

'Birdie': director's change of pace

By Todd Silberman
Staff Writer

GILROY — "You guys, there's no excuse for missing cues," Betsy Andrade admonishes in a voice that would have carried down five blocks of Broadway.

It is Monday. Several months before, she received a phone call. "Sit down first," the caller suggested. "How'd you like to direct a production of *Bye Bye Birdie*?"

"I said yes," she recalls. "It was scary, but I thought I wanted to tackle it."

At least one source of her initial fear, perhaps, was simply that putting on the show would mean managing a cast of more than 60 — kids.

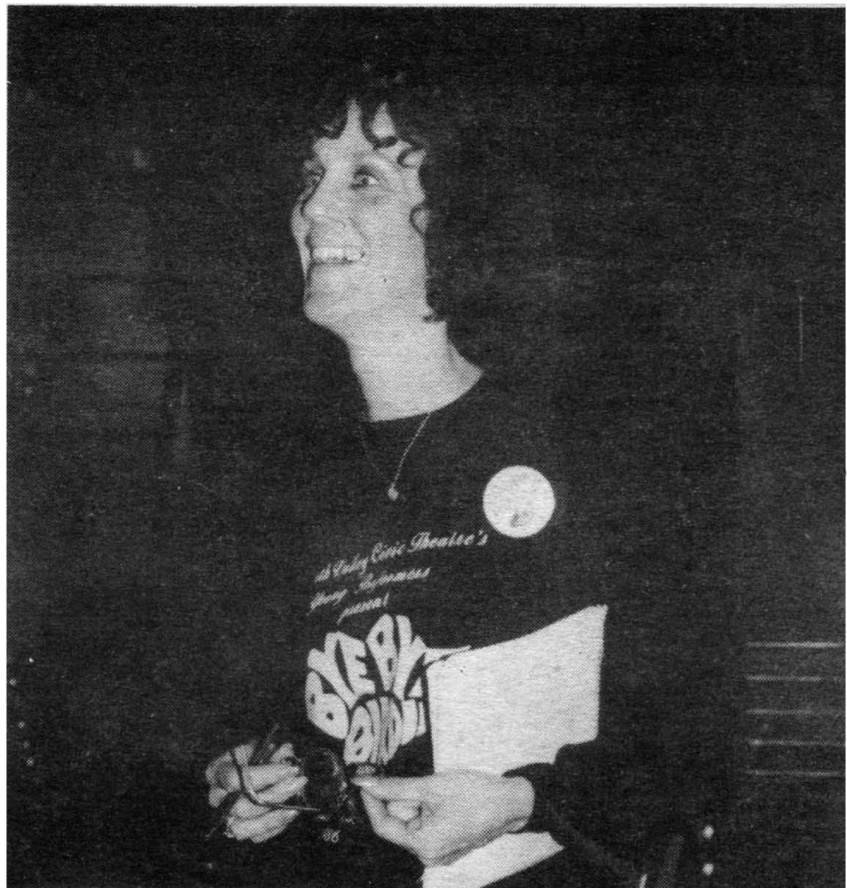
A lively chaos rules the Gilroy High School theater. For starters, the female lead hasn't returned from a weekend trip to Los Angeles. A technician announces that someone has wiped clean all of the settings for the show from the lighting board.

Andrade, attired in a sweat-shirt proclaiming the musical, is roaming the her attention fixed on the youths rehearsing.

"Energy!" she projects. "You've got to show lots of it."

Bye Bye Birdie, written by Michael Stewart with music by Charles Strouse, was first produced in 1960. It was selected last fall by the South Valley Civic Theater for its spring production. The musical comedy is based loosely on Elvis Presley's induction into the Army and the impact that had on the American people — in particular, American teen-age girls.

Bye Bye Birdie, Andrade notes, is just right for young actresses and actors ranging in age from 7 years old to 17.



Todd Silberman/Viva

Betsy Andrade is directing a cast of 63 in *Bye Bye Birdie*.

"It's kids playing the part of kids and teen-agers playing the part of kids falling in love with a rock 'n' roll star," she says. "It's a musical that kids can relate to."

For Andrade, the musical represents a change of pace from her directing debut last fall of the South Valley Civic Theatre production of Neil Simon's *Same Time Next Year*. Before directing, Andrade played parts in everything from *The Sound of Music* to *Last of the Red Hot Lovers*.

Same Time Next Year, she notes, had a cast totaling two adults and only one set. The 63-member cast of *Bye Bye Birdie* is matched in its big production

proportions by 11 set changes.

Playing lead roles in *Bye Bye Birdie* are Jeff Porter of Gilroy as Conrad Birdie, Tamari West and Stacey Seehafer sharing the role of the girl to whom he bestows the "one last kiss," and Craig Rubio and Jennifer Brawn as Conrad's agent and his secretary.

The show will be presented at 7:30 p.m. this Friday and Saturday at the Gilroy High School Theater, and again May 30 and 31. Tickets are \$5 for adults and \$3 for students and seniors.

Call 842-SHOW for reservations or purchase tickets at the Theater Angels Art League House at 140 West Fifth St.

Talented local youths hi-lite *Bye Bye Birdie*

By Jim Maya
Miracle Miles Correspondent

Bye Bye Birdie opened last Friday night to an appreciative, adoring audience. The almost full houses on both Friday and Saturday nights were treated to the sight of 63 teens and pre-teens dancing, singing and acting their hearts out. This production of a very difficult show is done very well with only a few exceptions.

This is not, however, a review! If you think this writer is going to point out the flaws in the performances of any of those little darlings and risk the wrath of their parents, grand parents and assorted aunts and uncles, forget it!

Yes, there are some weaknesses in the South Valley Civic Theater production, but anyone who has ever been a child (yes, there are some adults who never were children) or ever had a child or ever worked with children will love this show.

Birdie has some great individual performances! The leads and several of the supporting performers shine.

I hesitate to even mention individuals, but Nancy Harris does Mae Peterson better than Mae could do Mae. Her timing and facial and body expressions turn her character into the perfect "Make them feel guilty" Mom. She blends with the other leads; Craig Rubio's Albert Peterson, Jennifer Brawn's Rosie Alvarez, and Jeff Porter's Conrad Birdie. I could mention about 30 of the rest of the cast for their outstanding performances, but where do I stop? Give me a break. . . This is a tough job!

Birdie has some great production numbers, especially "The Telephone Hour" and Maude's Cafe."

Birdie also has a great staff who are really miracle workers. They have taken a cast that was too large and too young at the wrong time of the year on a stage with no room backstage and made it successfully happen. I hope that especially the cast's parents realize the untold hours and intense frustration and stress that go with such a show. Without their awesome efforts 63 south valley young people would not have had this chance to be part of a hit show. . . live *Bye Bye Birdie*.

Producers Tom and Anne Hepner, Director Betsy Andrade, and all of the other adults who worked on all the multitude of support tasks should be very proud of themselves. I know they didn't think they were going to

pull it off, but they did as Saturday night's standing ovation proved.

One more kudo. . . Musical Director Rick Muchow's band sounded marvelous. They not only sounded fine, but time after time his sensitive direction helped the young singers stay on track.

Birdie continues tonight and tomorrow. Saturday night could be S.R.O., so get there early. Curtain is at 7:30 at Gilroy High School's theater.

Last Tuesday, a mini-audience saw and heard another great concert performed by the G.H.S. orchestra under the baton and steady gaze of director Ray Bernd. It was special for a lot of reasons.

One reason was the return of former G.H.S. actor musician and all around super person, Pat Hoggan. Pat played the piano for John Dixon in his trumpet solo, *Andante et Allegro*. It was John's last performance as a member of the G.H.S. Band. Sad, but also special.

John's personality and extraordinary musical and theatrical talents have combined to produce one of the most illustrious careers in the history of the performing arts at G.H.S. (You had better clip this out and save it, John.)

John has done the music for two senior plays, was Charlie Brown, played for and acted for G.C.T., Center Stage, S.V.C.T. and G.H.S., was one of the Mime Troupe as well as being one of the mainstays of the G.H.S. music department for the last four years. John has also developed into the kind of person who combines talent with sensitivity, touched by a slight aura of flakiness and great charm. He is loved and respected and will be missed by many, myself included.

You can still catch John's last two performances, with the G.H.S. Jazz Band in concert on June 5th and in the Encore performance of G.H.S.'s *Godspell* on the 8th of June.

Civic Theater presents *Bye Bye Birdie*

Young performers from all South Valley cities will take part in South Valley Civic Theater's upcoming production of "Bye Bye Birdie" on May 23, 24, 30 and 31 at Gilroy High School on Tenth Street in Gilroy.

This Broadway hit musical comedy is loosely based on Elvis Presley's induction into the Army and the effect it had on the people (especially the teenage girls) of America.

Chosen to play Conrad Birdie is Jeff Porter of Gilroy. Kim McAfee, the teenage girl to whom he bestows "One Last Kiss" will be played by Tamari West, also of Gilroy. Others taking leading and supporting roles are Jennifer and Josh Brawn, Nancy and Tom Harris, Barnwell marks, and Stacey Seehafer of Morgan Hill; Mandy Duarte of San Martin; Evon Johnsey, Whitney and Simon Pintello of Hollister; Cynthia and Lisa Raff, Ellen and Karen Wood of San Juan Bautist; Nancy Banks, Dana Booth,

Daphne, Yani and Zoe Bundros, Spencer Busick, Keith Cunningham, Dana Drenk, Elaine Engehausen, Tami and Sidney Espinoza, Sonia and Tasha Gariaeff, Joel Gregor, Janet Headley, Andy, Lizzie, Matt and Tim Hepner, Cindy Howell, Helen Huang, SaraKambish, Amy and Holly Lawrence, Belam Letona, Brian and Shannon Locey, Chris Lloyd, Sabrina Montalvo, Jessica Mussallem, Nicole Nelson, Peter Overstreet, Holly and Katie Porter, Erica Rizza, Craig Rubio, Jon Smurthwaite, Megan Stocks, Kellis Tharp, Jenay Venuti, Chris and Cinnamon Warfield and Vince Ternasky of Gilroy.

Ticket reservations for this event may be made by calling the S.V.C.T. message phone at 842-SHOW or in person at the Theater Angels Art League House at 140 West Fifth Street in Gilroy. Prices are \$5 for adults and \$3 for students and senior citizens. A special curtain time of 7:30 will enable younger people to experience this event.