

## STAGE REVIEW

### Cisterns

*Back Alley Theatre,  
through July 17 (opened June 12)*

"Cisterns" could be a horror story if the protagonists took their lives seriously.

As the play begins two sisters, Samantha (Jenny O'Hara) and Winifred (Jennifer Salt), are having a birthday party in honor of their late mother, complete with gifts that would have undoubtedly outraged her. It's a marvelous concept, drenched in laughter. But, in the spaces between the laughs, an uneasy history unfolds. These two mama's girls can't function on their own. Winnie is a baby doll; Sam is a tomboy; their life together is possibly incestuous; their lives separately are stunted.

Enter Legrand (Michael Cavanaugh), Winnie's ex-husband and Sam's ex-lover. He more than holds his own in the sisters' power plays. Winnie, who seems the more schizophrenic of the two girls with her array of imaginary personalities, is also the more dominant. She wins all their games. In her obedience school Sam is the dog brought to heel. When the phone rings, Sam won't answer without permission. When Legrand announces he plans to remarry, we're not surprised that he winds up upstairs with Winnie. It is surprising that the

play's end has a wholesome feeling, as Sam hugs her sister, shrugs her shoulders and goes off for a drink with her friends.

Julie Jensen's play is original, funny and rich in mysteries and surprises. We'd like to see more of these people. In fact, we'd like to see more now. The play at 70 minutes seem little more than a long first act. As we snuggle down for the second, the actors come out for their curtain calls.

However, the production is worth a trip to the Back Alley. Director Laura Zucker skillfully molds this touchy material into a picnic instead of an orgy.

As Sam, Jenny O'Hara is marvelous. She pours phenomenal energy and gusto into drinking, playing, clowning, creating a children's world of presents, parties and Christmas every day complete with tree. The fearful possessive facets of Sam's character, when they flash out, are totally believable.

Salt plays Winnie as a homespun baby doll, which contributes to the family likeness between the two. Cavanaugh is strong as the visiting husband. There's a feeling that he catches the sisters' compressed vitality and thrives on it.

Jim Billings' set is a nice blend of Mama and Sam. Joe Morrissey's lighting design makes an effective transition through twilight into night. Sound director Jerry Sider's thunderstorm is stunningly realistic.

— Laura Hitchcock