

ARTS & CULTURE

Theater

This *Five and Dime* provides a glimpse in time



PHOTO BY BRANDON R. MCWILLIAMS

Natalie Tucker (Joanne), Ashley Edmiston (Sissy) and Lauren Tobiason (Mona)

By David Cannon
Sentinel Arts Critic

The last play that Silver Spring Stage mounted was *Communicating Doors*, a hilarious comedy full of theatrical tricks and time mechanisms all serving the purpose of flat out farce. The Stage's current production of *Come Back to the Five and Dime*, *Jimmy Dean*, *Jimmy Dean* plays with these same factors toward much more serious ends.

It is interesting that the Stage is doing *Jimmy Dean* right now because it was directed by the recently deceased Robert Altman, first on the stage and then as a movie with the same cast. The movie was notable for another knockout performance by the underrated Karen Black as Joanne and the first film to show that Cher (Sissy) really was a serious actress. Plus in the background is another Oscar winner in Kathy Bates as Stella.

The story is straightforward

enough but told in a very theatrical fashion. This is basically a reunion story set in a rapidly decaying Texas town in 1975. Here the disciples of James Dean hold their 20-year reunion. Like the similar *Big Chill*, these grown ups will laugh, reminisce about their teenage years, go on a big nostalgia tour and reveal some long repressed secrets.

What makes the play fascinating is the way it is told – with some characters playing their present day selves, others playing their teenage selves and a few fitting in both time frames. There is an amazing scene in Act II where two time frames are going on simultaneously as the Jimmy Dean fan club meets across two decades.

How appropriate with all this doubling going on that there are two Jimmy Deans. One is the famous actor that everyone in this town idolizes since he filmed his final movie *Giant* not too far away. And there is Mona's child who is also called Jimmy Dean. Mona claims that the movie actor is the father of her child. Then there's this fancy girl named Joanne who arrives in town and no one knows. Is she some stranger butting in on this reunion or does she have a reason to be here?

The production under the direction of Michael Sandner does get off

to a slow start with all the scene setting and getting use to the multiple time frame gimmick. But the production picks up as soon as Ashley Edmiston enters as the sassy local vixen Sissy (soon joined by Eve Cox as her equally fun-loving younger self). As the others appear – including Lauren Tobiason as the more inhibited Mona, Natalie Tucker as the mysterious Joanne and Alex Diehl as the one male in the cast – the pace of the show really picks up and there are some really stunning revelations as the plot drives toward its final revelations.

Michelle Carello's set design is a wonderfully cluttered five and dime store full of period bric-a-brac while Amy Narron's lighting helps a lot as we switch back and forth in time frames. Thomas Wolfe once said you can't go home again. *Jimmy Dean* is the flip side of that coin – at some point you got to leave home. Every character in *Jimmy Dean* is somewhat frozen in time, and this 20-year reunion is both a mystery to resolve and a wake up call to start moving on.

Come Back to the Five and Dime, *Jimmy Dean*, *Jimmy Dean* continues at Silver Spring Stage through June 22. For more information, call 301-593-6036 or go online to www.ssstage.org.

Book Review

The Brothers' War: Civil War Voices in Verse

by J. Patrick Lewis

By Terri Schlichenmeyer
Sentinel Book Reviewer

How well do you get along with your brother or sister?

I'll bet sometimes he really bugs you. She might touch your stuff or "borrow" things without your permission. You two might even argue sometimes until Mom or Dad steps in to stop the fight.

But even so, down deep, you love your brother or sister and you would do anything to protect him or her.

About 150 years ago, during the Civil War, protecting your brother sometimes wasn't possible. In the new book *The Brothers' War: Civil War Voices in Verse* by J. Patrick Lewis, you'll see that back then, brothers sometimes were on opposite sides of an issue and sometimes that meant death.

If you've studied history in school or if you've listened to Dad or Grandpa's stories, you

was on.

Of course, there was already a United States Army, but it was commanded by the North. Southern soldiers resigned their posts in the federal army and returned to their home states to fight for the South, or the Confederacy. This meant they were fighting – and killing – the people they had been friends with. It also



meant they might be killing their own brothers.

In this book, you'll read poetry that will give you an idea of what people were thinking while they were fighting in the Civil War, while they were slaves and while they fought for slaves' freedom. You'll find out more about the war, and you'll see some real, actual pictures that were taken during the War Between the States.

I liked this book, but I have one strong caveat for parents and grandparents: if your child – no matter what age – is prone to nightmares or has a loved one at war now, be absolutely sure that you give this book with caution.

Although the poetry is well written and can bring up some powerful feelings, that's not the issue. The historical facts that march along the bottom of each page are great, but they're not going to disturb a sensitive kid.

What could upset a child are the photographs of dead soldiers, battle scenes and the aftermath of war. True, it's not much worse than what you'd see on TV, but it's not something you normally see in a children's book, either. Because Civil War attitudes were different then, the pictures are unapologetic and blunt. That's OK for a grown-up, but parents need to know about them before giving this book to a child.

With that in mind, if you've got a young Civil War buff in your household or an adult collector, *The Brothers' War* is a must-have for their bookshelf. For them, it's a book they'll fight to own.

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might know about the Civil War. Lewis explains that the War Between the States started because Southern states were angry at Northern states, particularly over the issue of slavery. The South talked about withdrawing from the Union. In April of 1861, Southern forces launched an attack on Fort Sumter in South Carolina. The War

Come Back to the Five and Dime

★★★

Silver Spring Stage