

## Adolescence, high school of 50s parodied in *Grease*

By Val McPherson

The music of the '50s isn't my favorite and so with some apprehension, I arrived in Omaha last Sunday to review the rock and roll musical *Grease*.

Corn Cobs, UNL men's spirit organization, had arranged cast interviews by the news media before the show at the New Paxton Hotel. The hotel management, however, knew nothing about it. By accident my photographer, John Rubin, and I met Chick Vennera, assistant stage manager and actor.

We joined Vennera and four other members of the cast, Marcia McClain, John Lansing, Karen Dille and Jerry Barkoff for a hurried preshow dinner. The first thing that struck me about the cast was their ages.

The average age was 19.5 years old which kept the conversation from becoming a personal sales pitch characteristic of more experienced actors. Instead, we talked of new albums, great places to eat in Milwaukee and the Grateful Dead concert that would steal much of their anticipated audience.

The three speak of the "good old days" fondly, but with relief that they are gone. The rest of the show is a flashback concerning the relationship of Sandy Dumbrowski (McClain) and Danny Zuko (Lansing). It is the familiar theme of leader of the pack who falls in love with "Miss Innocent" and corrupts her.

About the same time dinner was served, the cast had to dash off to prepare for the curtain call. Rubin and I stayed behind to arrange for McClain and Lansing's steaks to be held until after the show, and then made our way to the Music Hall through a crowd of mostly Grateful Dead fans. After convincing the management that the *Daily Nebraskan* was a legitimate newspaper, we went backstage and photographed the last minute preparations.

Gigantic photos of high school seniors and rock stars of the 50s were the set decorations. The play opens with the Rydell High School class reunion of 1959, presided over by the terror of the English dept. Miss Lynch, the stereotyped bookworm Eugene and the still enthusiastic ex-cheerleader Patty.



*Grease* was written by Jim Jacobs, who was a high school student in the 50s, and Warren Casey, a former high school teacher. They met in 1963 at the Chicago Stage Guild, and in 1969

began writing what would become *Grease*. It was first performed by fellow amateur actors in the Kingston Mines Theatre in Chicago where it drew a capacity crowd for the next eight months.

News of this success reached Kenneth Weissman and Maxine Fox in New York. After scouting the show

they decided to take it back with them. It opened at the Eden Theatre in 1972 with a professional cast. Four months later it was moved to Broadway where it is still running, currently the longest run of any Broadway musical.

Since June, *Grease* also has been entertaining London audiences. Two national companies have toured the United States and Canada presenting

it. The second of these companies was the one to appear in Omaha and will be in Lincoln Oct. 30.

*Grease* is basically a musical-comedy about an urban high school in the 50s. Its vehicle is explosive choreography, comic treatment of tear-jerking songs that would have made the top 40, typical—yet exaggerated—high school scenes and rampant satire.

There is a serious note to this production that probably makes all the jive so effective. *Grease* has captured a moment in American history when rhythm and blues burst out of its previously black domain and radically altered pop music. The tranquil Eisenhower years were rocked by this youthful forum whose speaker was an awkward new morality.

This production also has captured a bit of our own personal history. It has caught the beautiful, yet terrifying, time known as adolescence when youth struggles for identity in a foreign environment. *Grease* will be enjoyed by those who remember their youth, whether it was in the 50s or not.

After the show McClain, Lansing and I talked our way into the Grateful Dead concert. The Dead played "Goin' down the road feeling bad" while McClain and Lansing relaxed from the pressure of a national tour.

Over a meal of leftover steaks, Milk Duds and Cokes, they talked of the rigors of a tour that takes them by bus to as many as eight performances a week. They are required to keep physically fit and to be at their best for each show. Somehow they do it and that is the clay from which theatrical excellence is molded.

McClain, Lansing and the rest of *Grease* will be in Lincoln at Pershing Auditorium on Tuesday at 8 p.m. All seats are reserved and are selling for \$3.50, \$4.50 and \$5.50. It should be two hours of excellent entertainment, even if your favorite group is Jethro Tull.



## Pianist expands innovation into jazz

McCoy Tyner, *Song of the New World*.

McCoy Tyner has to be one of the most exciting, challenging jazz musicians/composers around. This new album by the renowned pianist is further evidence of his constant exploration and expansion into new areas of jazz.

The album is a little reminiscent of his earlier *Extensions*, and in fact seems to be an expansion of it.

Opening the album is Mongo Santamaria's "Afro Blue." Alphonze Mouzon is superb on drums—more imaginative than I've heard him for awhile. Hubert Laws on flute and piccolo is, as usual, crystal clear.

Jooney Booth's bass is the solid driving force of the second cut "Little Brother." A dynamite trumpet solo by Virgil Jones enhances the piece.

The second side opens with the hauntingly beautiful "The Divine Love." Tyner proves he can arrange and orchestrate as well as compose and play.

Tyner's work never ceases to hold

my thoughts while listening. His knowledge as composer and artist of effects is evident, and he has the truly great jazzman's richness of ideas and mastery of everything he does.



Pianist McCoy Tyner

## Photo exhibition honors Cather

By Diane Wanek

Willa Cather has played such an important role in the development of Nebraska's culture, it is fitting that this week marks the opening of the Willa Cather Centennial Festival.

The festival consists of a number of cultural programs planned throughout the year to honor this distinguished Nebraska writer. These include several concerts, an international seminar, films and a photography exhibit.

The festival opens tomorrow at Sheldon Art Gallery with "The World of Willa Cather", a photographic exhibit by Lucia Woods.

The photographs in *Willa Cather: A Pictorial Memoir*, to be published in December by the University of Nebraska Press, will be comprised of photographs mainly by Woods, a Chicago born artist who studied at the New York School of Interior Design.

According to Phil Perry, member of the Sheldon Art Gallery staff, "the vibrant artist has captured the land of Nebraska and the Southwest with a true bearing, as described by Willa Cather."