

# 'Oklahoma!' headed for Gavilan stage



Gilroy Community Theatre will present its summer musical, "Oklahoma!" at the Gavilan College Theater July 23, 24, 30, 31 and Aug. 6 and 7.

Directed by Phil Skiver, the production stars GCT veterans Frank Vanella and Shelly Andrews as "Curly" and "Laurey," the young lovers in the territory about to become a state. Donald Walton and Peggy Fischer provide the comic relief as "Will Parker" and "Ado Annie."

Murile Brem returns to the Gilroy stage as "Aunt Eller," and character actors Rod Pintello and Bob Fairless play "Jud Fry" and "Ali Hakim."

Tickets for the performance are \$7.50 and \$6, and can be reserved by calling 842-SHOW. Curtain time is 8 p.m.

The second weekend of the production will be a special event coordinated for visitors at the Fourth Annual Gilroy Garlic Festival.

The performance is scheduled as an official festival event. The production also involves a new emphasis on community involvement: each member of the production staff for "Oklahoma!" worked with an apprentice interested in becoming involved with community theater.

Ado Annie gets roped by Will Parker as GCT prepares "Oklahoma!"

(Kai Lai photo)

# Cast announced for 'Oklahoma'

6/17/82  
GILROY — In commemoration of National Theater Week, Gilroy Community Theatre has announced the casting of its summer musical, Rodgers and Hammerstein's *Oklahoma*.

GCT veteran Frank Vanella will return to the South County to perform the role of Curly. He has played principal roles in *Rodgers and Hart*, *Kismet* and, most recently, as Don Quixote in *Man of la Mancha*.

Playing opposite Vanella in the role of Laurey, will be Shelly Andrews, a University of California at Davis sophomore who has appeared in GCT shows for almost a decade.

Other principal roles will be filled by Muriel Brem (Aunt Eller) and her daughter, Peggy Fischer (Ado Annie).

The part of Will Parker will be played by a GCT newcomer, Donald Walton. Character actors, Bob Fairless and Rod Pintello, have been cast in the roles of Ali Hakim and Jud Fry.

Completing the list of principals are Julie James as Gertie, Mike Smurthwaite as Carnes, E. John Mondo as Cord Elam, John Gratz as Skidmore and Jack Ray as Slim.

In all, 70 persons were cast in singing or dancing roles, according to director Phil Skiver. In addition, the number of people in the production staff brings the total to more than 100.

Production dates are July 23, 24, 30, 31 and Aug. 6 and 7. Call 842-SHOW (842-7469) for further information.

## "Oklahoma!" to be presented on college stage

One of the greatest musicals of all time, Rogers and Hammerstein's "Oklahoma," will ride to the stage once again as Gilroy Community Theatre presents its summer musical at the Gavilan College Theater on Friday and Saturday, July 23, 24, 30, 31, and Aug. 6, 7.

Directed by Phil Skiver, the production stars GCT veterans Frank Vanella of Morgan Hill and Shelly Andrews as Curly and Laurey, the young lovers in the territory about to become a state. Donald Walton and Peggy Fisher provide the comic relief as Will Parker and Ado Annie. Muriel Brem returns to the Gilroy stage as Aunt Eller, and character actors Rod Pintello and Bob Fairless play Jud Fry and Ali Hakim.

Tickets for the six evening performances are \$7.50 and \$6, and can be reserved by calling 842-SHOW. Curtain time is 8 p.m.

The second weekend of the production will be a special treat for visitors at the Fourth Annual Gilroy Garlic Festival. The performance is scheduled as an official festival event. The production also involves a new emphasis on community involvement: each member of the production staff for "Oklahoma" worked with an apprentice interested in becoming involved with community theater.

For more information, call 842-SHOW, Monday through Friday, 1 to 5 p.m.

EVENING FREE LANCE Hollister, California, Thursday, June 17, 1982—13

## GCT casts 70 in 'Oklahoma'!

Gilroy Community Theatre has announced the casting of its summer musical, Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Oklahoma!"

GCT veteran Frank Vanella returns to perform the role of Curly. Playing opposite Vanella in the role of Laurey will be Shelley Andrews, a UC Davis

sophomore who has appeared in GCT shows for almost a decade, advise GCT officials.

Other principal roles will be filled by Muriel Brem (Aunt Eller) and her daughter, Peggy Fischer (Ado Annie).

The part of Will Parker will be played by a GCT newcomer, Donald Walton.

Character actors Bob Fairless and Hollister's Rod Pintello have been cast in the roles of Ali Hakim and Jud Fry. Completing the list of principals are Julie James as Gertie; Mike Smurthwaite as Carnes; local residents E. John Mondo as Cord Elam and John Gratz as Skidmore, and Jack Ray as

"Slim."

Seventy persons were cast in singing and dancing roles, according to director Phil Skiver. In addition, the number of people in the production staff brings the total to over 100, he said.

Production dates are July 23, 24, 30, and Aug. 6, and 7. Call 842-SHOW for further information.



### 23/FRIDAY

**Oklahoma!** perennial favorite is offering of the Gilroy Community Theatre. Opens tonight at Gavilan College Theater. Tickets \$7.50, \$6. Telephone 842-SHOW.

## 'Oklahoma' set to open

Dress rehearsals are being held each night this week at Gavilan College in preparation for opening night of *Oklahoma* June 23.

Directed by Phil Skiver, the Rogers and Hammerstein musical stars Gilroy Community Theatre veterans Frank Vanella and Shelly Andrews as Curley and Laurey.

Donald Walton and Peggy Fischer provide comic relief as Will Parker and Ado Annie.

Fischer's mother, Muriel Brem, will return as Aunt Eller, a role she played in an earlier GCT production of the musical.

Rod Pintello and Bob Fairless play the roles of Jud Fry and Ali Hakim.

The production also involves a new emphasis on community involvement.

Each member of the production staff worked with an apprentice interested in becoming involved with the community theater.

Tickets for the six evening performances are \$7.50 and \$6, and may be reserved by calling 842-SHOW.

Curtain time is 8 p.m.

A special opening night *Prairie Party* is being sponsored by Theatre Angels Art League at the center on Fifth Street.

Tickets are available at the Book Arbour or from Theatre Angels.

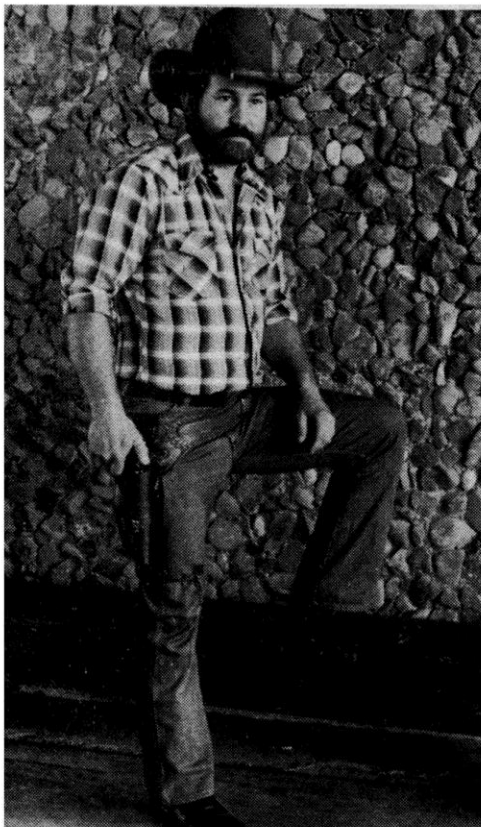
The second week of the production will fit into the schedule of visitors to the 4th annual Gilroy Garlic Festival, and is listed as an official event.

## Gilroy Community Theatre presents Oklahoma!

Rodgers and Hammerstein's great musical, *Oklahoma!* is being produced by the Gilroy Community Theatre to coincide with the Gilroy Garlic Festival. The production stars GCT veterans and Morgan Hill resident, Frank Vanella as Curly, and Shelly Andrews as Laurey, pictured above. On the left is San Martin resident Jack Ray who stars as Slim. In addition, Muriel Brem returns to the Gilroy stage as Aunt Eller, while Donald Walton and Peggy Fisher provide the comic relief as Will Parker and Ado Annie.

Tickets for the six evening performances, July 23, 24, 30, 31, and August 5 and 7 are \$7.50 and \$6, and may be reserved by calling 842-SHOW.

Performances will be held at 8 p.m. at the Gavilan College Theater, Gilroy.





# Community theater opens 'Oklahoma!'

By Carol Sellen  
Special to the Free Lance

Fifty voices burst out in song on stage at the rehearsal of "Oklahoma!" by the Gilroy Community Theatre. The joyful energy was infectious. It crossed the footlights and made my toes itch to keep time to the music.

"Oklahoma!" a musical by Richard Rodgers and Oscar Hammerstein, has been infecting audiences in some corner of the world since 1943, when it opened on Broadway. In New York alone, it had 2,248 performances plus a long and profitable life on the road.

However, after its opening night on Broadway, one critic wrote, "No girls, no gags, no chance" — and was proven totally mistaken. The "new" musical was different, innovative in musical comedy form.

Standard Broadway musicals had been mostly patchwork; the spectator fluttered from one sparkly scene to another. The fact that the parts did not agree made little difference. It was the diversity that made the show a musical.

## BLEND

Song, dance and the story were blended in "Oklahoma!" This made the narrative line stand out for the first time. Integration is most noticeable at the end of the first act, when the heroine dreams of a fight between her cowboy lover and a smokehouse villain.

Agnes De Mille was responsible for creating the show's new dance form. An American who developed a career in Europe as a classical ballet choreographer, she blended everyday movements of prairie America with classical ballet; the results have been dubbed musical ballet.

## BLUE JEANS

There was another innovation that has affected all our lives...the costumes. A musical had always sparkled with rhinestones, feathers and patent leather dancing shoes. The curtain opened on "Oklahoma!" and there were men in grubby work clothes called "jeans." The expectations of many in the audience were jilted.

That was 39 years and many, many "jeans" ago. These weeks, wearing a pair of designer jeans with a white stripe down the side, Phil Skiver was busy directing GCT's production of "Oklahoma!" Young women in cotton dresses and men in jeans were dancing and singing a number from the first act.

Skiver said he felt this type of production would appeal here because "the community is more laid back and more country than a large city, such as San Francisco or San Jose. This type of show, since it came out, was a favorite. It is fun, energetic and well known. No one will leave the theater without humming one tune or another."

## IRRESISTIBLE

The ballets and production numbers have an irresistible flavor. "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'," "People Will Say We're In Love," and "Out of My Dreams" have been favorites.

The plot of "Oklahoma!" is the conflict between the farmer and the cowboy, and the cowboy's eventual acceptance of the new order is not without nostalgia for the vanishing range. Roger and Hammerstein's thought selection and order made "Oklahoma!" a kind of hymn of optimism, high spirits and inexhaustible energy. Life is OK, but the future is better!

The fact that the four lead parts are equally balanced in size and importance may have come about by accident, or at least by elimination.

Before "Oklahoma!" the primacy of the performer was considered of main importance; worry later about giving the actor something to demonstrate his skill.

Mary Martin writes in her biography "My Heart Belongs," that Rogers and Hammerstein wanted her to be in their play. They offered to write her a starring role.

Undecided whether to accept their role or the lead in the musical "Dancing in the Streets," she flipped a coin. "Oklahoma!" lost.

Unfortunately for her, "Dancing in the Streets" folded soon after opening. However for months after "Oklahoma!" opened, she said she received roses from Rogers and Hammerstein for not accepting their role, because without a star they had an equally balanced cast, and a success.

## LARGE CAST

At the Gavilan College Theatre, Skiver seemed to be taking directing this large cast in stride. He said this would be his 56th show, having done shows in San Francisco, Denver, Saratoga, etc.

He has been a stunt man at Knotts Berry Farm, has a black belt in karate and is a gymnast. Gilroy has been his home for the past six years.

As the cast on stage was stepping lively and singing the title song from the play, Skiver said that as far as he is concerned "This is the best cast Gilroy Community Theatre ever had; cooperative and patient...true community involvement."

"Oklahoma!" has a cast of 55 performers; the main players are Frank Vanella as Curly; Shelly Andrews as Laurey; Muriel Brem as Aunt Eller; Donald Walton as Will Parker; Peggy Fischer as Ado Annie; Bob Fairless as Ali Hakim, and Rod Pintello and Jud Fry.

Music director is Richard Nelson and the show is choreographed by David Yanez.

Performance dates are Friday and Saturday; July 30, 31 and Aug. 6 and 7, at the Gavilan College Theatre. Tickets are \$7.50 and \$6. For tickets and information call 842-SHOW.

Show starts at 8 p.m.

## Review

# 'Oklahoma!' musical more than OK



Gilroy Community Theater performers fill auditorium with song

By Linda Tarvin

You say you're tired of TV reruns? You took the kids to a PG movie and kept your nose buried in your \$2 popcorn and your 80 cent soft drink during the parts with language you'd punish them for using at home?

You noticed that your precocious offspring are laughing at all the right places during the suggestive TV sitcoms? Is that what's got you climbing the walls this summer, Bunky?

Cheer up. Wholesome entertainment is as near as the short drive to Gavilan College Theater. Last Friday the Gilroy Community Theatre (hereafter referred to as GCT) opened a six-performance run of the stage musical *Oklahoma!* The lively adventure will be presented again on Friday and Saturday evenings for the next two weeks. The play opened to a capacity crowd, so reservations are advised. (You can call 842-SHOW).

The production is set in Indian territory (now Oklahoma) in the early 1900s. The 18-member orchestra is directed by Richard Nelson who is a professional musician and conduc-

tor. Nelson also is the cast's vocal director. With his wife, Debbie (*Oklahoma!* co-producer), he operates the Academy for the Performing Arts in San Jose. The orchestra sounded a little weak during the opening overture but seemed to improve as the evening went on.

*Oklahoma!* opens at dawn on a summer day and the set and lighting convey a peaceful mood. Aunt Eller (Muriel Brem) strolls out onto the porch and sits down in a rocker where she knits and then begins to doze. Brem then proceeds to get the audience into the palm of her hand as she steals scene after scene as the feisty aunt of the heroine.

Laurie (the heroine) is played very convincingly by Shelly Andrews, who is a dramatic arts major at UC Davis. Andrews conveyed just the right blend of innocence, mischievousness and charm. She also has a clear strong voice which is spotlighted in her solo "Many a New Day".

Curly (the hero) is played by Morgan Hill resident Frank Vanella. His musical comedy career started as Professor Harold Hill in the 1974 Live Oak High production of *The Music*

Man. He was Don Quixote in GCT's Man of la Mancha and the MC in Cabaret. Vanella makes a wonderful Curly. He seems genuinely mystified by the conduct of Laurie. Vanella looks at home in Western wear and he even manages to make his legs look very bowed. Aunt Eller tells him that a pig meeting him in the road would have no trouble at all going through his bowlegs. Vanella's singing is especially good in "Oh, What a Beautiful Morning" and "The Surrey with the Fringe on the Top".

The fickle Ado Annie is played by Peggy Fischer. She played Ado Annie for the Gavilan production of Oklahoma! in 1972. Fischer is Aunt Eller's true-to-life daughter. She makes a delightful Ado Annie. Her facial expressions when she sings "All Er Nothin'" are hilarious. Ado Annie is romantically linked with Will Parker and Ali Hakim. In explaining her fickleness to Laurie, Ado Annie sings "I Cain't Say No". Fisher projects a paradoxical combination of sensuality and innocence.

Will Parker is played by Donald Walton who is making his GCT stage debut. Parker seems very at ease on stage and I look forward to seeing him in future GCT productions. He sings one of my favorites - "Kansas City".

Bob Fairless is the peddler Ali Hakim. At first Fairless seemed a little unsure in his role as the shifty gypsy but he appeared to gain tenacity and facility with each appearance on stage.

Jud Fry (the bad guy) is played by Rod Pintello, who got the theater bug just this year. Pintello is properly despicable as Laurie's and Aunt Eller's sleazy hired hand. He looks dirty and mean. In the smokehouse scene with Curly, Pintello has his shining moment as he joins Vanella in singing "Pore Jud". After Curly leaves, Pintello has some trouble hitting the notes in his solo, "Lonely Room". It seemed difficult and unfamiliar on opening night.

Slim is Jack Ray of San Martin. He, too, seems right at home in Western garb. The ladies' and girls' costumes could have been bought off-the-rack in local stores. There were lots of prairie dresses and the Gunne Sax influence was unmistakeable.

Mike Smurthwaite of Gilroy played Andrew Carnes, Ado Annie's rifle-toting father. Smurthwaite plays his comical role to the hilt, squeezing out laughs with his lines as well as with the twists and wrinkles he uses to contort his face.

Gertie Cummings is played by Lorrie Mertz. She pursues Curly and has an obnoxious horse laugh. This must be a "fun" part to play and Cummings fills it well. She also is one of the dancers.

There is an 11-member men's chorus, also all dancers. They are very good with Will and Aunt Eller in the "Kansas City" number. There are 22 members in the women's chorus, of whom 10 are dancers. They join Laurie and Aunt Eller for the lilting "Out of My Dreams". There were a few problems during Laurie's nightmare part of the dance. The can-can dancers had trouble getting their kicks coordinated. However, all else was synchronized and graceful.

There is a 10-member children's chorus. The youngest member is 5-year-old Melanie Nelson. She is worth watching when the combined choruses and the cast sing "Oklahoma!". Melanie is a natural performer. There is no self-consciousness, her gestures are perfectly made and it is obvious that she knows EVERY word. After the performance I discovered that she is the daughter of Conductor Nelson. No newcomer to GCT, last year (at the ripe old age of 4) Melanie was in Sweet Charity. Her brother, Jeff, also is in the Oklahoma! children's chorus.

The versatile sets are the designs of Joe Cardinali. Scene changes take place speedily and smoothly. David Yanez is making his debut as a choreographer for GCT. Yanez was a super dancer in Jesus Christ Superstar. His work on Oklahoma! is praiseworthy.

This is the directoral debut with GCT for Phil Skiver. He has had character roles in 56 different plays and musicals.

For an enjoyable evening's entertainment away from home I would certainly recommend that you catch one of the performances of Oklahoma! It's lively and funny with some excitement and lots of good music to boot.

# State of 'Oklahoma' is great

By Joanne Rife  
Special to The Dispatch

*Oklahoma!*, the one with the exclamation point, came to Gilroy Friday for a six-performance, three-weekend stand, courtesy Gilroy Community Theatre.

Rogers and Hammerstein's old 1943 war-horse, which has begun to show some aging, is marked in the GCT production by the usual vim, vigor and vitality for which the local group is known. These are

well-matched voices, very pleasing to the ear, far and away the strongest singers. Vanella seems a trifle old for the part, like an aging lifeguard at Huntington Beach, and Andrews a trifle more vacuous than necessary, but they are an appealing pair, their singing totally professional.

Giving them a run for their money in the secondary parts of Will Parker and Ado Annie are Donald Walton and Peggy Fischer. Walton is a delight as the bow-legged Parker, out to win the unwinnable Ado Annie. He is light on his feet, has a mischievous glint to his eye readily discerned from the back row, and a good voice for comedy.

Fischer has a plum of a part with Ado Annie, certainly one of the bright comedy roles in the history of the musical. She is thoroughly at ease disarming *I Cain't Say No*, and with Will, *All Er Nothin'* with the kind of vocal clarity one prays for. Imagine understanding the words!

Muriel Brem is steady and infectious as Aunt Eller and Rod Pintello brooding and ugly as Jud Fry. Pintello is the dirtiest Jud to come through the hag wallow in many a moon. *Pore Jud* is a riot of a number as Curly and Jud harmonize on the attributes of Jud's death and funeral.

Bob Fairless as Ali Hakim, the peddler-man, is off-key, not in his singing, but in his performance.

The choral work is fine, particularly in the rousing title song. Musical director Richard Nelson holds a tight rein on the music. The orchestra, always the weakest musical element in GCT productions, staggers a bit, but tottles forth as one of the better attempts in the past couple of years.

The dances, directed by David Yanez, are singularly strong for the men, but lose precision with the women.

The sets are workable but uninspired. Where's that corn "as high as an elephant's eye?"

Regardless of the few little things that didn't quite work, Director Phil Skiver, with Vanella and Andrews to base his production on, has put together an amazingly solid show.

Let's hope some out-of-towners stop by the Gavilan College Theater during the Garlic Festival and catch a dose of GCT fever. It's the best act around.

## Governor salutes play

An unusual salute Friday highlighted the opening night production of *Oklahoma!*. Signed by George Nigh, governor of Oklahoma, was the following telegram: "As governor of the great state of Oklahoma, it gives me pleasure to send you and the cast greetings on behalf of all Oklahomans. You have our best wishes for an outstanding and successful production of the Rodgers and Hammerstein musical, *Oklahoma!*"

The Gilroy Community Theatre production continues at 8 p.m. July 30, 31 and Aug. 6, 7. Tickets are \$7.50 and \$6. Reservations may be obtained by calling 842-SHOW.

people who are having fun, working hard and giving thought to their production, and it shows.

*Oklahoma!* has a see-through plot as thin as a Paris model (it vanishes when viewed from the side), but it also has marvelous songs and delightful dialogue and, ah well, a sense of nostalgia for songs like that and stories like that, long gone in this cynical age.

There is nothing particularly new or insightful about the GCT production, but it is rousing and singable and well done.

The two leads, Frank Vanella and Shelly Andrews as Curly and Laurey both have excellent,



# Standing ovation given GCT

By Carol Seller  
Special to the Free Lance

Nestled on a hill, overlooking the city of Gilroy, is a spot where you can revitalize your outlook on life while enjoying yourself. The site is inside Gavilan College theater and on stage is a performance of Rodgers and Hammerstein's "Oklahoma!"

Gilroy's Community Theatre's production is positive, inspiring with its catchy lyrics and up-beat melodies. It's a "toe-tapping, I-believe-in-you" production.

"Oklahoma!" is based on Lynn Riggs play, "Green Grow the Lilacs." The play lacked substantial subject matter for a straight play, but was translated by Rodgers and Hammerstein into a brilliant frame for songs and dance.

The melodrama which Riggs invented for the Indian territory at the turn of the century was given a musical translation that has touched the senses since it was first produced in 1943.

It is interesting that the Gilroy Community Theatre decided to produce "Oklahoma!" at this time, for two reasons. First, the show is about a community in a transition period. The cowboys and farmers were at odds for the land. Today we have businessmen wanting farmland for industry and subdivisions. Second, musicals have been most popular during times of economic stress. I don't think anyone will deny we are in an economic slump.

## RIGHT TIMING

The Gilroy Community Theatre's timing to do the show is a propos, as is the timing of the music in the show.

The orchestra's zest sets the pace for the show and is the most memorable part of the production. They played the irresistible songs of "Oklahoma!", "All'er Nothin'," "Oh, What a Beautiful Mornin'" and made them refreshing.

Skillfully, the orchestra bound scenes together and helped build dramatic climaxes in scenes, such as the scene in the smokehouse. Rod Pintello, as Jud, is a fine actor, less, though, a singer.

The scene builds to an emotional climax with a dramatic song by Jud. The orchestra adds its strength and the scene ends on an emotional high. Music director Richard Nelson is perceptive and supportive of the singers' needs. Nelson and the orchestra should take a bow along with the rest of the cast.

There was a few exceptionally good singing voices in the cast. But the whole cast adequately projected, in sound and clarity, the dramatic messages of Oscar Hammerstein's lyrics and dramatically imaginative libretto.

The song "Oklahoma!" at the climax of the play is a knock-out. It's a stand-up and applause number, which the audience did.

## TEMPO

With the positive cheerful tempo of the orchestra and the skillful choreography by David Yanez, the dancers helped the story with stylized dance.

The good dancers jumped and kicked and made it look easy. And the dancers seemed comfortable with their country-western movements.

The ballet at the end of the first act, which was the height of the original Broadway play, was the bottom of this production. This is the dance where the heroine dreams of a fight between her cowboy lover and the smokehouse villain. The dancers were not prepared. Flat!

The characters in the show seemed equally balanced. Frank Vanella is a first rate Curley, the cowpuncher, and Rod Pintello is a fine smokehouse skunk. Shelly Andrews makes a graceful and lyrical heroine and Muriel Brem is splendid as the forever cheerful rough-and-ready aunt.

Meanwhile, Bob Fairless has some funny scenes as the Persian peddler and Peggy Fischer is total charm as Ado Annie. And the supportive cast truly is supportive.

## TOP SCENE

So many of the scenes were good that it is hard to single out any for special commendations. One of the best is the scene in the smokehouse between the hero and the pathetic villain. They played off each other in timing, feeling and built a superb scene.

The scenes between Ado Annie and Ali Hakim were good comic relief. They each had a manner of saying their lines that made the senseless or tragic seem funny.

The set, designed by Joe Cardinalli, is exactly right for the production. Depicting a farmhouse, the interior and exterior, and the interior of the smokehouse. Cardinalli constructed them so they were moveable and not too large so the dancers had adequate room to maneuver about the stage.

Bonnie Mertz and her costume crew depicted the clothes worn at the turn of the century in this prairie country. They moved nicely when they danced.

The play has a cast of 55 and a large production staff. Considering the number of people involved, this is true community theatre. Phil Skiver, the director, did a good job pulling this all together.

Performance dates are Friday and Saturday; July 30, 31, and August 6 and 7, at the Gavilan College theater. Tickets are \$6 and \$7.50. For tickets and information call 842-SHOW from 12 to 5 p.m.

Show starts at 8 p.m.



Photo special to The Dispatch

## Last performances

Peggy Fischer and Donald Walton will perform the roles of Will Parker and Ado Annie for the final times tonight and Saturday in the Gilroy Community Theatre production of *Oklahoma*. Curtain time is 8 p.m. at Gavilan College Theater, 5055 Santa Teresa Blvd., Gilroy. Tickets are \$7.50 and \$6 and may be reserved by calling 842-SHOW.