

## STAGE REVIEW

# 'THIN WALLS' ON THIN ICE; 'SLAB BOYS' DYE TO SUCCEED

By DAN SULLIVAN,  
*Times Theatre Critic*

It's good to see the Back Alley Theatre playing every night in the week instead of just weekends. It's good, too, that the Back Alley continues to focus on plays that Los Angeles hasn't seen before. But its current two-play repertory—"Slab Boys" at the top of the week and "Thin Walls" at the weekend—has some problems.

"Slab Boys" by John Byrne is a 1978 working-class comedy from Glasgow that director Bill Castellino has flattened into a farce. Its lapses are as nothing, however, next to those of Phoebe Suton's "Thin Walls," a comedy of Valley life and the stupidest new play of the year.

Of the dozen scenes written entirely to the convenience of the author, here's just one: A young career woman (Carol Potter) comes home to find her apartment looted, including her cherished silver. She feels sick, violated. At the door appears her old high-school

sweetheart (John Calvin), down from Oregon on a visit.

Imagine yourself as the woman. Wouldn't you at least mention to your old friend the awful thing that had just happened? At a minimum, wouldn't you close the door? In this play the woman immediately forgets the robbery (and the door) and starts catching up on old times with the guy, eventually going to bed with him.

Young people in the '80s may be that cool about their personal rela-

*Please see TWIN BILL, Page 4*



## INSIDE CALENDAR

FILM: "La Petite Sirene" reviewed by Kevin Thomas. Page 7.

STAGE: "Solo Flights" reviewed by Sylvie Drake. Page 5.

TV: Tonight on TV and cable. Page 8.

*Kris Kristofferson says he has much to be happy about despite career setbacks. Page 3.*



ELLIS HERWIG

Dennis Christopher, left, John H. Fields, center, Christopher Michael Moore, right, in "Slab Boys."

## TWIN BILL

Continued from Page 1

tionships, but not about their missing stereotypes. Here the looters are the just-moved-in couple next door (John Lansing and Theresa Kananik), who somehow have a key to the young woman's apartment.

How? Don't ask. The walls in this complex aren't half as flimsy as Sutton's plot. The Back Alley cast negotiates its complications with touching loyalty, particularly John Gallogly as the wimp who sleeps on the heroine's sofa. Allan Miller was the director, replacing Ron Leibman, who must have seen the handwriting on the wall.

"Slab Boys" is a much stronger play. If only director Bill Castellino hadn't instructed his players to barge through it, like a Bowery Boys farce! True, its characters take pride in behaving like the Bowery Boys. But there's a lot more at risk for them than that, and they know it.

Their job is to grind special dyes for the designers in a big Glasgow carpet factory, a boring process that could lead to something bigger if the lads will buckle down, which

He's got art school ahead of him, he thinks. He's wrong. This is a play about testing the limits of your world and paying for it. It is not just a bundle of sight gags. To be fair, it's not literally handled that way at the Back Alley. But the actors aren't given time to develop what's going on under the skylarking.

Nor, despite Chris Idoine's plausible set, do we have a sense of the factory as a place where some quite serious work goes on—for all the talk that "we're all crazy here." John H. Fields as the foreman literally does come on as crazy, with a mania for saluting and clicking his heels. A trace of this would be enough to establish him as a man who never got over being in the army.

Nor is it necessary for Catherine Harper, as the office sexpot, to constantly throw her chest around like the bumper of a '57 Cadillac—we get the point, already. But don't blame the actors. They're no more responsible for these excesses than is the cast of "Thin Walls" for the dreadfulness of its writing. It's a director's choice, and it ought to be restudied.

Even barging through, the company does pleasing work—Dennis

Moore as his generous best buddy; Michael Covert, as a boy whose social connections will have him out of the slab room by lunch; James LeGros as a boy who can expect to be there until he's 80. Zelda Rubinstein makes an impression, too, as the lady who comes in with the tea cart. "Slab Boys" has no trouble being bold and vivid. What it needs now is more pastel.

### 'SLAB BOYS'

John Byrne's play, at the Back Alley Theatre. Director Bill Castellino. Producers Laura Zucker and Allan Miller. Set design Chris Idoine. Costumes Diana Eden. Lighting Christine Lomacka. Sound Jerry Sider. With Christopher Michael Moore, James LeGros, Dennis Christopher, John H. Fields, Bob McCracken, Michael Covert, Zelda Rubinstein, Catherine Harper. Plays at 8 p.m. Mondays-Wednesdays and Saturdays; at 3 p.m. Sundays. Closes Nov. 28. \$12-\$14. 15231 Burbank Blvd, Van Nuys. 780-2240.

### 'THIN WALLS'

Phoef Sutton's play, at the Back Alley Theatre. Director Allan Miller. Producers Laura Zucker and Allan Miller. Set design Chris Idoine. Costumes Martha Burke. Lighting Christine Lomacka. Sound Jerry Sider. With John Calvin, John Gallogly, John Lansing, Theresa Kananik, Carol Potter. Plays at 8 p.m. Thursdays, Fridays and Sundays; at 3 p.m. Saturdays. Closes