

This Side of the Hill Players

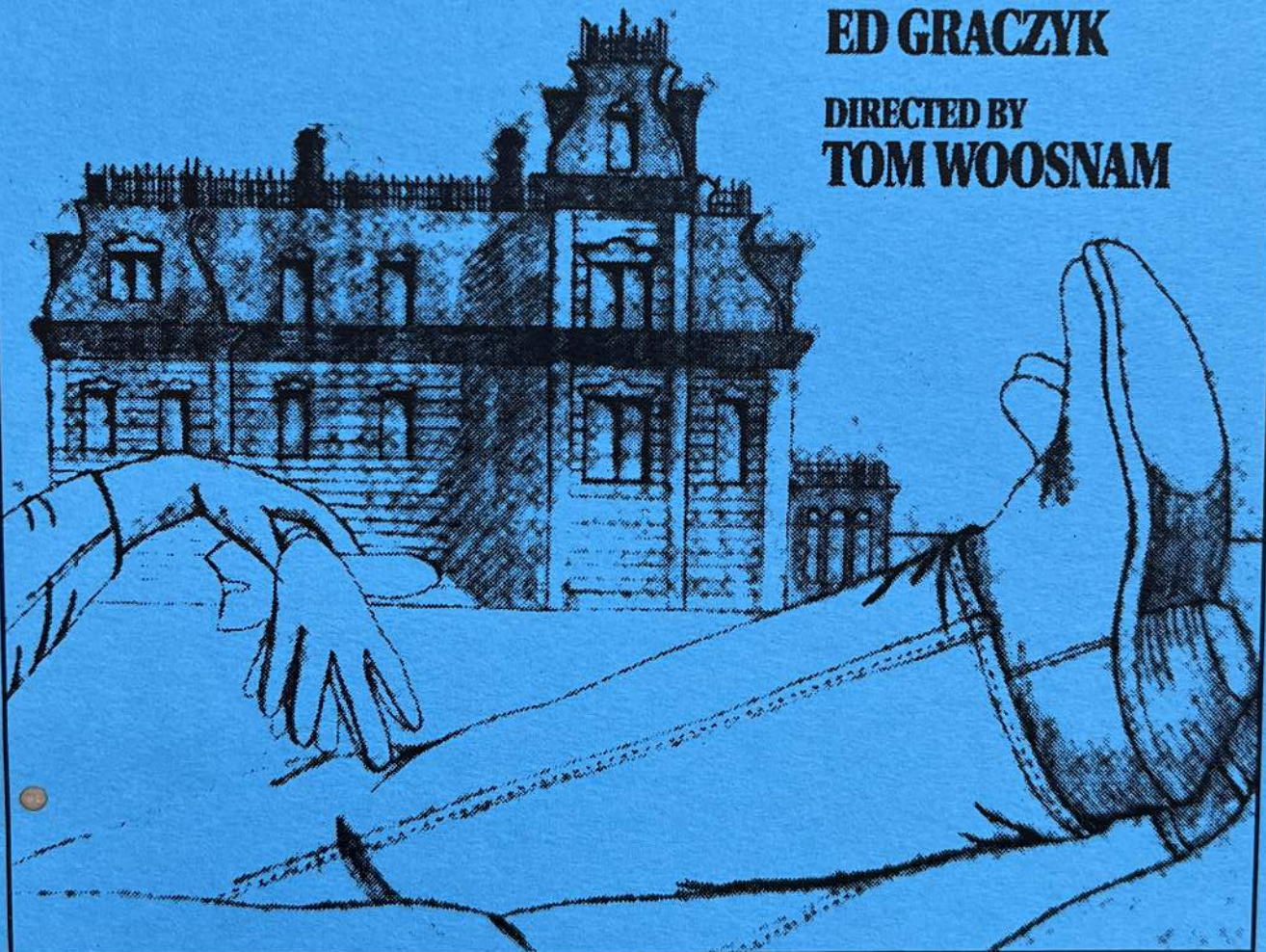


by special arrangement with Dramatists Play Service, Inc. present

Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean

BY
ED GRACZYK

DIRECTED BY
TOM WOOSNAM



July 21-August 5, 1995

Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean

THE CAST

Juanita	Betty Ralphs
Mona	Roxane Eppes
Mona (then)	Jennifer Gauthier
Sissy	Katherine O'Connor
Sissy (then)	Jennifer Merriss
Joe	Abraham Engel
Joanne	Melissa Malloring
Stella May	Jackie O'Keefe
Edna Louise.....	Prairie Griffith

TIME

September 30, 1975

September 30, 1955

PLACE

A five-and-dime in McCarthy, a small town in West Texas

There will be a 15-minute intermission

between Act One and Act Two...

Please join us in the lobby for refreshments

The Crew

Director	Tom Woosnam
Stage Manager	David Johansen
Set Designer	Chuck Danskin
Lighting Designer	Paul Anable
Costumes	Pat Pipp, Judy Larson
Prop Search	Ginny Anable, Mary Danca
Graphics	Jean-Claude Langer, Sheila Langer, Julia Woosnam
Lighting Technician	Richard Bassin
Sound Technician	Heather Danskin
Prop Crew	Ginny Anable, Judy Larson
Set Construction	Chuck Danskin, Tom Woosnam, Richard Bassin, David Johansen, Paul Anable, Ginny Anable, Stan Aitken, Jean-Claude Langer, Sheila Langer, Dick Engel, Al Murphy, Ed Vignos, Jenna Corwin, Heather Danskin, Hank Rennagel, Ashley Rennagel
Publicity	David Johansen, Charlie White, Stan Aitken
Photography	Gordon Kloess
Poster Design	Julia Woosnam
Program Graphics	Laurie Becker
Program Coordinator	Margaret Harris
Advertising Director	Bruce Marion
Advertising Sales	Bob Rogers

Come to Mel Mello, 'Jimmy Dean'

By STACY TREVENON
Half Moon Bay Review

As the 40th anniversary of screen heartthrob James Dean's death approaches on Sept. 30, This Side of the Hill Players present Ed Graczyk's searing yet howlingly funny "Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean," directed by Tom Woosnam and opening this Friday.

It's set in a tiny, drought-ridden Texas hamlet in a five and dime with soda fountain, stacks of "Archie" comics and a shrine to James Dean that is cluttered with his photographs. There, a handful of die-hard fans gather for the 20th anniversary of Dean's death on Sept. 30, 1975. Proudly sporting their "Disciples of James Dean" jackets, each of the women also fiercely hangs on to grand visions of herself and her place in the world.

Dean, the rebel outcast, "made them feel that they were accepted and gave them a reason to believe in themselves," said Katherine O'Connor, the San Francisco actor who portrays the "ballys," irreverent and well-endowed "Sissy."

Joining her are Dean-obsessed "Mona" (Roxane Eppes), who claims that her sheltered son is Dean's and that she was "chosen" to bear him. There are also timid, mousy "Edna" (Prairie Griffith), perhaps the only one who's happy with herself, bombastic "Stella" (Jackie O'Keefe), who insists she's perfectly happy without children, store owner "Juanita" (Betty Ralphs), who plunges into religion to escape a painful truth, and "Joanne" (Melissa Malloring.) Arriving in a yellow Porsche similar to the one in which Dean died, Joanne drops a revelation that forces the "disciples" to wrenchingly face their illusions.

"Change, and the ability to change" is what director Woosnam feels that the play is about. "(Each) confronts what she wants to do with her life," he said.

Flashbacks explore the group's core — a younger Mona, Sissy and their friend "Joe" — young misfits who will later face the harshest realities. Their interwoven lives and the secrets that bind them unfold on the



Dean Drumheller / Review

Five and dime owner Juanita (Betty Ralphs, left) isn't amused by Sissy's (Katherine O'Connor, center) irreverent sass while Mona (Roxane Eppes) polishes a photo of James Dean in "Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean" opening Friday.

"No matter what happens, if they have a strong bond, they'll overcome it."

K. O'Connor

day Dean died, Sept. 30, 1955. Juxtaposed against their 1975 counterparts, Jennifer Gauthier and Jennifer Merriss play the teenage Mona and Sissy respectively, and Abraham Engel plays a haunted Joe who is eerily reminiscent of the moody Dean.

Buoying this somber picture is plenty of earthy humor, as the women spar over each other's pasts and ultimately make peace.

"No matter what happens, if they

have a strong bond, they'll overcome it," O'Connor said.

The cast has differing takes on the play, which became a film in 1982 with Cher, Karen Black, Sandy Dennis, Kathy Bates and director Robert Altman. For Malloring, it's constructed like an ancient Greek play — she sees Joanne, as she strips away the others' self-deceptions, reprising the classical Furies. For Eppes, it is an actor's treat — "I love a play that takes me through a range of emotions," she said.

For Woosnam, it blends two favorite genres: a Western setting and a theme of emotional and/or physical

isolation. "When people are faced in any situation where they need to survive, I'm instantly drawn to it," he said.

"Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean" will run at the Mel Mello Center at 1167 Main St., Half Moon Bay, through Aug. 5 at 8 p.m. on Fridays, Saturdays and two Thursdays, July 27 and Aug. 3. There will also be two discount 2 p.m. Sunday matinees on July 23 and 30. Tickets are available at the Eriksen Gallery and Bay Book and Video in Half Moon Bay, and at the door. For group discounts, call 726-9208. For other information, call TSOTHP at 726-0998.



'Come Back to the 5 & Dime'

This Side of the Hill Players' production of "Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean," features (from left) Katherine O'Connor, Roxane Eppes and Melissa Malloring. The comedy-drama by Ed Graczyk will be directed by Tom Woosnam.

It will play July 21 to Aug. 5 at the Mel Mello Center for the Arts, 1167 Main St., Half Moon Bay. Curtains are at 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays and 2 p.m. Sundays. Tickets are \$12. For reservations or information call 726-0998.

Twenty years ago today



Dean Drumheller / Review

A framed photograph of screen heartthrob James Dean causes the past to spill into the present for Mona (Roxane Eppes, far right) in This Side of the Hill Players' current production of "Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean" now running at the Mel MelloCenter for the Arts in Half Moon Bay. As she pores over the picture on the 20th anniversary of Dean's death, a flashback reveals a younger Mona (Jennifer Gauthier, left) with her friend Sissy (Jennifer Merriss) as they share their dreams of Dean on the day he died in 1955. The comedy/drama will run one final weekend at 8 p.m. Thursday through Saturday at the Mello Center. Tickets are available at Eriksen Art and Framing and Bay Book and Video in Half Moon Bay, or at the door. Call 726-0998 for information.

Bittersweet 'Jimmy Dean' on coast

By RICHARD INNERST

Times Correspondent

This Side of the Hill Players' production of "Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean" is well worth seeing.

Ed Graczyk's play, a blend of dark humor and pathos, portrays people sustained by illusion rather than faith, whose shallow values have led to barren lives.

It's September 1975. Juanita's 5 & Dime in McCarthy, Texas, is decorated for the 20-year reunion of the Disciples of Jimmy Dean. Chuck Danskin's fine set vividly evokes the feeling of a '50s dime store with its spinner racks for paperbacks and comics, messy displays of notions, and a fountain featuring Orange Crush and stale doughnuts.

Unique to Juanita's store, though, are the illuminated picture of The Last Supper hanging behind the fountain, a testament to Juanita's dogged faith in Jesus and the power of prayer, and, across the room, the shrine to Jimmy Dean, a bookcase crammed with pictures and mementos of the star and topped by a large photograph trimmed with white Christmas lights.

In 1955 Juanita's was the meeting place for the Disciples, a club with officers, dues, jackets and a song, "The Eyes of Jimmy Dean Are Upon You."

1955 was an important year for the Disciples because Dean was in a nearby town filming "Giant." It was also the year of Dean's death and the club's last meeting.

As the faithful gather, there's some reunion fun along with a troubling sense that their pathetic worship of Dean is symptomatic of their shallow values and empty lives.

Mona, the club president, is the most pathetic. Her life peaked in her teens when she was an extra for "Giant." Since then she has devoted her life to

raising the son that she falsely claims Dean fathered. To keep the boy dependent on her, she has also fostered the illusion that her son, named Jimmy Dean, is retarded.

The brittle, deluded Mona is portrayed with heart-rending intensity by Roxanne Eppes.

Mona's best friend, Sissy, is fun-loving and bouncy but equally shallow and deluded. She dreams of being an Ice Follies star because she has a lush figure and was a good roller skater in her teens.

Now she tries to maintain the illusion that her husband, who disappeared two years ago, is working abroad, earning big money so he can return to her. Actually he left when she lost her breasts through a mastectomy.

Katherine O'Connor is excellent as Sissy. She can be funny, but the scene in which she confesses her husband has left her is one of the most touching in the play.

While in high school Mona and Sissy were part of a close threesome with Joe, an effeminate boy, whom the two girls liked and protected. Joe, given a brooding, troubled portrayal by Abraham Engel, escaped McCarthy after he was dragged to the cemetery and beaten by three bullies.

Joe returns to the reunion as Joanne. At first the Disciples don't recognize the new Joe, then are successively appalled and fascinated by the sex change.

Ironically Joanne is now the strongest of the group. Having exorcised her demons and accepted the truth about herself, she carries herself with a calm assurance, admirably caught in Melissa Malloring's performance.

Joanne's mission is to bring reality to the others. She faces Mona with the fact that Joe fathered her child. She even confronts the dry-witted, no-nonsense Juanita, well-acted by Betty Ralphs, with a hard truth: Her husband was not a devout man taken to God by a heart attack, but a cruel drunkard who died of cirrhosis of the liver.

Another disciple, Stella, has achieved financial security by marrying an oilman. Wonderfully portrayed by Jackie O'Keefe as a loud, gauche, sometimes cruel woman with more money than brains, Stella insists that she is successful and happy. But her marriage is childless, and her life with her rich husband appears selfish, bleak and empty.

The only fulfilled and happy Disciple is Edna, a shy, awkward, slow-witted hanger-on, all of whose qualities are vividly captured in Prairie Griffith's performance. A cynic would say Edna's salvation is her ignorance, but it may as well be her loving nature, her honest devotion to her husband and children.

In 1955 scenes that weave through the reunion, the young Mona and Sissy are ably portrayed by Jennifer Gauthier and Jennifer Merriss, respectively.

What "Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean," comedy-drama by Ed Graczyk, presented by This Side of the Hill Players

Where Mel Mello Center for the Arts, 1167 Main St., Half Moon Bay.

When Through Aug. 5: 8 p.m.
Thursdays-Saturdays, 2 p.m.
Sundays

Price \$12

Call 726-0998

Rating ★★★½ (of a possible 4)

Director Tom Woosnam has skillfully united the play's haunting blend of past and present, illusion and reality, humor and pain, and given each its due.