



ED KRIEGER

Christopher Michael Moore and Dennis Christopher are 'The Slab Boys'

The Slab Boys

REVIEWED BY DAVID GALLIGAN

Produced by Laura Zucker and Allan Miller for the Back Alley Theatre, 15321 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys; (818) 780-2240. Opened Oct. 24; plays Mon.-Wed. & Sat., 8; Sun., 3; ends Nov. 28.

The concept of director Bill Castellino pushes hard against the grain of John Byrne's *The Slab Boys*, a play of manners and morals of the working class set in a "slab room" at a Scottish carpet company. Castellino has mistaken zany comedy/drama for Marx Bros. farce and has, consequently, paced the play at a breakneck fury that tends to get garbled with the speed, let alone the accents of the evening.

They're an unholy trio, these slab boys. Phil and Spanky and Hector are an uneven group if ever there was one. Phil is one silly millimeter away from madness, one step away from his suicidal mother; a lad with dreams of entering art school, Dennis Christopher embellishes him with a sting as swift and deadly as a scorpion's tail. He makes darts out of words and manages a bullseye nine times out of 10. If he never shows Phil's soft spots, it might be a blatant disregard on the part of the director to deal with the play on a dramatic level. What little soul-baring is wrought in *Slab Boys* is delivered to an upstage wall. Christopher's accent, however, is on key with the locale. As George "Spanky" Farrell, Christopher Michael Moore is inconsistent with his Scottish brogue, though his characterization is in the right place. James LeGros manages to imbue Hector with a realistic fervor that keeps his role out of caricature and still balances the comedy beam—a deliciously comic scalawag. As Alan, the new slab boy, Michael Covert is properly withdrawn, a stranger in a '50s hornet's nest of rock n' roll mentalities and duck-tail hairdos.

The remaining players fall trap to their director's whims with entrances and exits that turn on a dime. As Willie Curry, the gaffer, John H. Fields is ludicrous in his declamatory interpretation while Catherine Harper, as Lucille Bentley, is pure exaggeration as a shapely co-worker. Jack Hogg, as portrayed by Bob McCracken, falls victim to a dreadful case of makeup. What should amount to a terrible case of acne looks like an attack of leprosy—and it is difficult to get beyond that as an audience. Zelda Rubinstein has accent problems in enacting a tea cart lady in the factory.

The set design by Chris Idoine is commendable other than the omission of the marble slabs the boys work on. Diana Eden's costume design is hit and miss (men didn't wear heeled boots in the '50s) with a decided leaning toward today's punk fashion more than anything else. Christine Lomaka designed the unassuming lighting.

John Byrne's *The Slab Boys* is no great shakes as a play but director Castellino hasn't serviced it correctly, either.