

## STAGE NEWS & NOTES

### A 'Suburban' description

**T**here is nothing especially wrong with Richard Caliban's "Suburban Romance," except that it does not say anything. This production, at the Back Alley Theatre in Van Nuys, has an excellent cast, decent direction from Allan Miller, an atmospheric set by Don Llewellyn as well as suitable lighting by Pam Rank and good costumes by Barbara Metzenbaum.

But Caliban's look at a present day suburban family has all the energy and depth of a scoop of vanilla ice cream melting in a dish. The playwright gives us a family of four — middle-aged Mom and Pop, their mid-20s daughter who sleeps around, and a 20-year-old stuttering son who does not know what to do with his life.

Everything about this family seems to be valid, but dramatically they all seem to be suffering from arrested development. Thus, when Mom tells Pop that she wants to sleep in another room because of his snoring, we all know the problem goes deeper than that. This aspect may well be a "little crisis" many people go through, but it would be nice to hear what author Caliban has to say on the matter. But all we get at the Back Alley are pained looks and silence.

Similarly, it is interesting to view a young woman who is both a nurse and promiscuous, but

once again Caliban offers no details. Even more unbelievable is the lack of information given about the son, who is obviously emotionally immature and seems to be the product of a loveless homelife.

And so it goes for three acts, with each character coming forward with his or her Erma Bombecklike monologue but precious little in the way of concrete facts. Everything about "Suburban Romance" has been done before, and far better, by Thornton Wilder, William Inge, Sherwood Anderson and several dozen other major American authors who are not afraid to give audiences and readers a valid look at what happens beyond the cliches of small-town life.

But oh, the cast! K Callan is nothing less than superb as the mother of the house, all surface smiles hiding inner pain. John Carter is wonderful as the perplexed husband. Raphael Sbarge is incredibly good as the lonely son. Largo Woodruff as the daughter and Rick Dean as her reckless lover fit their stereotypical roles quite well. Finally, Joe Ivy scores a personal triumph playing the family's dog, Duke. In fact, Duke is easily the most interesting, well-developed and poignant character in "Suburban Romance." Sociologists, take note.

— Rick Talcove



*K Callan and John Carter are husband and wife in "Suburban Romance" at the Back Alley.*