

# Bloom County: a mix of metaphors

By WAYNE L. GRABEIN  
Reporter

Waddling its way into 284 newspapers nationwide, the popular Bloom County comic strip, featuring Opus the penguin, Milo and Binkley, emerges from the deepest closets of Berke Breathed's mind.

"Ideas come in my head, I work them out on paper and it goes on the strip," Breathed says. "There's no philosophy involved."

The University of Texas graduate says he enjoys weaving euphemisms and metaphors into his comic strip and, whenever possible, exaggerating the represented subject matter.

Trying to make a metaphor of real life situations in the small life of the comic strip would be as close to a philosophy that he has, Breathed says.

Many of the cartoonist's euphemisms and metaphors appear in poetic form and are usually recited or sung by one of the strip's most popular characters, Opus.

"Opus was a surprise. He came out of left field and I

don't know where he came from," the Iowa resident says. "It's the kind of character cartoonists look for all their lives and that I just stumbled upon."

Breathed explains that the success of Opus as a character was the result of choosing an animal, a penguin, which appeals to the public and then adding the appropriate personality. Although it's a combination that works, it's not a formula to create other characters by, he says.

After the character's first appearance in Bloom County in June of 1981, the bow-tied penguin remained nameless for eight months until he declared his name was Opus during a series of strips Breathed calls the "Penguin Evolution Trials."

Breathed says the name Opus, though, actually came from the song title "Magnum Opus" on the album "Left Overture" by the musical group Kansas.

With Opus, Breathed is able to wade through sometimes controversial subjects with little public rebuttal which he attributes to the wide appeal of Opus.

"You just have to know enough to take advantage of the character and not take it for granted when it comes along," the 27-year-old cartoonist says.

Yet, one character from the earlier Bloom County strips was doomed from the start. He was a flamboyant bum named Skip Limekiller.

"He's an example of a character that could well be getting too close to 'Duke' in Doonesbury and I didn't need those characters," Breathed says.

Comparisons of Bloom County and Doonesbury have been made ever since Breathed started cartooning 10 years ago with his Academia Waltz strip in U.T.'s The Daily Texan.

"People always saw that I had been heavily influenced by him (Garry Trudeau, Doonesbury creator) and before recognizing the distinctions, they made the comparisons," Breathed says.

Although the photojournalism graduate admits that Doonesbury's influence can still be seen in Bloom County, Breathed says he considers himself much more visually

oriented than Trudeau.

"Although he's a wonderful writer, I don't think he's a brilliant artist," Breathed says of Trudeau.

The Bloom County cartoonist also says his approach to the world is more from the position of anarchy rather than the quiet liberalism of Doonesbury.

"After five years of Bloom County, if someone still thinks it's a Doonesbury clone, then I think it's an insult on their part," Breathed says.

By using a reversed, mirror image of his signature on his cartoon, he displays Bloom County's uniqueness in another, subtle way. Breathed explains that Leonardo da Vinci, who originally used the technique to prevent his notes from being read, has long been a hero of his.

"I always felt that if anybody that brilliant could do anything that ridiculous, he was my kind of man," Breathed says. He uses the technique for his signature in honor of da Vinci.

Breathed is honoring another person when Milo Bloom, a slightly eccentric, 10-year-old

boy, assumes the role of the trouble-making journalist at the town's newspaper. Breathed says that of all his characters, he could relate the best to Milo in this role because of the mischief he gets into.

"I used to get into a lot of trouble myself in journalism," he says. He attributes many of these problems to making up most of his facts while at U.T.

With his success in cartooning, Breathed considers his photojournalism degree essentially wasted. Although he doesn't anticipate drawing Bloom County for more than 10 years, Breathed plans to do work in writing and cinema instead of using his photographic training.

In retrospect, Breathed says he wished he had learned more about his environment by taking classes such as history, sociology and language.

But his ability to conceive such standing classics as Binkley's closet full of anxieties, penguin lust and dandelion breaks in Milo's Meadow proves Breathed already knows and understands much about the world around him. ♪

# OPAS brings good music, comedy

The MSC Opera and Performing Arts Committee is bringing two favorites to the stage in College Station — Lerner and Loewe's fantastically French musical "Gigi" and Neil Simon's award-winning comedy "Brighton Beach Memoirs."

Simon's play is about many things, but mostly about the job and pain of growing up smart, sensitive and aware. Simon's protagonist is 15-year-old Eugene Morris Jerome. He's a would-be-writer who keeps a constant journal of the activities of the eccentric household that he lives in. Of course, Eugene would rather be a baseball player with the New York Yankees, but will settle for the writer job if the baseball thing doesn't pan out.

The Jerome family consists of his mother and father, his 18 year-old brother, his mother's widowed sister and her two daughters. This clan all lives in cramped quarters in a house near the beach area of Brooklyn, New York.

Concentrating on two consecutive early Wednesday evenings, Simon has constructed the play as a series of vignettes, all interlocked with the overall theme of survival during the Depression. The various problems deal with thwarted ambition, late-blooming indepen-

dence, physical illness and personal dishonor — small everyday problems that ultimately change these people's lives.

One critic said: "It is the true watershed play for Simon's career. By rummaging through memories of his youth and combining them with new found theatrical restraint and superb playwriting, craftsmanship, Neil Simon has created an instant American classic."

Tickets in Zone I are sold out. But Zones II and III are still available for these prices respectively: Students \$15.25, Regular \$17. Students \$13 and Regular \$14.50.

Just three days later, April 18, the cast of Gigi will flourish onto the stage in that way that only the French can do.

This stage rendition is adapted from the award-winning film (11 Academy Awards). As a movie it follows no traditions and holds an important position in the history of "movie musicals." It set many trends and ushered in a rich new era of musical comedy.

The celebrated team of Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe has produced a sensational score with many unforgettable tunes.

A delicious kaleidoscope set in turn-of-the-century Paris,

GiGi features such memorable songs as "Thank Heaven For Little Girls," "I Remember I Well," "The Night They Invented Champagne," and the title song, "Gigi," which won an Oscar for Best Song.

Adapted from of the French author Colette's best known novels, the musical is the story of a young girl who has been trained from childhood to catch a man, though not for marriage. For she is the daughter of a long line of elegant and expensive "courtesans," and her well-meaning grandmother and aunt, who have taken such care to bring their charge up "right," are taken quite by surprise to find out that Gigi would rather be a rich man's wife than his mistress.

Stage and screen stars Betsy Palmer and Taina Elg join Louis Joudan in this new stage version with newcomers Lisa Howard and Tom Hewitt playing the romantic leads.

Tickets are on sale now in the MSC Box Office. Zone I is sold out. Zones II and III are still available for these prices respectively: Student \$21.50, Regular \$24 and Student \$19.50, Regular \$21.50.

If tickets are bought for both "Gigi" and "Brighton Beach Memoirs" a special discount is available. ♪



Gigi



Brighton Beach Memoirs