



LOCAL ENTERTAINMENT

by Leigh K. Romero

"In the Sweet Bye and Bye"

Going to pick up my tickets for "In the Sweet Bye and Bye" at the Back Alley Theatre. I stood behind a well dressed couple as they were exchanging their tickets for another night. It seems that Rue McClanahan, the star of the show, had to work late on her new series, "The Golden Girls," and therefore had to miss the performance. At twelve dollars a ticket, they obviously wanted their money's worth, and felt that any other actress would not do.



Left to Right: K. Callan, John Anderson, Rue McClanahan, and Christopher Murray in Donald Driver's IN THE SWEET BYE AND BYE at THE BACK ALLEY THEATRE.

I saw that performance, with Patricia Huston playing "Jessie" instead of Ms. McClanahan, and I must assure that couple that they missed a difficult, but ultimately rewarding ensemble effort. At first, it seemed that both Ms. Huston and we, the audience, were uncomfortable together and had to get to know each other better before we could both relax. But once we did, she within the confines of the homespun kitchen in a small town somewhere outside of Portland, and we with the most unorthodox person we would ever hope to meet, the play ripped along at a frenetic pace, drawing us into the lives of a family at once zany and common.

"Jessie" (Huston) and "Hagen", her husband (John Anderson) live alone in

an old house owned by Jessie's mother. Hagen has not worked in three years and that's exactly how long it's been since the couple has lived together as man and wife. Instead, Jessie has taken all her pent-up emotions to funerals, characteristically falling into the graves, onto the coffins, making a spectacle of herself. Hagen has put his energies into an illicit romance with Jessie's thrice-married sister, "Neva" (K Callahan). When their son arrives home from the hospital with a kaleidoscopic faced nurse, their settled lives turn topsy turvy. The comedy, by Donald Driver, is not the set-up, set-up laugh kind we're used to from sit-coms. Rather, the humor draws from the interactions of the characters. For instance, it is established early that Hagen and Neva tryst on Wednesday nights when Jessie goes to prayer meetings. But during the course of the play, one disaster after another strikes on Wednesdays, until a distraught Neva cannot help moaning, "Why does everything have to happen on a Wednesday?" Without exception, the actors are equal to the pace and the ensemble playing. It is distracting, however, to have a son who utters not one

line. There is a great opportunity for a character revealing monolog at one point, which instead is covered by the actor indicating wildly what his character is thinking.

The set by Rich Rose is a confusion of delightful patterns which engenders a homey feeling. His livingroom transformation must be the scenic feat of the season.

"In the Sweet Bye and Bye" which was due to close in August, is so popular it has been held over until October 13. Whether headlined by Ms. McClanahan or Ms. Huston, you won't want to miss it. The Back Alley Theatre is located at 15231 Burbank Blvd. in Van Nuys. Phone 780-2240 for reservations.

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