

Play Review**'Birdie' brings back good ol' days****By Christina  
Henderson***For the Daily Press*

ESCANABA — Grab your saddle shoes and get ready to scream. The Escanaba High School Fine Arts Department captures the fun (and fallout) of growing up in the 1960s in their production of the musical "Bye, Bye, Birdie."

Framed by technicolor sets and poodle skirts, "Birdie" follows the story of Conrad Birdie (Jason LaFave), a rock-and-roll hero headed off to military service, much to the chagrin of his uptight manager, Albert Peterson (James Schmidt), and scores of adoring female fans. With the help of his sassy girlfriend Rose Alvarez (Bridget Schumann), Albert launches a publicity stunt in which Conrad will give "one last kiss" to lucky fan club president Kim MacAfee (Jaena Manson) on live TV. As with any good musical comedy, events don't quite go as

planned.

Directors Lynn Soderberg and John D. Beck boast a group of accomplished performers who've been acting and singing since elementary school. Nine Birdie cast members were in *The King and I* in 2004 and many performed with *Players de Noc* and *Missoula Children's Theatre*.

Schumann is a joy to watch as Albert's under-appreciated love interest, evolving from sweet secretary to sexy siren and back again over the course of several graceful song and dance routines. "Spanish Rose's" encounter with a mad-capped shiners meeting is one you won't soon forget.

Schmidt displays wide emotional and vocal range in his turn as mama's boy Albert. He'll charm you with his nimble dancing and boyish smile in "Put on a Happy Face," then break your heart as he begs Rose, "Baby, Talk to Me."

Kaylee Kobasic lays on the

guilt and the cheetah-print fur as Albert's mother Mae. Kaylee's powerful rendition of "A Mother Doesn't Matter Anymore" was the standout vocal performance of the show.

Jaena Manson displays her lovely voice and sharp wit as Kim, the sweet young girl eager to grow up. Kim is surrounded by a crowd of buoyant fan-club friends led by the hilarious, scene-stealing Ursula Merkle (Lauren Kleiman). Kim's jilted boyfriend, Hugo Peabody, (sophomore P.J. Uhazie) shows off a collection of argyle sweaters and considerable acting chops after "drinking too much milk."

Delanie Murphy rings true as 60s sitcom mom Mrs. Doris MacAfee with her pert mannerisms and perfectly-coiffed hair. Husband Harry (Henry Black) commands the stage with blustery lectures and musical rants about "Kids." Both Murphy and Black are delightfully corny, displaying stage presence

beyond their years.

Jason LaFave swaggers into the title role with a greased curl on his forehead and a dangerous smirk. His crooning and hip-swiveling will make grandmas blush, and LaFave manages to exude masculinity even while wearing a sequined polyester jumpsuit.

The performers are well-supported by their technical crews including Stage Manager Tracy Nowak and Backstage Manager Garrett Germain. The orchestra gave a toe-tapping performance, especially sax players Jack Klim and Eric Bogaudou with their jazz riffs.

Bye, Bye, Birdie is a fun, fast-paced show that will make you sad to wave farewell to Conrad and company when the curtain goes down.

Performances are Nov. 19, 20, 22, & 23, 2010 at 8 p.m. at the Escanaba High School Auditorium. Buy tickets at the EHS Activities Office or at the door.