



VARIETY



LEGIT REVIEWS

Suburban Romance

(Back Alley Theater; \$12 top)

Director Alan Miller has done some marvelous stuff with a seemingly ordinary play about suburban angst. The situation in the play is deceptively simple. Every Family will serve to describe these characters.

There's a father who's out of touch, a mother who dreams about the past, a teenage son who can't hold a job, a daughter who's a nurse who is secretly sleeping with an aspiring rock musician, and there's a dog who is the best actor-canine to hit the stage since the legit creation of Snoopy.

Nothing happens in the play that is out of the ordinary but audience comes to care about the people. That's because the performances from the six-member cast and the writing of New York playwright Richard Caliban are full of deceptively light artifice.

Director Miller has given all the fragments such a supple focus that the experience is like the ping of a tuning fork. In this case, light touch translates into a cheerful glow that is altogether winning.

Written under a \$3500 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation (\$2500 to the playwright and \$1000 to the Back Alley), the play is notable for a sweet as opposed to saccharine view of human nature and the production is distinguished by a clarity that illuminates predicaments that are essentially prosaic.

Don Llewellyn's austere set design, dominated by two double beds, renders the illusion of several rooms while also conveying the sense of a front yard. Chief figure in that yard is Duke the dog, played to the hilt by Joe Ivy, who remains chained to a dog house for most of the play. It's a performance to make actors drool.

And costume designer Barbara Metzenbaum has made Ivy look like a mutt by subtle imagination, a quality which characterizes the entire production.

Standout performer is Raphael Sbarge as the stuttering son, a floundering, baffled and lovable character whom Sbarge captures perfectly.

John Carter is wholly credible and sympathetic as the middleaged father, and K Callan as the mom moves through her domestic routines and wifely grips with a vaguely bedazed demeanor that comes to be touching. Largo Woodruff's assertive daughter and Rick Dean's likeable, assured boyfriend complement the proceedings with aplomb.

Loyn.