

STAGE

When it comes to ambitious ideas, it's all 'Greeks' to them

By Jack Burditt

Daily News Staff Member

Hasn't anyone told the folks at the Back Alley Theatre in Van Nuys that they're a mid-size Equity-waiver theater; that their 93-seat venue could fit into the lobby of some larger houses?

Apparently not, or why else would they tackle a project as ambitious as "The Greeks"? Talk about growing pains.

"The Greeks" comprises nine plays presented as a trilogy, chronicling the fall of Troy and its aftermath. Adapted by John Barton and Kenneth Cavendar from the works of Euripides — with additional material from Sophocles, Aeschylus and Homer — it was originally produced in England by the Royal Shakespeare Company in 1981.

The Back Alley production will be the Los Angeles premiere, following productions at Williamstown, Hartford Stage Co. and Seattle's ACT. "As far as I know, those are the only brave souls that have attempted it," said "Greeks" producer Laura Zucker.

The play is currently in preview, with the official opening set for Wednesday.

Zucker and Allen Miller, director of the epic, founded the Back Alley in 1979. Both Sherman Oaks residents, they opened the theater in Van Nuys not only for its proximity but to give the Valley a cultural boost.

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Producer Laura Zucker
Back Alley Theatre

Miller. "Working on it is a privilege. One of the bigger ideas in this material is: What are the gods? How do the gods behave, what are their influence on our lives?"

Miller described the uncertainty of working on such a massive project as one of the great pleasures of working in the theater. "Without danger, there is no sense of accomplishment."

If "Greeks" follows the path of past productions at the Back Alley, then it should have a successful run. At a time when many theaters are struggling financially, Zucker shows frustration because they are playing to capacity audiences nearly every night. Thus, it is not surprising that the Back Alley is expanding in the

near future. Zucker and Miller are interested in finding another location, possibly the old Van Nuys Post Office on Sylvan Street.

"People are hungry for good entertainment here, something close by and convenient," said Zucker. "If you are dependent on the Ventura Freeway, you have to structure your life around rush hour."

For those people, the Valley has the Back Alley Theatre. And now the Back Alley has "The Greeks."

STAGEVIEW

■ **What:** "The Greeks," adapted by John Barton and Kenneth Cavendar.

■ **Where:** Back Alley Theater, 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys.

■ **Starring:** 35 actors; 90 costumes.

■ **Behind the scenes:** Produced by Laura Zucker, directed by Allen Miller.

■ **When:** Opens Wednesday. Part I plays Wednesdays and Saturdays at 8 p.m.; Part II, Thursdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 3 p.m.; Part III, Fridays and Sundays at 8 p.m. Performances continue through June 1.

■ **How much:** Wednesdays, Thursdays and Sundays, \$13; Fridays and Saturdays, \$15.

■ **For tickets:** (818) 780-2240.

■ **Bargain:** Those who buy two parts at the regular price get the third part free. There is a special marathon performance (all three parts) on April 27.

Alley in 1979. Both...
Oaks residents, they opened the theater in Van Nuys not only for its proximity but to give the Valley a cultural boost.

"I think we offer very interesting plays that have substance to them," explained Zucker. "We don't do Neil Simon revivals, and there's nothing wrong with that, but we try to put on productions that you wouldn't see at other theaters."

Indeed. Zucker first began work on "Greeks" three years ago. The production features 35 actors, 90 costumes, an original score by David Kates, an enormous set and the renting, borrowing and buying of additional equipment. The actors are required to dress in shifts.

As described by Zucker, the epic brings to life the gods and heroes of ancient times, rendering their heroic deeds and passions into a story comprehensible to modern audiences.

Miller admits this sort of material has not interested him in the past. Yet he saw something different in "Greeks" as soon as he read the play.

"Every emotion conceivable is in these three parts — the spectrum is just incredible, the language is just wonderful," said

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Andrew Robinson, Elicia LaPort in rehearsal for "The Greeks."