Grease keeps 50s alive and well

By Todd Myers

The 1950s were alive and hopping at "Grease," Sunday night at the musical's last performance in the Music Hall.

The cast, starred J. Michael Kelly as the street-wise Danny Zuko, Suzanne B. Hanson as Sandy Dumbrowski, Jan Sheldrick as the woman about town, Rizzo, and Randy Crowder as Kenickie.

The plot is simple: a summer love affair gone sour when the two parties involved go back to school and feel they must stick to their old cliques, rather than show their true feelings.

Danny and Sandy suddenly find they are two different people when school starts. Danny is a greaser street-punk, sneaking cigarettes between classes, stealing hubcaps, drinking beer and rumbling with the gang. Sandy is the epitome of innocence and conformity, wanting to fit in with the crowd.

The couple's attempts to change for each other, and yet stay popular with the old crowd, led to a number of comical scenes.

One of the most notable ones is when Danny joins the track team. Carrying a baton, he jogs up to his gang on a street corner, then after a two-minute discussion he explains he is in the middle of a race and jogs off—smoking a cigarette.

Another is when Frenchie (Linda Videtic) is upset over flunking out of beauty school. She wishes for a guardian angel, and suddenly he (Jim Kalal) pops up looking like Pat Boone in whiter-than-white. He sang to Frenchie stretching each '50s falsetto ridiculously high.

The music was very good, and the only member of the cast without an excellent voice was Randy Crowder. His version of "Greased Lightnin'" was lacking, but his acting was superb. His resemblance to Jeff Conaway (the movie's "Kenickie") was striking, and he suited the role well.

The play had everything the movie did, expressing the social atmosphere of the '50s in everything from sex to drinking. Rizzo explains in the song "There Are Worse Things I Could Do" that she could waste her life away waiting for "Mr. Right," but would rather live for the moment.

The crowd ranged in age from about 10 to 70 years old, with attire equally diverse, some dressed '50s, others in minks, ski jackets, Izod with plain-jackets jeans... all seemed to have a great time. The crowd clapped along, tried to keep up with the "Hand Jive", and some even sang.

Grease was an Our Turn Production, produced by Gary Schweikhart and co-produced by Pat and Anne Harwood, who more recently produced Jesus Christ Superstar. If Grease is any indication of the direction of theater in Omaha, we'll have much more to look forward to.