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A Star is Born

by Judith Pratt

A *Star is Born* may very well be re-named *A Star is Reaffirmed* for it is largely a vehicle for Barbra Streisand to display her fascinating vocal talents and her evident acting abilities, both absent from the screen for too long.

Kris Kristofferson, as the fading rock hero John Norman Howard, is inept and inappropriate, and hence the amount of time dedicated to displaying his career and path of self-destruction seems wasted. Originally, in the 1931 movie *What Price Hollywood?* and in the 1953 re-make with Judy Garland and James Mason, Kristofferson's character was that of an aging and out-dated actor who takes an unknown and creates a superstar. Here John Norman Howard, discontent with his unimaginative yet still beloved music, happens upon Esther Hoffman (Barbra Streisand) and promptly fell in love with her and her singing potential. The scenes where Kristofferson ignores his own fans and their demands to dedicate himself to Streisand's career are moving and intimate, and even Kristofferson's abrasive voice does not impair the beauty of their impromptu jamming session.

In an incredible (and incredible) sequence, John Norman, a bumbling stage performer who is often booed by his audiences, throws his arms up in dismay at the falseness of his music and brings his lover Esther Hoffman on stage to soothe the angry crowd. In a surprisingly short time, the audience, once so intent on hearing grinding rock music, begins moving in rhythm to the subdued tones and applauding Hoffman's heraldic performance.

From here, the singer's career becomes entirely public. Despite Kristofferson's assertions of his drug addiction and alcoholism, Streisand demands that they marry. A reformation occurs in Kristofferson as the two romp and frolic in the Arizona desert, while constructing a haven for themselves, far from their demanding public. But the public cannot be ignored and Streisand takes to the road for concerts, TV appearances and eventually a Grammy award. Kristofferson himself finds his public alienated towards him, and although his acting abilities are insufficient to display pitiful resentment, the

tension can be seen rising between Esther and John. He once again takes to cocaine and alcohol and attempts to re-enter the world of rock with a new style of music. But he is now only valued by nostalgic rock fans who are not prepared to allow for any changes. His suicidal tendencies once again surface.

Streisand, as Hoffman, exudes a strength and awareness of characterization greatly to her credit. Esther, seeing John Norman deteriorate before her, tries to boost his career as he had done hers but their music is not compatible and she is forced to assert her own identity rather than succumb to his confusing sense of failure. The tension between them is narrowed down to a tension within her: to acknowledge her inner pressure for success or to divest herself of the star image and retreat into seclusion with her ailing husband. He solves the dilemma at the end of the movie.

As an exemplum of strife and sacrifice within the mechanization of the music world, *A Star is Born* is deficient. The consuming search for



success is barely evident and the stardom achieved by Hoffman appears too easily and too spontaneously. The few poignant scenes in the movie are not able to bring cohesiveness to the theme and the emotional outbursts often appear unfounded and disjointed. But for Barbra Streisand fans, the movie delivers numerous powerful songs and solo spots by the lady which, combined with an admiration for her acting talents, are the movie's saving graces.

Rags to Riches -a tale for everyone

by Denise Currie

A fairy tale come alive is what Puss in Boots represented to Halifax children and adults who saw the Portus production of the play over the Christmas holidays at the Sir James Dunn Theatre. It is a delightful child's fantasy of a cat in boots that makes a poor miller's son live happily ever after by making him a prince who marries a princess. Walter Borden did a marvelous job with his role as the talking cat, Puss. John Burke, a young aspiring actor, is the poor miller's son Jack who, after his father's death is left to fend for himself with nothing but an old pair of boots, while his mean brother Ruthless (Stephen Cross) has acquired their father's mill and all other belongings. Jack gives the boots to Puss because it is the only thing he has ever wanted and Puss then begins to return the favor and makes plans for Jack's dream to

come true - to marry a princess. The king (Vaughn Laffin), queen (Clairmarie Haley), and princess (Beth Richardson) that happen to be travelling in the area at the time are prey to Puss's scheme to make Jack a prince. With a little luck and a lot of conniving, Puss manages to arrange for Jack to be clothed by the king as a prince and take hold of a castle by the destruction of an old Ogre.

The second scene in the Ogre's castle is excellent. We see the Ogre, played by John Jefferson, popping in the scene in a puff of smoke, an excellent use of stage affects. The Ogre's estate has interesting events taking place - from magic spells heked on Lord Percy (Neil Holden) and Lady Gwendolyn (Lauren Lee) to a transformation of the Ogre's servant, played by humorous Matt

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