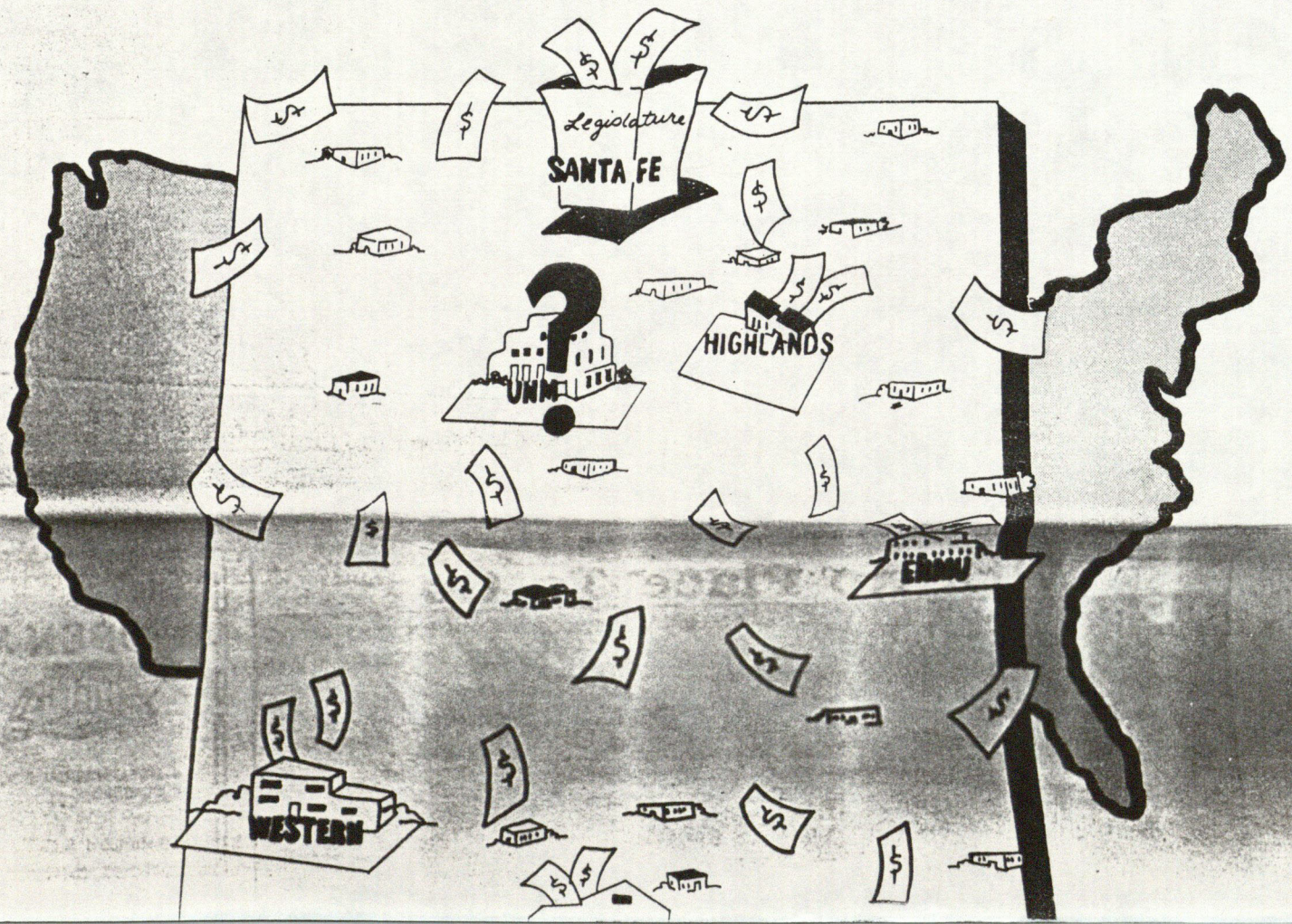
Daily Lobo

No. 75

Monday, December 11, 1989

Student tickets for the Centenary game and the Lobo Invitational will be available today at the Pit Ticket Office from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. Two more pick-up dates are scheduled during the Winter Break. Groups must re-register by Jan. 5. See page 26 for more details.

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