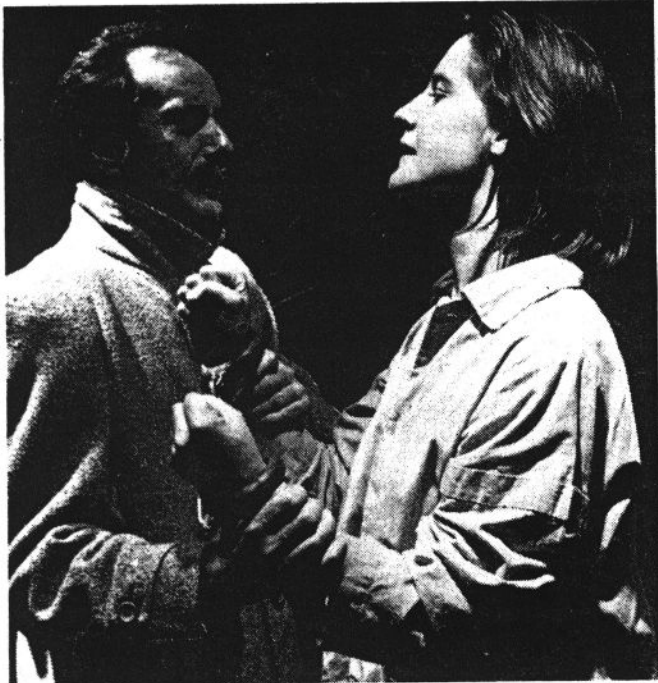


PICK OF THE WEEK



Ed Krieger

Allan Miller and Anna Katarina.

DAYS AND NIGHTS WITHIN

Set in an East Berlin prison in 1950, Ellen McLaughlin's strong play is about the intense and complicated relationship between an accused spy and her interrogator. As Elsa Weber, a woman suspected of being an American spy, Swiss-born Anna Katarina commands her role with a strength not often seen in American actresses. Not an ounce of calculation rests in her bones; she projects straight-ahead capability and a vulnerability which never resorts to the sexual. Allan Miller's communist interrogator is a tad too bureaucratic, but it's clear director Michael Pressman is going for understated believability. Pressman's taut direction makes this 90-minute show just long enough to stick a needle into our own brain waves. Half needing to break down the accused, half reeling from the accuser's relentless questions, we become co-conspirators, co-participants in this all-too-familiar process endured by political prisoners. The interrogator shrinks the accused's world to the size of her cell; entering her dreams, he becomes a wolf, eternally alive, endlessly pursuing her. Leslie Rose and Ken Lennon's lighting is particularly effective during these dream sequences. Jerry Sider's sound design is tense and superb throughout. I could do without a few of Katarina's mannerisms; likewise, a few modulations on her part while the interrogator changes his mode of psychological torture are somewhat abrupt. But this drama, winner of the Great American Play contest at the Actors Theater of Louisville last year, is thoughtful and well done. McLaughlin's play is finally a tribute to the remarkable resiliency of the human spirit and to the redemptive power of love. Amnesty International speakers head postperformance discussions on Wednesdays. Back Alley Theater, 15231 Burbank bank Blvd., Van Nuys; Wed.-Sun., 8 p.m.; Sun. mat, 3 p.m.; thru Nov. 30. (818) 780-2240.

—Maryl Jo Fox

We also recommend the following Equity-waiver productions: *Nite Club Confidential* at the Tiffany Theater, *Kvetch* at the Odyssey Theater, ... *About Anne* at Stages, *Steven Banks' Home Entertainment Center* at the Chamber Theater, *Street Scene* at the Company of Angels, *Brothers* at the Gnu Theater, *Bleacher Bums* at the Century City Playhouse, *Heartbeats* at the Matrix Theater, *Anita Mann's A.M.: A Blast From the Past* at the Backlot Cabaret, *Why Hanna's Skirt Won't Stay Down* at the Coast Theater, *Stitch and Yubie* at the Cassandra Gaylor Theater, *Early Tennessee* at the Powerhouse, *Beside Ourselves* at the Sills Theater, *Bouncers* at the Tiffany Theater, *Warren's Story* at Theater III, *Life and Limb* at the Boyd Street Theater, *Microtheater for the Digital Age* at the Powerhouse, *Sonata for Rimbaud* at Theatre/Theater, *Circle of Will* at the Zephyr Theater, *Habes Corpus* at the Studio Theater.

L.A. WEEKLY November 7-13, 1986

SMALLER THEATERS

The Valleys

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