

drama

'The Mad Show'

"The Mad Show," a pseudo-satirical, semi-musical review based on *Mad* magazine, was given its first amateur performance anywhere by a North Eugene High School cast last weekend. The production fared about as well as most *Mad* material does when read: at its best, it gave rise to a few chuckles, smiles, and approving nods; at its worst, it compared less than favorably to the more raucous back numbers of *Fortune* and *Field and Stream*.

And for the better part of its two hours, it lay somewhere in between, though this is not to fault the production of the NEHS drama department. Director Mike Snider assembled an engaging cast which performed with verve throughout the evening, and two or three of his principals (all of whom received equal billing, since the review has no stars) are strong comic talents who gave the material more, often, than it deserved. Lighting, sound effects, and supplementary slides featuring *Mad* graffiti were without exception well-coordinated, and the four-piece ensemble which provided the show's incidental music, though over-loud at a couple of points, generally acquitted itself well.

My quarrel is with the material produced by those small-minded and by now rather smug sensibilities down at *Mad* magazine itself. The publication they produce today has, unfortunately, gone sickly with the advent of wealth and reputation. Today's *Mad* is an anemic little number indeed, compared to work done by its resident geniuses back in the 1950's and early 1960's. Although the matchless drawings of Mort Drucker and the still-fertile imaginations of Sergio Aragones and Don Martin are mainstays, there's a heavy reliance now on sight gags, scripts which furnish ping-pong repartee as controlled and predictable as an exercise in logic, and pallid farce whose trivial nature precludes the introduction of risk or, more to the point, surprise. The days of those ornate, raffish, boundlessly cynical takeoffs on TV ("Dragnet," "Peter Gunn," "Howdy Doody"), comic strips (the cheerful skewering of Hal Foster's "Prince Valiant") and films (the reduction of Disney characters to unshaven, bad-mouthing low-lifers like Mickey Rodent and Darnold Duck) are too long gone, perhaps for good.

So one finds in "Mad Show" little more than a chastened, giggly tribute to the satirical possibilities which the creators of *Mad* have so consistently skirted. There's a mild slap at

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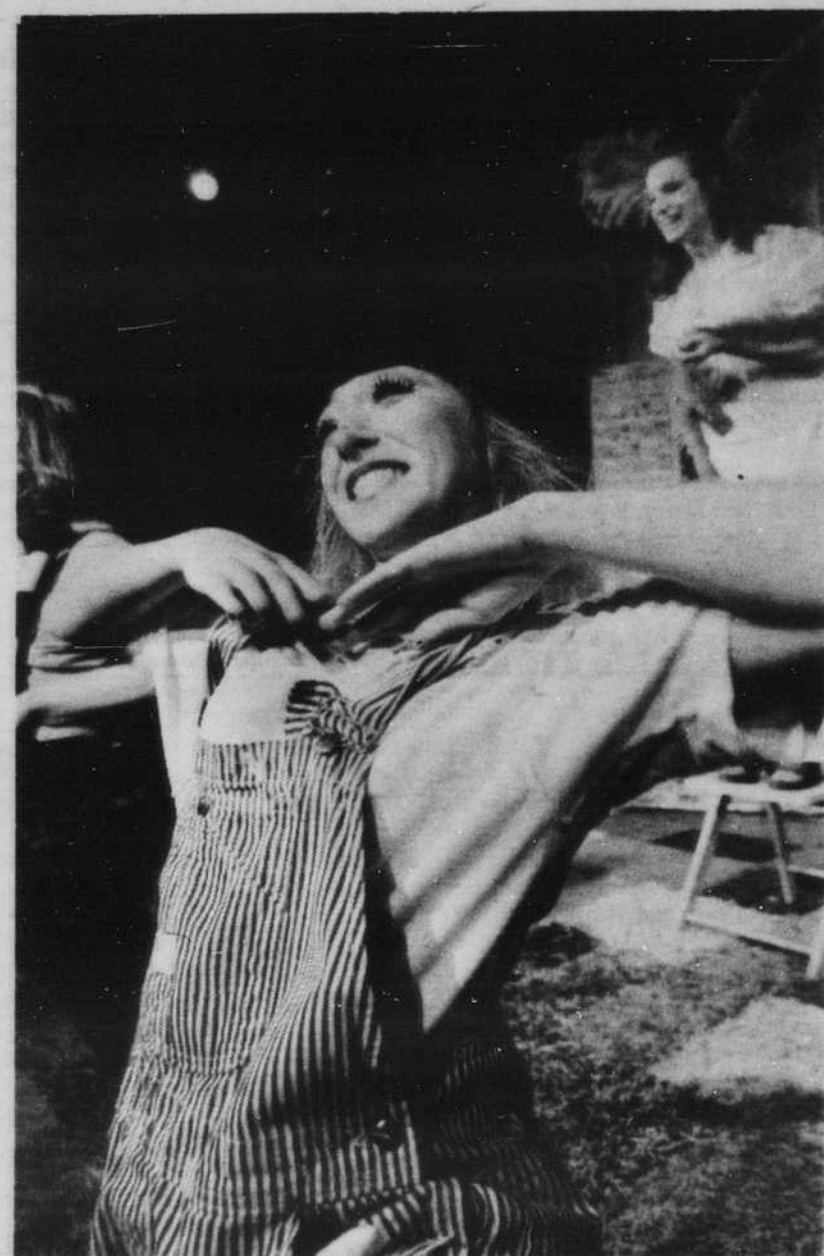


Photo by Cal Jones

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Nixon (and who could miss a target like that, these days?), a fairly amusing lampoon of TV pro-football coverage (but once you've read it, who wants to hear it again?), and some on-the-beam shots at kiddie TV, commercial jingles, and game shows. There's a song called "Hate" (the only tuneful item in the show) which captivates with clever lyrics, much enhanced in this instance by North's boisterous, imaginative rendition.

But the remainder is characteristically puerile. An ostensibly satirical look at folk singers is nothing more than a contrived series of minor sight gags; an Academy Awards presentation for parents who exhibit exceptional skill at driving their kids nuts is hampered by its tired conceptions of family life; and "Yecchi," a song derived from *Mad*'s rallying cry, provides more yicks than kicks in its preoccupation with snot, body odor, vomit, and other sure-fire knee-slappers.

North Eugene's cast is really very much above the material they performed on this particular go-round, and that's saying a lot more than it seems. They'd be well-advised to attempt to secure rights to "El Revue de de Coca-Cola," or to *National Lampoon*'s intermittently inspired review, when these vehicles become available to amateurs. And they should take a cue from the off-Broadway audiences of 1965, who left "Mad Show's" original production with no greater claim to fame than the presence of "Laugh-in's" Joanne Worley among its cast members. A dubious distinction at best, as some would argue—heh heh—which testifies to *Mad*'s decline into domesticity.

Chris Houghlum



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