

August 1985

Back Alley Theatre

In the Sweet Bye and Bye

by Kean Mantius

If anyone still thinks you have to go over the mountain to see good theater, take a look at "In the Sweet Bye and Bye" at the Back Alley

Theatre in Van Nuys. The play, by Donald Driver, is a sly, witty comedy that, like all good comedies, reveals an inner truth about people.

"In the Sweet Bye and Bye" concerns itself with a middle-aged couple, Hagen

and Jessie, who live in a small town in Oregon. Jessie, played by Patricia Huston the night I was there, is a dreamer—always wishing she could go somewhere, do something bigger than her real life. She's hooked on funerals, as death represents the ultimate "somewhere else." Hagen, her husband (John Anderson), is a put-on artist, constantly setting her up for a punchline and, not incidentally, trying to kid her out of her dissatis-

faction. Neva, Jessie's sister (K Callan), has gone through three husbands and is carrying on with Jessie's. Then there's mama (Jessie's), whom we never meet, but who calls on the phone at least 30 times a day; and Bill Leland (Christopher Murray), the alcoholic "son," who appears but never speaks.

Bill Leland is brought home from the hospital by his nurse, Carmel (Rebecca Gilchrist), whose practical friendliness blows some fresh air through the cobwebs in this family's corners.

The actors are, without exception, superb—so convincing that after spending two hours in their kitchen, I felt I should thank them for having me over.

The characters they play are lovable lunatics—the kind of lunatics that are found in every family—and the changes they go through during the play's crisis are believable and satisfying. In fact, that's the word I would apply to my experience of this play: I felt I was in good hands from the moment the actors appeared on the stage, and as a theatrical experience it was richly satisfying.

Due to its popular and critical success, the run of "In the Sweet Bye and Bye" has been extended through October 13th. Go see it!

The Back Alley Theatre is located at 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys. "In the Sweet Bye and Bye" runs Thursdays through Sundays at 8:00 p.m., Sunday matinee at 3:00 p.m. Tickets are \$12 on Thursdays and Sunday, \$14 on Friday and Saturday. Information and reservations: 780-2240.



Rue McClanahan and John Anderson in a scene from Donald Driver's "In The Sweet Bye and Bye," now playing at the Back Alley Theatre.

WARNER CENTER
N • E • W • S
Volume 4 Number 1
August 1985