

L. P. Weekly

**DUET FOR ONE** Written by Tom Kempinski, based on the experience of cellist Jacqueline Du Pre, this sustained dialogue between a famed concert violinist recently stricken by multiple sclerosis and her analyst is most assuredly an actress' play. (Anne Bancroft did it on Broadway in 1981 and Faye Dunaway will do it in an upcoming movie.) It is also a play that has no plot, strictly speaking. And, by virtue of the very subject matter — brilliant talent struck low and all that — it has a script that, if not handled subtly, lends itself to bathos and melodrama. Linda Kelsey is remarkably bad in the central role. A world-renowned musician must have dignity, poise, some *hâut* perhaps. Kelsey, however, plays in one prolonged hysterical pitch, like the caricatured *hausfrau* on Benzedithe the day her washer and dryer break down. Mugging, flailing her arms about, talking in accents, running over her shrink's toes with her wheelchair, she externalizes all of her character's feelings in sitcom-style overstatement. Playing opposite her, Allan Miller calmly resists this spectacle as long as he can, but finally succumbs in his climactic monologue, where he exhorts his patient to try to live again. If the actress would only compose herself, this might be a perfectly engaging evening of theater. Back Alley Theater, 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys; Thurs.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 3 p.m. thru March 31. Call (818) 780-2240.

—Helen Knode

Daily News

# 'Duet' explores tragic life story

**F**or a time, in the '60s, cellist Jacqueline Du Pre had the proverbial "it ail." She was a world-class musician whose marriage to pianist Daniel Barenboim was trumpeted in the media as the fairy tale of the music world. Then she contracted multiple sclerosis, was confined to a wheelchair and never played again.



Linda Kelsey and Allan Miller star in "Duet for One," by Tom Kempinski, at the Back Alley Theatre in Van Nuys.

Tom Kempinski's play, based on Du Pre's tragic story, offers a fictional violinist, Stephanie Abrahams, whose irreversibly degenerative condition only recently has been diagnosed.

The play opens with Stephanie's initial (and unenthusiastic) meeting with the psychiatrist her husband has urged her to see. Stephanie isn't really interested in therapy — she's upset, of course, but isn't that only natural?

The drama unfolds in a series of scenes between patient and doctor. The static staging — one room, two mostly seated characters — frames the inexorable progression of

Stephanie's bravado, denial, anger, depression and ultimately, acceptance.

'Duet for One' was produced on Broadway with Anne Bancroft and Max Von Sydow. This Back Alley West Coast premiere production impresses as a star vehicle without the requisite tour-de-force characterization.

'Duet for One' is playing at the Back Alley Theatre, 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys. Performances are Thursday through Saturday at 8 p.m., Sunday at 3 p.m. through March 31. Tickets are \$12 to \$14. For reservations, call (818) 780-2240.

—Danielle Roter