



Director Jenn Thompson

Some shows stay with us. They last. They brand a generation and then stick in our collective musical theatre DNA. We hum the tunes and sing the lyrics without necessarily knowing how we know them. They just live in us—somewhere. But sometimes that deep affection and familiarity can potentially come with a fairly limited view of what is possible and potent in a piece of theatre. In other words: we take them for granted.

Since bursting onto the scene as the surprise, runaway hit of the 1960/61 Broadway season, *Bye Bye Birdie* has enjoyed a kind of unprecedented and universal popularity. For good reason. Armed with a solid gold score and a sunny disposition, *Birdie* exploded into our national consciousness, spawning multiple film versions, pop albums, sequels, and countless amateur productions. For many of us, *Birdie* is the very first show we saw, or did, or watched our kids do.

My deep affection for this show is certainly personal. My first introduction was as a young Broadway cast member of another Charles Strouse mega-hit: *Annie*. And then again as a young woman when I played Kim at the River Rep in Ivoryton—the theatre my family ran for nearly two decades, just up the road from Goodspeed. And now, the opportunity to introduce it to a new generation of theatregoers; it is, indeed, a thrilling one; but perhaps the charge of reintroducing it to their parents and grandparents presents the biggest opportunity of all.

So how to shine a new light on an old friend? There's nothing to fix here—'cause it ain't broke. But there sure is plenty to explore and excavate. And with *Birdie's* legendary creators Charles Strouse and Lee Adams' blessing and participation we've done just that. Armed with a new song or two and exciting, bold dance arrangements by Broadway's David Krane, we've taken a fresh look at these characters and reinvested in them. Aiming to both remind audiences of why they fell in love with *Birdie* to begin with as well as surprise them with its craft and relevance.

As creatives, we're not immune to preconceptions, either, and we've challenged ourselves to toss out our own biased notions about what this show is expected to look and feel like—and what a perfect venue for our venture. The Goodspeed offers both intimacy and history, and we've used both as a jumping off point—designing the show to include the audience and embrace the theatre itself in an effort to create an inclusive, electrifying atmosphere that showcases the authenticity of small town America as well as the immediacy of live performance. East Haddam as our very own Sweet Apple! What could be more fun?

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Goodspeed has never produced *Bye Bye Birdie*—another wonderful and surprising first! I cannot imagine a better setting in which to rediscover this classic, iconic, gloriously entertaining show.