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Wednesday, August 14, 1985

Philly's Beat

Philadelphia, Aug. 10.

3 Numbers Prods. presentation of a musical revue in two acts by Stephen Stahl with special musical material by Bill Jolly. Staged by Stahl; musical direction and arrangements, Jolly; choreography, Robin Reseen; set, Chris Whelan; costumes, Fridel & Lynne of Rose Goldstein; lighting, Pieter Tupitza; slides and special effects, Chip Marcoccia. Opened Aug. 9, '85, at Grendel's Lair, Philadelphia; \$18 top.

Cast: Rufus Bonds Jr., Bruce Curless, Andre Jackson, Juanita Johnson, Bobby Lovett Jr., Jessica Petranto, Sean Taueo. Instrumental accompaniment: Bill Jolly (keyboards), Elton (Frog) Jolly (bass), Nick Williams (guitar), Johnnie Croom (percussion).

Philadelphia's and Philadelphians' contributions to pop music, ending at a point considerably short-

of last month's international Live Aid concert, are chronicled in a lively songathon performed by an integrated cast of young and exuberant AGVA singer/dancers.

Bracketed between salutes to Bessie Smith and the Kenny Gamble/Leon Huff Philadelphia Intl. hits are nostalgic replications of native and adoptive Philadelphians like Clara Ward, Bill Haley, Frankie Avalon, Chubby Checker, the Dovells and Billy Paul.

The framework for this sampler of "the Philly Sound" is on the simplistic side. A bewhiskered, ultracausal deejay, enacted by Bruce Curless, stands in a simulated control booth at stage right and provides brief, shrugworthy intros which are often accompanied by period-setting black-and-white slides projected on a center-stage screen. There are occasional perplexing efforts to add production pizzazz via smoke, soap bubbles, flashing bulbs and the positioning of performers behind a couple of transparent screens.

Considerably more helpful are Bill Jolly additions to more than 40 yesteryear foot-tappers. Establishing the show's theme and providing tuneful transitions are Jolly's "The Philadelphia Beat," "Sing It A Cappella" and "Shake And Wiggle."

An especially appropriate oldie is "South Street," about "the hippest street in town." This show was shifted, pre-previews, from a 100-seat house to its present 160-seat South Street site.

Whether, considering its nonstop hometown drumbeating, it can effect a hoped-for move to a New York venue is problematic. With the same personable performers, however, it could be a rousing tv special.—*Hari*.