

THEATRE

Bye Bye Birdie

Review by Deborah McGee

It looks like Lane Community College Theatre has a hit on its hands. In *Bye Bye Birdie*, director Patrick Torelle generates tremendous energy—enough to propel the rumor that Eugene is the West Coast hub of musical theater.

What excellent sets! Scenic and lighting director Richard J. Harris uses the college's large stage to advantage. *Bye Bye Birdie*'s main set is a lilac/soft blue art deco juke box, framing most of the play's action. Harris has devised such marvelous props as larger-than-life crayons, phone books and telephones, giving this production a Pop Art edge. He has fun with cameras, slides, silhouettes, and even a medieval cartoon, successfully juggling an expanded theatrical tool library.

Bye Bye Birdie is the story of Conrad Birdie, an Elvis-style singer who gets drafted. His manager and the manager's sweetheart instigate a farewell publicity stunt: have Birdie kiss a randomly selected fan goodbye. Show biz folks meet mainstream Americans in this play, which laughs at how crazy humans get about life in the global village.

Birdie benefits from good overall acting, especially by two local, highly talented women: Nicola Foster as Rosie Alvarez, and Judith Roberts as Mrs. Peterson.

Playing Rosie's reluctant mother-in-law, Roberts epitomizes the production's occasionally vaudevillian tinge. In her portrayal of the stereotypical Jewish mother, she squeezes the most non-verbal mileage from her character's matronly torso, mink coat and open-mouthed gasps, not to dismiss the awesome power of her mouth.

Foster, who owns a local dance studio, kept flashing me on Shirley MacClaine when that actress did more Broadway. She has the same pixie head, great legs and red/black color patterns in her character's costumes. Foster doubles as choreographer, turning out one fine dance number after another in a way that underlines the word production.

Nathan Cammack, musical director, ably guides the treat of having a live orchestra. At times Saturday night they overpowered solo vocal numbers, however, in particular those of Foster.

Although about the rock and roll era, Charles Strouse and Lee Adams' 1960 Broadway hit will not send sensitive ears cringing. The tunes are ones you'll remember, like *Put On a Happy Face*, (*I've Got a Lot of Livin' to Do*, and *One Last Kiss (Baby, One Last Kiss)*. My favorite vocals were by the trio of young women, Birdie's

fan club members, who forever repeated their love.

Costumer Judith Harrison delivers the fun of full skirts, hair bows and colorful pump shoes. Best are Birdie's duds: black leather coat and wickedly tight pants, a red lounging robe with an exaggerated gold lame collar (eat your heart out, Liberace), and his outsized brown military uniform, grotesque in form, gaudily outlined in gold fringe. Harrison clothes Deborah Sackett in the most outrageous pink leopard tights, adding in shock value to Sackett's vampish character Gloria Rasputin. Lyn Burg is relaxed and natural as Kim MacAfee, sweetheart teenybopper from Sweet Apple, Ohio, whose puberty climaxes with Birdie's arrival in town. Larry Sutton turns out a steadily charming portrait as Albert Peterson, Birdie's manager, in a role that originally launched the career of Dick Van Dyke.

Bye Bye Birdie is a meal the whole family can enjoy, with just the right amount of spice—that is, if you're not offended by the thought of Terry Thiele's (Birdie's) gyrations. He plays Birdie with just the right amount of grease. You'll never forget how he slicks back his hair.

Birdie continues through Jan. 31. See *What's Happening* calendar for details.



Photograph by Cliff Coles

An exciting "art deco" set provides the background for Kim MacAfee (Lyn Burg) and Birdie (Terry Thiele) in LCC's *Bye Bye Birdie*, based loosely on Elvis' life.

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