



Babette G. Augustin/Staff photographer  
 "The Telephone Hour" scene features several of the more than 60 students who took part in Aquinas Institute's production of *Bye, Bye Birdie*. On hand to watch the May 3 opening-night performance was the musical's composer, Charles Strouse (pictured below).

## Broadway composer inspires Aquinas cast

By Barbara Ann Homick  
 Staff writer

ROCHESTER — Before Charles Strouse was mesmerized by the bright lights of Broadway, he had dreams of becoming a short-order cook.

The Tony-award winning composer of such theatrical classics as *Bye, Bye Birdie*, *Annie* and *Applause* — who was one of the featured guests for the Aquinas Institute's opening night of *Bye, Bye Birdie* on May 3 — said it wasn't until his teen years that he began thinking about pursuing a career in theater.

"My first impulse was that I would meet a lot of girls in the theater," joked Strouse in an interview with the *Catholic Courier* on May 3.

Strouse's visit to Rochester was a nostalgic one for him because the musician spent several years in the Flower City as a member of the Eastman School of Music's class of 1947.

The 60-year-old Strouse recalled that all his memories of Rochester weren't so fond. After entering college at age 15 — he



*Bye Birdie*.

Commenting on the original version of *Bye, Bye Birdie*, Strouse said no one ever thought rock 'n' roll would become so popular when the play was written in the early 1960s.

"It was a novel idea then," said Strouse, a current member of the board of directors at the Eastman School of Music.

Strouse added that he never understood why women go crazy over rock stars, as do the young girls who swoon over Conrad Birdie in the production. Strouse remembered, however, the satisfaction he felt when he was walking by Carnegie Hall before a Beatles concert and he heard hundreds of youths — mostly girls — singing "We love you, Beatles, oh yes we do," to his music.

"Art imitates life, life imitates art," he explained.

Before the curtain went up on Aquinas Institute's production of *Bye, Bye Birdie*, Strouse stepped backstage to give the cast of more than 60 students some final pointers.

He told the young Thespians, "You all make me so happy because you are a part of my life now, as I am a part of yours."

In order to calm a few nerves, Strouse told the anxious group that many famous people had gotten their start by doing the play and that Hollywood was always looking for fresh, young talent.

Much of Aquinas' cast was in awe that such a successful man as Strouse was attending their performance.

David La Due, who played "Albert Peterson" in the play and served as technical director for the show, noted that having Strouse in the audience put a lot more pressure on cast members.

"I think it is great that we can perform it for him, but it puts more stress on us considering he wrote all the music," said La Due.

La Due added with a smile, "I have this fear that he is going to run on stage saying, 'Stop, stop. You are singing it all wrong.'"

Caroline Elliott, who portrayed "Rose Alvarez" in the show, summed up how many cast members felt about Strouse's visit.

"Someone that is the epitome of what we

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