

## THEATER DISTRICT

### Back Alley puts on laid-back comedy

By Danielle Roter  
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"Putting on the Dog" is set in a funky rooming house in a small New Mexican town. This laid-back comedy bristles with colloquial cadency and the unspoken longing of simple folk who don't say what they mean anyway.

Frederick Bailey's talent as a playwright is showcased at the Back Alley. The characters live honestly, the environment creaks and smells and the scenes flow. But the possibility of tugging heartstrings is glimpsed only fleetingly. Perhaps the playwright, who also directs, is too close to his material to trim the excess or tighten the slack which might enable the emotional life of this play to bloom.

The romantic resolution of the two young boarders (Bruce Wright and beautiful Christy Sinickas) may not bring the lump-in-the-throat that is indicated, but "Putting on the Dog" nonetheless delivers a fair share of charm and laughs.

Sylvia Meredith is delightful as Iowa, the almost-octogenarian waitress who runs the boarding house. Kurtwood Smith's characterization of a gruff-old-boy small-town sheriff is first-rate. William Utay, Daniel Kremer and Steve Toholowsky create sharp characterizations. Joe Clarke offers an unaffectionate caricature of a "halfwit."



Sylvia Meredith and Kurtwood Smith put on the dog.

Bill Steis' clever and evocative set is a real asset to the Canyon Pictures (in association with Laura Zucker and Allan Miller) production.

Toodles the dog, as the dog, lends warm support and demonstrates surprising restraint.

At the Back Alley Theater in Van Nuys (capacity 99), 8 p.m. Thu-Sun, through Aug. 3, Tickets: \$4 and \$5. Reservations: 780-2240.