

TOP-NOTCH ACTING — I finally caught up with two productions, both scheduled to close this weekend, featuring the kind of sterling performances that exemplify the quality of acting Equity-waiver theater should attain.

Patrick Meyers' "Feedlot," at the Back Alley Theater in Van Nuys, takes us to the top floor of a Texas grain elevator for a confrontation between two men.

What transpires puts the macho concept to a severe test — with startling results.

Billy Fred, a crude man who recently separated from his wife, continually picks on sensitive, artistic Gene Harris, while their co-workers try to keep peace between them. However, the power play between them exposes the inner secrets of both proud men, secrets that are craftily tied together by playwright Meyers in a most unusual conclusion.

Richard Cox (Gene) and Joseph Ragno (Billy Fred) are equally superb in their roles, each bringing their character's nuances and transitions to credible life.

Ragno is repeating an acclaimed New York performance. Others under Alan Miller's flawless direction are David Hanna, Tom Power and Ed Morgan — all top-notch. The realistic setting was supervised by Patrick McFadden for this superior Laura Zucker production.