

Champion pool shark calls shots in the Union

By KAREN STEGMAN
Staff Writer

Seven-time world champion billiards player Paul Gerni, who is also the star of a Miller Lite beer commercial, exhibited his tremendous skills and brought a new perspective to the game at an exhibition in the Union pool room Monday night.

Gerni has held titles in the Artistic and Trick Shots category since 1975, when he pocketed 21 billiard balls with one single stroke.

Nicknamed "The Ambassador of Pool," Gerni has toured extensively to promote the game.

"Pool has been maligned," Gerni said. "Pool is like a mission to me. I'm promoting the game with a positive image."

Gerni has opted out of many tournaments in order to improve the image of billiards around the world. He has performed in 16 countries, becoming fluent in six languages along the way.

He said he is proud of the fact that he does not drink, smoke, gamble or swear.

"The old image of a smoke-filled room with creaky floorboards, a single low-hanging light bulb and a spittoon in the corner is being replaced," he said.

Gerni has also made numerous television appearances, including spots on "Baretta," "Kojak," "Dynasty" and "Sesame Street."

Though Gerni wears a tuxedo for all his performances, he emphasizes comfort and relaxation. "What you see is what you get" is his motto.

This natural attitude came across in his show, which seemed at times to be a comedy routine as well as an incredible display of talent. Gerni kidded and chided the predominantly male audience of about 60.

Though Gerni portrays an image of a man playing games, his attitude toward billiards is quite serious, and he has expanded his philosophy toward pool to involve his life.

"There is a common denominator of excellence," he said of his success. "Achievers work ahead, do a little more than the boss asks, go the

extra mile. Motivation leads to achievement."

While Gerni is confident about his talents, he is even more optimistic about the future of billiards.

He said that more than 33 million people in the United States play pool today, and more people are catching on to the sport every day.

"The game has a lot to offer," he said. "It brings out your good qualities."

Gerni's exhibition at the Union, sponsored by the Carolina Union Sports and Recreation Committee, was a blend of skilled shots and trick shots, "the ones that will make you either rich or dead."

Using silver dollars and paper bags as props, Gerni entertained the audience that crammed into the tiny pool room. He even did a remake of his Miller Lite commercial, using what he called "Carolina Lite" to make an amazing trick shot.

While Gerni's show was entertaining, he sometimes seemed to contradict his mission of bringing respect to billiards. He may have shed some negative images when he slipped in a few ethnic jokes and sexual connotations about some members of the audience involved in trick shots.

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Show captures spirit of 19th-century actress

Kim Donehower
Theatre

The crowd at Paul Green Theatre Monday night was treated to a different sort of theater experience as PlayMakers Repertory Company presented "Affectionately Yours, Fanny Kemble," a one-woman show starring accomplished actress Eugenia Rawls.

"Fanny" is a collection of the letters and journal entries of celebrated British actress Fanny Kemble. Compiled, directed and performed by Rawls, the show provides both an insightful social commentary into 19th century America and an intriguing portrait of a fascinating and outspoken lady.

Daughter of a celebrated London theater family, the 20-year-old Kemble made her debut at Covent Garden in the role of Juliet in 1829. Immediately acclaimed as a performer of great promise, she con-

tinued her acting career in England until financial circumstances forced her family to move to America. There she met and married Pierce Butler, son of a Georgia planter. It was the circumstances of living with Butler that caused Kemble to develop her determined feminism and heated opposition to the racial prejudice and slavery, which she, as a foreigner, found very strange and quite repulsive.

Kemble's marital situation gradually worsened until at last, desperate not to be separated from her two daughters, she agreed to Butler's stipulations that she break

off correspondence with some of her closest friends, promise to leave the stage forever and stay out of the slavery issue. However, since she delayed two days in her reply, her overbearing husband accused her of abandonment and instituted divorce proceedings. Kemble eventually granted him his divorce after securing visitation rights for her children, and once again returned to a successful career on the stage.

Rawls has chosen excellent material with which to work in this one-woman endeavor. Kemble's letters and diaries are elegant, witty prose commentaries on the social situation of women and blacks in the 19th century, and they provide an eloquent look at the personal development and reactions of Kemble herself.

Rawls is ideally suited for this

production. Herself an accomplished actress of recognized stature, she fits neatly into the Kemble role. As she progresses chronologically through the journals and correspondence, she gives to Kemble's writings the appropriate air of a gradually awakening maturity and realization. From the amusing naive of Kemble's stage debut, to her powerful criticism of slavery, to her resignation of old age, Rawls effectively captures the spirit of all of Kemble's experience.

The authentic late 19th century set and costume provide a simple, appropriate backdrop to the concept of the production. With the clean, candid writings of Kemble and her own terrific acting abilities, Rawls produces a fascinating and entertaining look at a great personality and a vital period in history.

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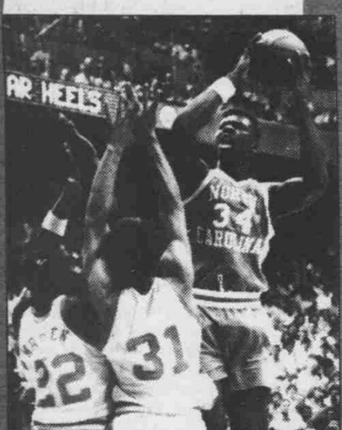
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