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LEGIT REVIEWS

Feedlot

(Back Alley Theatre; \$6 top)
There is an excellent five-man cast performing a hard-hitting one-act drama in "Feedlot" at the Back Alley Theatre in Van Nuys. Trouble is, the one-act play is buried within a rambling two acts.

Production-wise, this Laura Zucker presentation is first-rate, especially Allan Miller's tight direction and leads Richard Cox and Joseph Ragno.

But Patrick Meyers' weighty script about a college student who attempts to take over a feedlot operation to make some sort of point about society's persecution of males, prevents the production from being totally outstanding.

Looking back on the two acts, it becomes clear that very little is accomplished in act one that couldn't be quickly established in a longer, but solo, act two. Act one simply sets up the redneck stereotypes that the student aims to break down in the second half. (Yet Meyers spends an hour developing the stock personalities.)

The dimensions of the characters are not realized until the breaking-down process begins; that is, when Cox, as a student who is gay, holds hostage at gunpoint the arch-redneck, played by Ragno.

The tension that Meyers creates between the two men in act two makes engrossing drama. But couldn't he get to it faster?

Cox, who played a similar role as the killer in the film "Cruising," conveys the dimensions of a maniac bent on proving his point that men are their own worst oppressors, who have been taught that their purpose in life is to obtain power. What is wrong with compassion, he wonders, as he holds a gun to the homosexual-hating fellow worker. In it all, there is a horrifying sensuality to Cox' perf.

Cox' outstanding work is equaled by Ragno, who is recreating the role he originally played at Manhattan's Circle Repertory in 1978. Ragno is truly believable as the homophobe whose wife has left him and who's hitting the bottle hard.

As Ragno plays it, the character shows, without having to state it, that he doubts his own sexuality; thus his anti-gay obsession.

The conflict builds to an inevitable confrontation — a rape played here in the dark with gripping results due to Miller's staging of the aftermath.

Fine support is given by David Hanna and Ed Morgan as well as Tom Bower, who is especially good as one of the feedlot workers, a victim of his situation.

Patrick McFadden was set design consultant, and it's a terrific control room that the Back Alley Theatre has created. It's complete with flashing light panels and one of those elevators that rarely is believable on stage, yet works here because of realistic sound provided by Mark Shelley.

Lighting by Cynthia Bishop and Stevens Pliska, costumes by Carolyn Allport and music assembled by Chris Allport, all contribute well. *Fox.*