

Play evokes sense of lost opportunity in the past

By Joanne Rife
Special to The Dispatch

The Roar of the Greasepaint — The Smell of the Crowd, Gilroy Community's Theatre's first production of the season, caused me to leave the theater with a sense of sorrow — not for the play nor the production, but for the lost opportunities of the turbulent '60s, where, amid drugs, filth and destruction, hope for true quality and freedom stirred.

And is now lost again.

The Roar of the Greasepaint — The Smell of the Crowd, with its odd juxtaposition of words in the title reflecting the confusion of the world, is about hope and better times, when the haves and the have-nots have a sense of working together.

For a brief moment, the positive aspects of the flower children — remember: "make love, not war" — made brave inroads into our lives.

Roar is very much a child of the '60s, full of symbols and metaphors. Its name implies it is about life on the stage, but is about life on the stage of life.

Cocky (played by Jim Calbreath) is a have-not; Sir (Dan Letlow) is a have. Cocky is stupid and brave; Sir is smart and clever. Cocky plays by the rules; Sir makes the rules. Cocky always loses; Sir always wins. It's the way of the world.

Enter The Black (Patricia Booth) who wins at the game because she does not play by Sir's rules, but by her own. Cocky sees the light and the play ends with a sense of hope that Cocky and Sir can go it together.

Pure 1960s.

The sense of sadness comes from recognizing how far we have come from those ideals in the last 15 years.

GCT's production of *Roar*, although obviously thought provoking, is no more than adequate. Its few strengths — color, movement, pace, smoothness — are cancelled by its weaknesses.

It is weak musically, has a wobbly plot and no subplot to enrich and deepen the action, and the stage at Gilroy High Theater does not lend itself to abstractions (it is far too intimate with the action in the audience's collective lap).

There was one standout — Patricia Booth as

The Black. She belted out *Feeling Good* and it was a riveting moment. Letlow played a strong Sir, dominating the stage and relentless with his convoluted dialogue.

Calbreath in white-face as the weak and wishy-washy Cocky had a harder time of it, although he rose to the occasion occasionally, particularly in the best song, *Who Can I Turn To?*

There was an element missing from this production that I've come to expect from GCT — enthusiasm. Although energy was expended on stage, the play was oddly lifeless, almost as if it were the end of a long run rather than opening night.

Perhaps it is the play itself. Dealing with abstract characters always puts distance between the play and the audience — the play becomes closer to its abstract idea and farther from the real people viewing from the darkened house.

Roar came from the London stage to open on Broadway late in 1964. Written by Leslie Bricusse and Anthony Newley, who played Cocky, *Roar* became a hit in '65 and closed after 231 performances, a respectable showing. The part of Sir was taken by Cyril Ritchard on Broadway.

George Costa directed GCT's effort to a polished if vaguely boring finish. Costume design by Costa and Bonnie Mertz was outstanding. Richard Nelson as music director lacked material. Neither of the stars have good voices.

The young chorus sang in disciplined fashion and the live orchestra, after struggling through the overture, settled down and provided good accompaniment. Choreography by K.T. Peterson Schwartz was colorful and full of bounce. The chorus, called The Urchins, was one of the highlights, both musically and for the dances. Costa's set was simple, direct and to the point.

Roar plays April 8, 9, 15 and 16 with curtain at 8 p.m. Tickets, at \$7.50 each, are available by calling 842-SHOW.

Frankly, I'm looking forward with more interest to *Hello Dolly* in July and *Side by Side by Sonheim* in November. *The Roar of the Greasepaint — The Smell of the Crowd*, although interesting, is not exciting theater.

By the way, one local noted the second half of *Roar's* title — *The Smell of the Crowd* — and thought it a most apt phrase for Gilroy, proud home of the ever-odorous garlic.