

## 'Hot and Cold' at the Back Alley

**T**he causes of both the short play and good acting are both being served entertainingly and provocatively in "Hot and Cold," the latest anthology of work from the writers' workshop of the Back Alley Theatre in Van Nuys.

With the nimble and versatile participation of the formidable Eileen Heckart in three of these playlets, "Hot and Cold" — which takes its theme from the various seasons of the year — is modest in intent but extremely durable in its execution.

Indeed, this viewer found it a vast improvement over the Back Alley's "24 Hours," the theater's previous collection of five-minute plays. As one can readily guess, five minutes allows both the actor and writer exactly enough time to get on and off stage, with precious little attention to what is actually being said.

In "Hot and Cold," the average length of each play is about 10 minutes, allowing actors, authors

and audience a comfortable stretch. Naturally some of the scenes fare better than others.

For example, Vallie Ullman has concocted a small gem in "Ruby and Samuel," a funny yet touching piece about two adults who share the same night school desk at different classes, and their correspondence via notes. Author Ullman and Jason Bernard are perfect under Jim Horbeck's direction.

There is fun, too, in Heckart's best scene of the evening, "Meals on Wheels," in which she plays a bedridden old lady who decides to engage in a bit of whoopie with the young man bringing her daily meals. Jeffrey Marcus is quite good playing off the excellent Heckart under Ted Post's staging.

Jim McGinn's "June Bride" is yet another variation on the pre-marital comedy theme, where a bride finds out she may be the only virgin her family has had on a wedding day in several generations. Judith Marie Bergan, Laura Bruneau, Sal Viscuso and Marcus are good in this episode.

An attempt at serious comedy is provided in Karen Eeiss Raskind's "Eye to Eye," about two patients in a doctor's office — one facing the possibility of going blind, the other facing the inevitability of the same dilemma. Actress Bergan and Bill Cort are extremely fine.

Two views of adolescent life are provided in Iris Rainer Dart's "Bee Bee Gordon Does It" — about two teenagers discussing who "puts out" — and John Pleshette's "Orientation Week," in which a mother — Heckart — tries to understand her maturing daughter. Actress Braneau and Jennifer Parsons are admirable adolescents in both playlets, while Heckart adds a patina of depth to her role.

The other plays in "Hot and Cold" seem more like fragments. Gary Socol's "Chilly Revelations," about a competitive married couple playing scrabble, is too cliched for comment. David Bennett Carren's "Christmas," about the crass members of a writing class rejecting a promising effort by a new member, is simply a too-obvious revenge play. Finally, offerings from Brooke David Kofford and Lee Thomas still need work.