

### Cisterns

(Back Alley Theatre; \$10 top)

Chekhov wrote the definitive play about sisters, and playwrights since have tried to succeed as well as he did. Some have made good attempts — even "My Sister Eileen" — and many have failed miserably.

Julie Jensen is the latest to write about sisters in a spate of recent shows that concern female siblings. Hers is called "Cisterns" and is preeming at the Back Alley Theatre.

One thing she doesn't do is include the mother, as the current offering at Matrix Theatre ("Skirmishes") does, and she doesn't have the characters constantly at each other's jugular veins.

What she does have is an older sister, independent and sarcastic, looking out for younger

sister who's been separated from her husband for more than four years in a "rustic, aging house in the mountains of Utah."

Although both are of adult age, they carry on like preteenagers, prepping a birthday party for their mother who's been dead for some time. Through these silly little games, little is learned about either one except that the older one is stronger.

Husband returns to tell his ex that he's going to remarry because he wants "to do something right." He and the older sister spar a bit. The wife comes downstairs and, after a small confrontation, the two fall into bed and the older sister goes out on the town — or desert — whatever is around the "rustic, aging house."

Talents of Jenny O'Hara, Jennifer Salt and Michael Cavanaugh are wasted on this 70-minute piece that starts nowhere and goes nowhere. Laura Zucker directs, but that doesn't help any either.

Jensen writes as if this were just a little romp that happened one night. She doesn't let the audience in on the secrets of these women, how they got to where they are, how long the younger one was married, or much of anything.

The "aging house" could be anywhere; there's little to pinpoint it in Utah. Jim Billings' set doesn't give any geographical indication nor does Joe Morrissey's lighting.

But, then, neither does a program note by the author, which states:

"I know exactly why I named

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this play 'Cisterns.' First of all it's a pun on sisters. But that's academic. A little game playing. More important is the memory of a particular cistern in an old ghost town a hundred miles from where I grew up.

"It's a large cement container designed to save rain water in the desert. None of the rest of the town works, but the cistern still holds water. It's full of silt from numberless wind storms.

"An old hawk floats around it, dead. There's a silence about it, a great majestic fright. The stillness of sediment, the quiet of dead birds, and the endlessness of a Utah desert . . . In spite of that it's still a comedy."

Huh???

Edwa.