

writers workshop more than a legitimate production. Comparison with the 10 short *Hot and Cold* plays now running across town at the Back Alley is inevitable since the roots are similar. Those works excel hands down in production value, theme, writing quality and as entertainment.

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HOT AND COLD—Back Alley, 851-9750—(10/20) "The entire acting and directing company delivers a first-rate production under the directorial supervision of Allan Miller"—Fisher. Ends Nov. 20.

ED KRUEGER



Sal Viscuso, Bill Cort, Eileen Heckart & Jason Bernard in 'Cold' 'Christmas'

Hot & Cold

REVIEWED BY TERRY FISHER

Produced by Laura Zucker; Back Alley Theatre, 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys; 851-9750. Opened Oct. 15; plays Thurs.-Sat., 8; Sun., 3:30; through Nov. 20.

Ten authors, five directors and nine actors, some of them hyphenates, are holding forth in the Back Alley Theatre's *Hot & Cold* (*Plays for All Seasons*), featuring the best from the Writers Lab. It's a mildly effervescent evening, long on humor, short on message, with an occasional sprinkle of comment on the human condition and the way people communicate. As with any collection of very short plays, some work better than others, some have completion and some don't go anywhere in particular. The entire acting and directing company delivers a first-rate production under the directorial supervision of Allan Miller, who provides a smooth transition between mini-plays. Marcia Hinds' geometric stage and platforms backed by a design of curving slats and Jerry Sider's excellent sound contribute to the seamlessness of the production. Pam Rank's lighting and Barbara Metzenbaum's costumes are appropriate and enhancing.

Notable among the cast are the eminent Eileen Heckart, who graces three plays, and the versatile Bill Cort, who appears in five. Heckart is funny as hell in Terry Kingsley-Smith's *Meals on Wheels*, directed with pizzazz by Ted Post, in which an elderly recipient of the meal delivery program devises a unique way to observe her birthday on April Fool's Day. Jeffrey Marcus is the unwitting "good Samaritan." In John Pleshette's *Orientation Week*, staged by the author, Heckart plays a wise but concerned mother of an apple-pie daughter entering Smith College whose roommate turns out to be a well-traveled mod sophisticate. The light fades on Heckart's bewildered face as the two new friends, played with style by Jennifer Parsons and Laura Bruneau, go off together. Finally, Heckart appears in *Christmas* by David Bennett Carren, about a writers workshop which encourages crass work but fails to recognize genuine talent. Jim Hornbeck directs the light piece which includes Bill Cort as the instructor and Parsons, Jason Bernard and Sal Viscuso as other class participants.

Karen Weiss Raskind also directs her own work, *Eye to Eye*, a humorous, poignant piece about two patients who meet in an eye surgeon's office. Cort excels at dignity and gallantry while Judith Marie Bergan is quizzically fascinating. Vallie Ullman has written *Ruby and Samuel*, a wry piece with surprises in store for its characters, tenderly enacted by Ullman and Bernard. It's one of the evening's best and Hornbeck's direction sharply delineates two French students communicating by letter who conjure an inaccurate picture of each other. Hornbeck also stages Iris Rainer Dart's *Bee Bee Gordon Does It* (does anyone not know what "it" is?) with two teenagers, an exuberantly screaming Bruneau and a gum-chewing, know-it-all Parsons, enthusiastically and seriously experiencing one of life's passages. On-the-mark writing and acting here.

Gary Socol's *Chilly Revelations*, which Pleshette helms with tongue-in-cheek skill, has Bergan as a sleek wife obsessed with winning at Scrabble who makes the most startling revelations to her soigne husband (finely played by Cort) over the game. Pleshette also directs Lee Thomas' lightweight *The Closet*, which features Viscuso as a husband with a pregnant wife, six kids and a confused sexual identity and Cort as his good (but not for long) friend. Miller takes the reins with Brooke David Kofford's satirical *The Hunting Season*, which has Bernard and Marcus stalking some unusual prey. It also features Cort and Ullman. The play is great fun and its plot is too good to give away. Finally, Jim McGinn's *June Bride* doesn't promise love forever after for incipient newlyweds Bruneau and Marcus. Her sister (Bergan) and his best man (Viscuso) do their best to get the marriage off to a good start.

Hot & Cold is an entertaining romp that falls as lightly as snowflakes on the face and evanesces just as quickly. But, like snowflakes, it refreshes for the moment.