

THEATRE

Come Back to the Five & Dime, Jimmy Dean

McCarthy, Texas is a veritable ghost town, a dried-up skeleton that hasn't had rain in two years and is now out of water. In this town is a small drug store right out of the fifties, literally. Complete with a soda counter and a jukebox of moldy old hits, the store is the ex-meeting place of the Disciples of James Dean. Today it is September 30, 1975, the 20th Anniversary of Dean's death, and the 20th reunion of the disciples.

Come Back to the Five and Dime is a play about people who live in the lies of their past. Sissy (Trisha Ann Will) is the most deluded. Years ago she came back to the townlet of McCarthy when her asthma caused her collapse at college. She convinced herself that she could never leave her town (except for yearly trips to Marfa, where *Giant*—Dean's last picture

—was filmed). Her high school buddy Mona (Brenda Jones), a buxom, fun loving woman who never really grew up, was married and lived in Oklahoma City for a while, but retreated back to McCarthy and the illusions it held. Even Juanita (Karen Russell), the owner of the Five and Dime, has deluded herself about the past. Where Sissy finds solace in her James Dean shrine and Mona finds release in sex, Juanita holds her religion like a security blanket to shield herself from reality.

Many people will know the play from Robert Altman's popular film version, which closely follows the original script. What people may not be prepared for is the unique method of using flashback in the play. Where Altman would pan up to the soda counter mirror and come back down into the past, director Jack

Watson follows stage technique and has the present and past unfold on the same stage. The lights shift color and younger versions of Mona (Tina Gilbert) and Sissy (Gail Grobey) step out, with their friend Joe (Erik J. Hegland). Near the end of the first act, action is occurring simultaneously, and in the second act the entire cast is onstage, with some of the characters interacting between both stories.

Watson nimbly keeps the action coherent and the pace up in these standout sequences and he makes it work. Even more importantly, he takes the intriguing but not altogether perfect script (which has too neat a denouement and fails in the development of two minor characters, Stella May and Edna Louise) and makes it live with the ensemble performance of the cast. The result is a dynamic performance, led by the energetic portrayals by Brenda Jones and Trisha Ann Will (and their younger counterparts in the flashbacks). Though the cast isn't uniformly great, the less accomplished performances are forgotten in the meshing of styles between everyone. It's an electric, exciting feeling that one rarely gets in local theater.

Come Back to the Five and Dime is not a perfect play or a flawless production, but it is one of the most enjoyable theater experiences I've ever had in Eugene. The pace is swift, the action well maneuvered, the set gloriously tacky and attractive (right down to its well-worn tile floor—a great touch), and the cast marvelous. Except for a few small problems (particularly the distracting pantomime one set of the cast resorts to when the other set is speaking), this production is a resounding theatrical success.

—Sean Axmaker

Come Back to the Five and Dime is a production of University Theatre's "Second Season." It continues May 16-18 and 23-25 in the Arena Theatre on campus. Tickets are \$2.

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