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The Valley Entertainer

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STAGE REVIEWS:

Semi-Sweet, Semi-Dry

In The Sweet Bye and Bye

Written by Donald Driver
Directed by Alan Miller
Produced by Laura Zucker

The Back Alley Theatre
15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys
780-2240

Performances through August 18

Reviewed by
Cynthia Lee Smith

One of the repercussions of death, for the living, is that it reminds us how fragile we are and how important it is to actually live life before it passes us by. For Jessie and Hagen (Rue McClanahan and John Anderson), the prospect of attending yet another funeral in their senior years stirs some pent-up feelings between them. Jessie has acquired the habit of throwing herself into open graves, while Hagen has taken refuge in the arms of his wife's sister. Eventually, they each confront their unrealized dreams and the inadequacies they find in each other, and home is sweet home once again.

In the Sweet Bye and Bye at the Back Alley Theatre is superbly directed and beautifully acted. While the play itself has a number of structural flaws and everything is wrapped up into a nice tidy bow, one has to admire the first-class production values Alan Miller has given it.

John Anderson and Rue McClanahan give this material a richness and vigor that go far beyond the words. The work they're doing is outstanding. I Callan as Neva (the sister who needs sex every Wednesday) is an absolute delight. And Rebecca Gilchrist as Carmel (the reformed alcoholic) is convincingly strong, yet vulnerable.

The play is not a rip-roaring comedy nor is it deadly serious. It's a simple story, with humorous overtones, about two people who are too old to actualize their dreams, but are young enough at heart to still give life a few kicks. It's a production worth seeing.



Rue McClanahan stars in "In The Sweet Bye and Bye"