

## The Fox

(Back Alley Theatre; \$7 top)

Incisive performances by the three-member cast, Margaret Ladd, Jenny O'Hara and Michael Horton, make this production of "The Fox" at the Back Alley Theatre in Van Nuys special. It's exciting theatre.

Director Allen Miller has adapted D. H. Lawrence's "The Fox" to the stage with clarity and well-achieved dramatics. His staging brings additional insight to the story of two lesbians who have "escaped" to the English countryside to build a life for themselves away from society's pressures.

Times are rough for Jill, played by Ladd, and Nellie, played by O'Hara. The farm and its animals are not producing; the secluded life is taking its toll on their personalities.

Into this nest comes virile young soldier Henry, played by Michael Horton. (Thus, the obvious metaphor of the title.)

It's old-fashioned thinking, at best, but with the man around, the farm becomes productive, the chickens lay their eggs and the hungry fox who has stalked the hens is hunted and killed. In short, the man's arrival brings fulfillment. It also brings tension among the two women. Feminist point-of-view aside, the drama still holds up, the characters are compelling and the

action is, ultimately, explosive. Yet this is achieved primarily because of the three well-rounded, sharp performances and the director's work.

Throughout, there is the craft of fine acting evident, a treat to consume and an oasis among the general run of Equity-waiver productions.

Besides adapting and directing, Miller also is coproducing director of the Back Alley Theatre with Laura Zucker.

Christopher Milliken has provided rich and dramatically enchanting lighting, and Hilary Sloane the very appropriate costumes. Steve Barker did the sound and no one is credited for the adequate set design.

Over the weekend, producers decided to extend the run beyond the original closing date of May 9 to the end of July. A wise decision.

One final word. As a title "The Fox" may not be the most alluring of names. But beyond the name is a rewarding drama. Besides, what's in a name? Fox.