consider this another rave review for Canamedia's The King Of Friday Night, which recently won the "Best Performance Special" Award at the Banff Television Festival. The production is so universally fine that it's hard to know where to begin.

"Culture" deserving one of the characters, that's something found in your fridge every couple of months. In this spirit, The King Of Friday Night blasts its way past colonial cultural hang-ups and elitist taboos to revel in and fuse the two most popular art forms of a generation: TV and rock 'n' roll. Like the best rock music, its energy seems barely containable in its medium. Like the best television, it takes us right to the edge of what the medium can do. And like the best rock videos, it intelligently plays with surrealism in order to illuminate rather than obscure. The result is a fine TV-rush that sets a new standard for creative work in North-American television.

It's rare enough to find an original stage-play ably translated into another medium, especially in ways that fully honour the capabilities of the new medium. But here, John Gray's stage musical, "Rock and Roll," has become immovable television of the most exciting kind. The King Of Friday Night is the first TV-feature shot in Betacam 1/2 video format, the first TV-feature to use colorization (a computerization process that turns black-and-white video into colour), and the most extensive use of multiple-layer chromakey ever seen in North-American television. Co-director Andrew Gosling and chromakey-designer Graham McCallum developed these video techniques at the BBC and have won numerous international awards for their efforts.

But what's fascinating about The King Of Friday Night is the astonishing degree to which the techniques are so completely right for the tone and spirit of John Gray's music and script. The basis plot-line is so familiar as to be archetypal - which is precisely why the chromakey sequences work so well. Set in the small, fictitious Canadian town of Mushaboom, the story begins in the present, but quickly does an extended flashback to 1961 to follow the rise of the Monarch - a local rock band inspired by Screamin' John (Eric Peterson), a burnt-out rocker who instills them with the spirit of Rock 'n Roll. After four years of wild success, the band breaks up when Parker (Frank MacKay), the lead singer, decides to go solo. After this crisis, the story resumes in the present with a reunion concert bringing together the ageing musicians who have each gone their separate, "normal" ways.

Gray has infused this plot-line with an intricate blend of wry irony, self-parodying nostalgia, sincere emotion and a mythologizing ethos that is matched visually, moment by moment, with such underlying empathy in which there is no sense of detachment. Rather, the spirit of the Monarch's life: teenaged dreams, first romance, rebellion, leaving home, the taste of success, and then the end of youth and the apparent death of youthful dreams. The witty, ironic tone covers an underlying empathy in which there is no sense of detachment. Rather, the spirit of the work is that of a shared vitality, a pop heritage held in common.

In this sense, The King Of Friday Night is clearly the opposite of nostalgia. Through its deceptively simple structure, it re-vitalizes the present with the energy of the music. The re-united Monarchs haven't lost their touch. Neither has their aging audience which, on-screen and off, still contains the spirit of Screamin' John deep in their souls. The frail portrait of the Queen overlooking the dancehall turns into the rebel trickster rocker laughing with devilish glee. As the music says, "When the situation's outta control, you better rock, you better roll."

Gosling, Gray and McCallum have truly fused every aspect of performance in this work: the tremendous acting and singing of Eric Peterson, Frank MacKay, Sheree Jea-cooke, Geoffrey Bowes, Andrew Rhodes and Alec Willows; the 24-track recording of Gray's fine rock lyrics; the location-shooting and the extraordinary visual "performance" of the in-studio chromakey all come together to create a production that's as tight you could want. Don't miss the repeat on CBC-TV.

Joyce Nelson

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**THE KING OF FRIDAY NIGHT**