



LINDA KELSEY

Play looks at rebuilding of life after tragedy

By FRANN BART
Staff Writer

Multiple sclerosis, a progressive debilitating nerve disease, has robbed Stephanie Abrahams (Linda Kelsey) of her passion, her identity, and her reason for living — the ability to make beautiful music.

What happens then to a world-renowned violinist at the peak of her career, now a physical invalid in a wheelchair?

Tom Kempinski's two-act, two-character "Duet for One," now playing at the Back Alley Theatre in Van Nuys, shows a woman fighting. Fighting to maintain an almost manic veneer of optimism and acceptance of her condition and desperately fighting her psychiatrist,

Feldmann (played by Allan Miller) who is trying to unlock the tremendous rage and despair hidden beneath her facade.

The plot is based on the true story of famed cellist Jacqueline Du Pre. Although it isn't known what internal struggles Du Pre really underwent, Kelsey, who is best known for her role as reporter Billie Newman in "Lou Grant," is up to the demands of what it must feel like to know your brilliance has been forever dashed to pieces.

Bach's violin sonata played between scenes is a nice way of underscoring the pathos and maintaining the cohesiveness. Somehow, it doesn't seem overdone.

Director Ron Satlof does a great job of getting across the contrast and tension between Stephanie's mood-switching and manipulative mental game-playing and

Feldmann's seemingly detached but caring character.

The psychiatrist's humanity really shines through at the end when the near-suicidal Stephanie breaks down and tells him she won't be coming back for treatment any longer. She says she just can't adjust to the massive changes (including a now deteriorating marriage) when she's lost all she's worked for all her life.

Feldmann then calmly asks her if the same time next week is still convenient. He hasn't given up. We are left with the subtle impression that she won't, either.

Performances run Thursdays through Saturdays at 8 p.m. with Sunday matinees at 3 p.m. through March 31. Call 780-2240 for ticket information.