

'The Fox' — a glossy tale

Back Alley bags praise for its play

By RICK TALCOVE
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Small theaters in Los Angeles usually approach their productions from the angle of getting them on the stage. Rarely, if ever, does the matter of getting them right enter into the picture.

A happy exception to the general rule is the infrequent yet superior productions offered by

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the attractive Back Alley Theater in Van Nuys, which refuses to open a show until the artistic elements are worked out.

Producers Laura Zucker and Allan Miller have given the Valley a truly professional Equity-waiver theater, free of the unwanted stigmas of amateurs over their artistic heads and obvious crass showcasing for film work.

The Back Alley's current effort, Alan Miller's adaptation of D.H. Lawrence's "The Fox," is the theater's most accomplished and mature effort to date. It is a bold undertaking, fraught with artistic danger, but it successfully accomplishes all it sets out to do.

Lawrence's moody novella of two young women whose idyllic life is invaded by a returning



The three-person play "The Fox" features, from left, Margaret Ladd, Jenny O'Hara and Michael Horton.

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Soldier has been extraordinarily well staged by adapter Miller. It also is acted to perfection by a remarkable three-performer ensemble consisting of Michael Horton, Margaret Ladd and Jenny O'Hara.

Both the adapter-director and his actors provide an atmosphere that is alive with tension yet constantly in check theatrically. While staged and acted with a disarming ease, "The Fox" manages to show admirable restraint and excellent taste in dealing with its sexual and psychological overtones.

The lesbian relationship between Jill and Nellie is shown not through silly groping, but through true interaction between performers. Furthermore, the subtle psychological changes that occur in the two women are brought to life by Ladd and O'Hara with startling accuracy.

And yet, the special triumph of the production may well be Horton's portrayal of easy-going Henry. Several actors inhabited this role during the Back Alley's rehearsal period, and clearly Horton was the man to wait for.

While offering the nominal good looks required by the role calls, Horton also captures the character's hairline reactions with artful fidelity. The triangular situation builds steadily over three short yet engrossing acts, with never a false move made by any element of the production.

Strangely, no credit is given for the fine spacious setting, though Patrick McFadden is credited with master carpenter duties. Hilary Sloane's costumes and Christopher Milliken's lighting also enrich the evening.

For those theatergoers who have been waiting for a truly worthwhile production to familiarize themselves with small theater, "The Fox" offers a compelling reason to take the plunge. Forget about the Amnanson and Mark Taper for now; the Back Alley is where the dramatic fireworks are.

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