Review

‘Jimmy Dean’ characters forced to face painful reality

By Kristin Moore

“Come Back to the S & Dine, Jimmy Dean. Jimmy Dean” focuses on the painful experience of differentiating between what one believes about oneself and the truth — appearance and reality.

The play opened Wednesday night. Remaining performances are tonight at 8 p.m., Saturday at 8 p.m. and Sunday at 7:30 p.m. at the Interim Performing Arts Center.

Ed Graczyk’s comedy-drama takes place in a run-down five and dime store in McCarthy, Texas. Five women return to the town for the 30-year reunion of the “Disciples of James Dean” — a fan club whose members revel in the memory of the heartthrob of their youth.

The store is relatively unchanged at the time of the reunion. The costumes and set are nostalgic and the store is an authentic recreation of a 1950s five and dime.

The action of the play centers on Mona, played by Michelle Brockhaus (then) and Sonia Keffler (now).

Sudden star

Mona, a dime-store clerk, was, for an instant, a star in her circle of friends when she was selected to cast in 10 years scene during the filming of “Giant,” near her hometown.

Brockhaus and Keffler both successfully portray Mona as a child living her own dreams, in her own world.

Mona claims to be the mother of James Dean’s son. She tries to keep the memory of Jimmy Dean alive through this belief, and she is also noticed because of it.

The play begins with the reunion, but shifts back and forth to the mid-1950s. The reunion itself is typical — the anxieties, fun and excitement of seeing old friends.

Amy Harmon portrays the “prayerful, bible reading” Juanita. She refers to James Dean as “him” and insists that he is the source of Mona’s problems.

Energetic portrayal

Jennifer Yarns and Susan Rowley play Sissy in 1965 and 1975 respectively. Both actresses are energetic in their portrayal of the sexy, luxum Sissy. Their characterizations are a source of comedy relief, contrasting the play’s dramatic nature.

Other characters are a source of comedy and is capable in her portrayal of the forceful, bubbly Stella May.

The apartment is shared by Edna Louise, played by Caroline Nichols, evokes a mixture of sympathy and smiles.

At the reunion, Mona and her close friends experience the changes that surface 20 years after their hero’s death.

Jeff Beals as Joe undergoes the most dramatic change in the play — physically, that is.

The purpose of the reunion, as Joanne (played by Kathleen Meier) says, is for “remembering those days that made us what we are today.”

Face reality

Meier capitalizes as Joanne, who forces each person to examine his or her lives and face the reality that exists 20 years later.

Until now, each person had been living dreams she had once believed in. Each person’s belief had been accepted by all of the others as truth.

Joanne conclusively reveals the change in each person and makes each one face reality within himself or herself and among one another.

Overall, the cast, directed by Dr. Steve Peters, consists of a group of actors worthy of praise. Their wonderful interaction and response on stage, combined with the great sound effects, lighting and use of flashbacks, produce a compelling performance.