

PUTTING ON THE DOG: Frederick Bailey's play takes place in Frijole Canyon, New Mexico, a smaller than small town where simple people make simple problems marvelously complicated. Writer/director Bailey has captured the typically Southern good ol' boy, and his actors, an enormously talented troupe, bring the characters to life with gusto. The story revolves around an old woman who runs a boarding house with a host of poor but happy tenants, one of whom is the local deputy. If the plot isn't particularly intriguing, it has some hilarious twists, and the players make you really care about these people. While all of them turn in good performances, the show really belongs to Daniel Kremer. His drawing, slow-walking, Gary Cooper-like deputy is a pleasure to watch, and he always keeps his dead-pant ready for whatever the deputy might encounter next. But the play is not without problems. The script lags occasionally and could use some judicious cutting. I also had trouble with the use of a dog, a lovely little beast well over retirement age. It was painful to see the animal jostled by exuberant actors too caught up by the work at hand. Otherwise the show gets my vote for the best new comedy in town. Back Alley Theatre, 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys. Thurs.-Sun. 8 p.m. Call 780-2240. (RHR)

Also particularly recommended:

Putting on the Dog, a hilarious comedy at the Back Alley Theater; **Inching Through the Everglades**, presented by the Provisional Theater Company at the Embassy Auditorium; **Happy End** at the East West Players; **Life Class** at the Bank Playhouse in Pasadena; **Bleacher Bums** at the Century City Playhouse; **The Grapes of Wrath** at the Colony; **Nightclub Cantata** at the Odyssey.