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Suburban Romance

REVIEWED BY VIOLA HEGYI SWISHER

Produced by Laura Zucker; Susan Goldstein, line producer; at the Back Alley Theatre, 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys; (818) 780-2240. Opened Feb. 4; plays Thurs.-Sat., 8; Sun., 3:30; ends March 18.

If it weren't for Duke the dog, good old pop, closely followed by not-so-old mom, would be the main attraction of *Suburban Romance*, which isn't a romance at all but a cheerful little commentary on the disunited state of family life today.

With a vocabulary of three or four words and a splendid range of eloquent barks, Joe Ivy makes a lovely spotted mutt. Very much a member of the family, Duke nonetheless is kept chained fairly close to the doghouse. And a good thing too. The one night he's let out, he gets into trouble with a bitchy neighbor's bitch.

Big, good looking John Carter as paterfamilias Al is out of tune with the times. In his day, you bet people didn't dance like *that*. Kids obeyed their parents. The generation gap was bridged by merciful hypocrisy. And now Al's stentorian snoring is driving his wife to make plans for sleeping in another room.

Wife Mary, played by K Callan, complains, condones, forgives, acts as troubleshooter. Bitterness may tinge her words, but her eyes shine with love. Daughter Sarah, a nurse, has Largo Woodruff gaining sympathy toward her predicaments, antipathy against her defiant ways. As her ladder-climbing lover Homer, Rick Dean parodies a rock musician who hasn't made it yet. Professionally, that is. Raphael Sbarge tackles the difficult role of Mary and Al's younger son Tommy, a stutterer whose mind seems as irresponsible and confused as his tongue.

Back Alley producing director Allan Miller has shaped the first act fragments of playwright Richard Caliban's three-act show to set the stage for *Suburban Romance*. Both author and director have given the prosaic material a once over lightly treatment. Anything heavier would have torn it.

Dominated by two big double beds, Don Llewellyn's indoor/outdoor set tries to cover all bases. Barbara Metzenbaum's costumes do their part in defining the characters. Pam Ranks' lighting and the sound by Jerry Snider are unobtrusive and serviceable.