

## **THEATER DISTRICT**

### **A 'Fox' that captures the Lawrence mood**

**By Jay Reiner**

According to the dictionary, a fox is a carnivorous mammal of the dog family with a pointed muzzle and a long bushy tail. According to D.H. Lawrence, the fox is an exciting, dangerous male who invades two women's lives as easily as his bushy-tailed cousin raids a hen-house.

Lawrence's novella "The Fox" has been adapted for the stage by Allan Miller (a film based on the novel was released in the late '60s). The result is a subtle, swiftly moving drama that retains the flavor of

Lawrence's moody writing. A spare farmhouse set (uncredited) and shadowy lighting design from Christopher Millikin are both first-rate.

When Henry, a World War I soldier, returns to his boyhood home in northern England, he finds it occupied by two seeming lesbians. At first it is the feminine Jill who responds to his presence. But, interestingly, it is mannish Nell, dressed in breeches and suspenders, who finally captures his attention. As Henry attempts to assert his dominance in this "hen-house," the drama unfolds in quick, brusque strokes to a final chilling climax.

The trio of actors do a beautiful job with the suggestive material. As Nellie, the dominant but not necessarily stronger woman, Jenny O'Hara allows her character masculinity without playing butch. Michael Horton is the "fox" of the play, male and macho, and crafty, too. Margaret Ladd can flash the most revealing looks as Jill, soft on the outside and steel within.

Hilary Sloane's costumes and Steve Barker's realistic sound design add to the authentic feel of the drama. "The Fox" is fascinating.

At the Back Alley Theater (capacity 99), 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys. 8 p.m. Thu-Sat. Tickets: \$4 & \$7. Extended through May 30. Reservations: 780-2240.