

A cause for 'Rebel' by Hartford Youth Theatre

By TOM CARUJO
Staff Writer

"Rebel Without a Cause" is still considered a powerful and sensitive film about disillusioned American teen-agers nearly 30 years after its release.

Although tame by today's standards, the 1955 movie broke ground in its stark depiction of the growing confusion, loneliness and rebelliousness of youth. Thousands of teen-agers saw a little of themselves in stars James Dean, Sal Mineo and Natalie Wood.

The Hartford-based Youth Theatre Unlimited hopes its stage version of "Rebel" will entertain, enlighten and educate teen-aged cast members and audiences. The play began a 3-week tour through area schools today at Windsor's Sage Park Middle School.

According to Alan N. Levy, Youth Theatre's executive director, the storyline and theme of "Rebel" is still valid and meaningful today. Clothing styles and music have changed, he says, but many of the issues and concerns are similar.

"We considered doing an updated

version of 'Rebel' but decided the story is just as fitted to today's teen-agers," he says.

Levy says the play is designed to give participating teen-agers on-stage and backstage theater experience while exposing area teens to a live stage show. In addition, the play provides discussion and learning opportunities for English and social science courses.

"Touring is really central to the purpose of our organization," Levy says. "We're working with public schools, exposing students to theater arts and getting them involved with the possibility of a career or hobby in theater."

In a study guide prepared by Youth Theatre for student audiences, the play's cast described "Rebel" as a story about "confusion, conflict, violence, fitting in, running away, bad family situations, communication gaps, rebelling, changes in society, generation gaps, learning who you are sincerely and honesty."

"The story is very much a story of coming-of-age in America," the

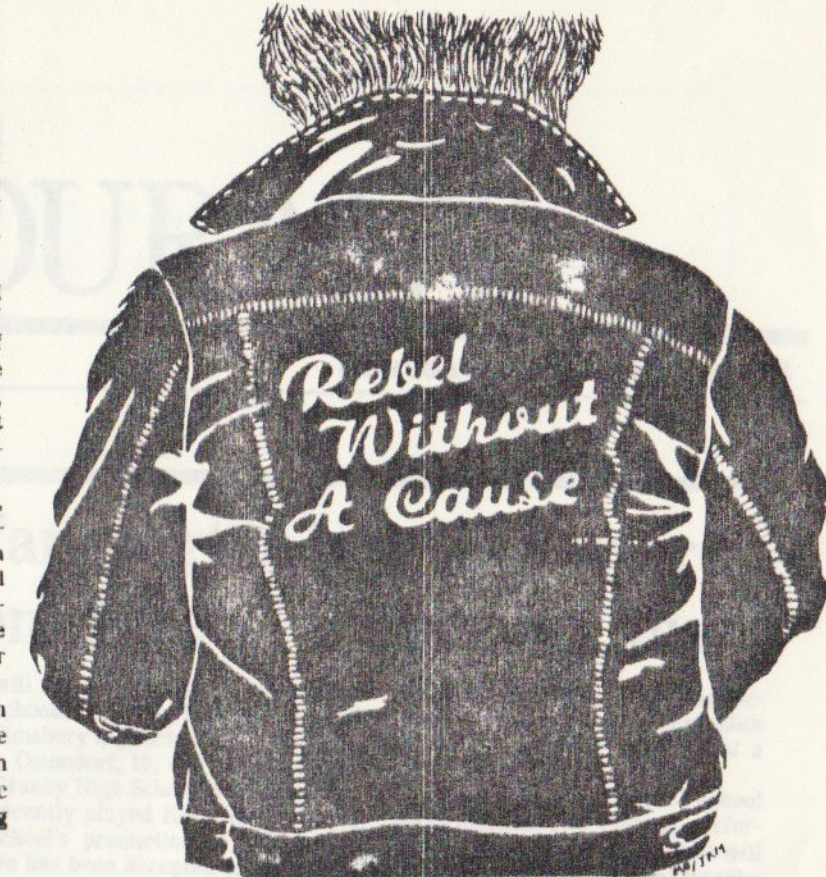
study guide explains. "The universality of these themes should be appropriate to in-class discussions."

Although the movie "Rebel" was attacked by some as advocating anti-social behavior, Levy said the film and play really uphold the traditional and honored values of honesty, sincerity and communications.

"It doesn't glorify the whole gang mentality or hoodlum activity," Levy says. "Mainly, it's a story of communication and a story of love — romantic love, the love of friends, and the importance of open, honest communications to the healthy development of young people."

The main character is Jim Stark, a troubled 17-year-old who's just arrived in town after leaving behind a history of violent and anti-social behavior. Despite warnings, he refuses to stay away from Judy, the steady girlfriend of gang-leader Buzz.

After a class outing erupts in violence between Jim and Buzz, the two agree to a dangerous "chicken run" at Millerstown bluff. A tragic accident results and a shattering



outcome follows.

Although the play obviously had to scale-down, simplify and improvise on the sets and props used in the movie, Levy said the only substantive change was casting a female — renamed Rae — for a male character named Ray in the movie.

"We decided to do it that way because of the strength of the actress and it raised the possibilities of making connections between Jim and between his mother and Rae," Levy explains.

In the accompanying study guide, Youth Theatre explains the arrangements and the design intent of the sound, sets, lighting and costumes for the play and describes the responsibilities of the 16 teen-aged

say-question test about the play's plots, characters and theme. Suggested written, verbal and role-playing assignments for further study follow.

Although the role of Jim is played by East Granby native Timothy Ostendorf, the cast also includes Christine Kluntz of East Hartford's O'Brien Middle School and David Clark of Windsor Locks High School. Production stage manager Jackie Farrelly is also from Windsor Locks.

Youth Theatre's schedule calls for nine additional performances following the show in Windsor. The group will appear at Enfield High School Dec. 18 at 9:30 a.m., while a benefit performance is slated for