

'Jimmy Dean': staging a testimonial for a cult idol

It all began with . . .

by Jeannine Seitz, reporter

In 1985 the legend of James Dean is all but forgotten. Teenagers of this decade know little of the mid-western farmboy who became the Hollywood celebrity of the 50's or how his untimely death shook the morale of the American adolescent.

Dean was more than a star; he was an idol. Those who followed his career and private life were more than fans; they were worshippers. The fervor and devotion that grew around his death was cult-like.

What was the source of James Dean's popularity? What caused the James Dean craze among young Americans after his death?

Dean was the epitome of troubled, rebellious youth. He appeared in three movies during his brief career: "East of Eden" (1955), "Rebel Without a Cause" (1955), and "Giant" (1956). In each of the movies he portrayed brooding, discontent young men. Dean became the symbol of youthful frustrations. The "cult-hero", was an instant success.

Dean's career, however, did not begin in Hollywood. He was raised on a prosperous farm in Indiana by an aunt and uncle who adopted him after his mother died. In high school, he was a basketball star and successful in theatre. He attended U.C.L.A. for two years to study law. Dean abandoned law to take up acting in New York City.

Dean was first cast in the Broadway play "The Immoralist" (1954). He was immediately discovered by the famous director Elia Kazan and signed for motion pictures.

Dean's fame was instantaneous. He was, however, a shy, private person who was embarrassed by publicity. The sensation Dean stirred in life was magnified in his death.

The young idol was driving in his brand new \$7,000 Porsche Spyder to a sports car show in northern California. He collided with another car and died soon after. Teenagers throughout the country mourned on that day, Sept. 30, 1955.



Dean's tragic death brought ghastly rumors about the young man's resurrection and reincarnation. Fan mail flooded Hollywood stating that Dean's death was a hoax. Others begged for memorabilia. Some fans claimed to have made spiritual contact with him. Teenage girls wrote of their "eternal" love for Dean and how his death had destroyed their lives.

Thirty years later, the James Dean phenomenon has faded. Although James Dean is no longer such a household word, the romantic legend of Jimmy Dean still persists in the rebellious hearts of our youth.

Opening tonight . . .

The Otterbein College Theatre production of "Come Back to the 5 and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean" opens tonight (Thurs.) for the first of a weekend of performances. The play, by Ed Gracysk, is being performed for the first time in this area and is being directed by Roy Bowen. The original casting was one by Dr. Charles Dodrill, who was unable to direct the play for health reasons.

All the action will take place in a five and dime diner in Texas near the location for the film "Giant". Naturally, the visitors to the diner meet to worship their idol—James Dean.

Flashbacks take the audience to 1955, the year of Dean's death, and forward to the club reunion in 1975.

The cast includes juniors Linda Cole, Nancy Fox, and JoBeth Phalen; sophomores Charlotte Dougherty, Liana Peters, Dia Huelker, and Catherine Randazzo; and freshman Michael Cunningham.

Tickets are available through the Cowan Hall box office from 1-4:30 p.m. weekdays or an hour before each performance.



Photo by Meg Scott

Liana Peters, Linda Cole and JoBeth Phalen will appear tonight in the opening evening of "Come Back to the 5 and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean."

ENTERTAINMENT

'Jimmy Dean' fast-paced, funny

By Dennis Fiely

Dispatch Theater Critic

When *Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean* opened on Broadway with a big-name cast in early 1982, *New York Times* critic Frank Rich called it a "dreary amateur night."

But the real amateurs are holding the play in good stead at Otterbein College in Westerville this weekend.

Guest director Roy Bowen and his student cast have given Columbus playwright Ed Graczyk's revised version of his memory play the pace and clarity it lacked on Broadway.

THE EVENTS of *Jimmy Dean*, set in a Woolworth's-like dime store, alternate between two time frames — 1955 and 1975 — and surround a group of small-town Texas women, all members of the local fan club for '50s movie idol James Dean.

In the play's "present" the women gather for a 20-year reunion; in the play's flashback scenes, they hold one of their meetings and salivate over the filming of Dean's final movie, *Giant*, in the nearby town of Martha.

REVIEW

On the New York stage, director Robert Altman needlessly muddled the picture with dumb theatrical devices, such as mirrors and a dual set. He also had the same performers play both their "then" and "now" personas.

Through simple changes in lighting and the cast, the Otterbein production neatly distinguishes between the time frames.

THAT'S NOT all. This show moves. Skeletons scamper from the kooks' closets so quickly that the play's "surprises" may catch you off guard, despite their inherent predictability.

The young cast members handle their down-home slang with ease and relish the opportunity to play these colorful characters, most of whom are afflicted with sexual aberrations of one form or another.

What the players lack in depth and originality, they make up for with enthusiasm.

They don't take any of this too seriously. Director Bowen and his cast recognize the ele-

ments of farce. The funniest lines occur immediately after the most serious moments.

THE YOUNG and inexperienced cast tends to imitate the appearance and style of the play's Broadway actresses, which included Cher, Sandy Dennis and Karen Black.

Linda Cole sketches a troubled, humorless Mona, lost in her fantasy of having mothered James Dean's child.

Even though she's a blonde, Liana Peters plays a very Cher-like Sissy — tall, thin and sassy.

Michael Cunningham captures Joe as a young man of brooding good looks and few words.

JoBeth Phalen as the rich, robust Stella May and Charlotte Dougherty as the pregnant Edna Louise are little more than comic tokens, but delightful nonetheless.

As Juanita, the store proprietor, Catherine Randazzo anchors the ensemble.

NANCY FOX sounds like she lowered her voice an octave to play Joanne, the transsexual (she used to be Joe), who carries

a bitter, harsh sophistication and forces all the other characters to face the truths about themselves.

That's what *Jimmy Dean* is all about — smashing self-delusions, destroying facades.

The theme comes through loudly and clearly in the spirited Otterbein production.

The college also continues to demonstrate the improvement seen this season in the technical end of its productions. Fred Thayer has designed a wonderful set, cluttered with signs, posters and five-and-dime knicknacks. The set not only provides a convincing backdrop for the performers, but it reinforces the play's message as well.

The Otterbein College Theatre production of *Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean* continues at 8:15 p.m. today and Saturday, and 2:30 p.m. Sunday in the Cowan Hall theater on the Westerville campus. Tickets are available at the Otterbein box office, 890-3028.

Box office opens for a flash from the past—James Dean

by Jeannine Seitz, reporter

There were the Roaring '20's, the radical '60's and the war torn '40's, but perhaps no decade is as steeped in nostalgia as the 1950's. It was a time better known to our parents than us, with Elvis, the bobby socks, and of course, James Dean. His rebellious life and untimely death still intrigue movie and nostalgia fans just as much today as they did thirty years ago.

The Otterbein Theatre department hopes to rekindle some of that '50's fervor with their next mainstage production, "Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean."

Otterbein's upcoming theatre production is "Come Back To the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean." The play will run Feb. 7-10, at 8:15 in Cowan Hall.

Dr. Charles Dodrill, chairman of the department of theater and dance, did the original casting. Due to health reasons, however, he is unable to direct the play full-time.

Former director of theater at The Ohio State University and Otterbein graduate, Dr. Bowen will direct the production in place of Dr. Dodrill. Dr. Bowen has directed at Otterbein in the past. The last production he directed on campus was "Shadow Box" which was performed four years ago.

According to Dr. Dodrill, Otterbein was very fortunate to get Dr. Bowen. In 1971 he was presented the Ed Begley Memorial Drama Award which is given annually to an Otterbein graduate who has risen to distinction in the theater world. Dr. Bowen has been involved in Columbus area theater for 30 years.

"Come Back To The 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean" was written by Columbus playwright Ed Graczyk. The play was first produced on Broadway nine years ago.

The play takes place in a small Texas town near the shooting location for the movie "Giant"—James Dean's last movie before he was killed in an automobile accident in 1955.

The fans meet in the local 5 & Dime on the 20th anniversary of Dean's death. Flashbacks occur throughout the play so the major roles are double cast to represent the young and old versions of the same characters.

Junior Linda Cole plays the 1975 Mona and sophomore Dia Huekler portrays the 1955 Mona. Mona's good friend, Sissy (1975) is played by sophomore Liana Peters and sophomore Gina Grogg plays Sissy (1955). The two women are officers of the Disciples of James Dean fan club. Joe, the club vice-president, and supposed love child of James Dean, is played by freshman Michael Cunningham.

Joanne—junior Nancy Fox, Stella May—junior JoBeth Phalen, and Edna Louise—sophomore Charlotte Dougherty are the devoted James Dean followers. Sophomore Catherine Randazzo plays the long time owner of the 5 & Dime.

To promote the production, the theater department is tentatively planning some campus events. Diane Idapence, public relations director for the play hopes to sponsor a Texas Country Western night in the campus center for dinner. Plans are also being considered to have a film festival of James Dean movies with the help of the Campus Programming Board. Idapence wants students who are not aware of the 50's generation idol to get acquainted with the legendary actor so they can better appreciate the play.

Tickets for "Come Back To The 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean" will be available 1-4:30 p.m. weekdays, starting Thursday Jan. 24, and at the door one hour preceding each performance. The play employs adult themes and language.

'Jimmy Dean' back with college staging

By Dennis Fiely

Dispatch Theater Critic

Columbus playwright Ed Graczyk said he's tired of talking about *Come Back to the 5 & Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean*, but his play refuses to fade away.

More than 2,000 scripts of *Jimmy Dean* are in circulation and the play, which originated at Players Theatre of Columbus in 1976, continues to be produced all over the country.

"It's a play that's not obviously going to die soon," Graczyk said last week from his Columbus home. "I know of five productions in Ohio within the last three months and it will be staged by professional companies in Holland and England this spring."

Otterbein College Theatre joins the parade this week when it stages a production of *Jimmy Dean* Thursday through Sunday in Cowan Hall on the Westerville campus. For tickets, call 890-3028.

The popularity and endurance of *Jimmy Dean* has been something of a vindication for Graczyk, who, along with director Robert Altman, suffered the slings and arrows of New York critics when the play opened on Broadway in 1982. It expired after 54 performances.

"It got slaughtered by the New York critics, but the people enjoy it and that's what's important," Graczyk said.

The Otterbein production, under the direction of Roy Bowen, is being billed as the "central Ohio premiere of the revised version" of the play.

Set in small-town Texas, *Jimmy Dean* looks at the behavior among fan club members in two different time periods, 20 years apart.

"The lines are substantially the same as always," Graczyk said.

Graczyk wished the Otterbein production well, and added that he felt "certain obligations"

to attend one of the productions.

He offered this advice for Bowen and the cast: "Try not to produce anything more than what the script says. . . . There are no great messages and this is not an earth-shattering drama."

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The Ohio State University department of theater will celebrate Black History Month by making a little history of its own.

Dr. Firman H. "Bo" Brown, chairman of the theater department, believes the all-black cast for *Home* could be a first for the department of theater. *Home* opens Tuesday for a two-week run in Stadium II Theatre at Drake Union. For tickets, call 422-2295.

The production stars graduate student Sandra Lovelady and two undergraduates, Craig Green and Misty Cook. David Ayers directs.

The play, originated in the late '70s by the Negro Ensemble Company in New York, deals with a young man's attempt to purge his past and return to his roots in Cross Roads, N.C.

Brown welcomed the opportunity to produce *Home*, but added it does not necessarily represent a commitment to more ethnic productions in the future.

"We're color blind as far as theater goes," Brown said. "We just simply try to do the best plays we can find. We're committed to good theater. Hopefully, that would deal with all minorities, all religions. The play is the thing; if the material is not worthy, we won't do it."

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RAINTREE cinemas 890-2385

COTTON CLUB (R) 2:30-5:00-7:30-10:00
 PINOCCHIO (G) 1:30-3:30-5:30-7:15-9:00
 NIGHTMARE ON ELM ST. (R) 1:30-3:30-5:30-8-10

★ ★ ★

FORUM cinemas 866-9149

PINOCCHIO (G) 1:00-3:00-5:00
 AVENGING ANGEL (R) 1:30-3:30-5:30-7:30-9:30
 NAKED FACE (R) 7:30-9:30

★ ★ ★

All Seats \$1.50 M

YORK PLAZA
 866-8922

All Seats \$1.50

GRACELAND
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ALL SEATS \$1.50

Nostalgia, good acting make "Jimmy Dean" memorable

by Tami Lange

It is unfortunate that many times a wonderful college theatre production goes unnoticed because students consider it too deep or (more often) too boring. The Otterbein Theatre production of "Come Back to the 5 and Dime, Jimmy Dean,

Jimmy Dean" breaks both those barriers in a way that can only be described as wonderful. "Jimmy Dean" is not only a well written comedy, but it is also a well developed study of an age and its characters.

The plot is this: It is Sept. 30, 1975, the 20th anniversary of the death of film star James Dean. In a small Texas town, near the location of the filming of Dean's movie "Giant" it is time for the reunion of the "Disciples of James Dean" club. The reunion is held at a small diner, most of which is a shrine to the great film actor.

More important than the homage to Dean are the explorations into the lives of the club members—both in 1975 as well as through flashbacks into 1955. First there is Mona, who has claimed for twenty years to be the mother of Dean's love child. The part is handled exceptionally well by junior Linda Cole and sophomore Dia Huekler (her 1955 counterpart). It is not difficult to believe that these two are actually the same character—mainly because they are the same, as Mona has never really grown up.

with idols like Dean, as well as the deeper satisfaction gained from leaving the theater and feeling as though you were involved—involved in the laughter and the tears of meeting a character and feeling as though you actually *knew* them. This surely is the goal in any production.

This is not to say that all of this involvement was well controlled. There was a lot of yelling and mixing of dialogue, which unfortunately buried a few important lines. In the same way, some laughter from the audience covered lines where the timing was lost, along with the point. These however may just be attributed to opening night jitters which caused only minimal distraction.

All in all the production was well done and much appreciated by the audience if the discussion during the intermission and after the show was any indication. Congratulations to director Roy Bowen, the cast and especially the crew for without the nostalgia of the set and appropriate sound effects the show may have floundered. If this is any indication of upcoming productions, I'd plan on getting tickets to "The Imaginary Invalid" as soon as the box office opens.

If you missed it—you not only missed a good production but an experience that would have perhaps, made James Dean proud.