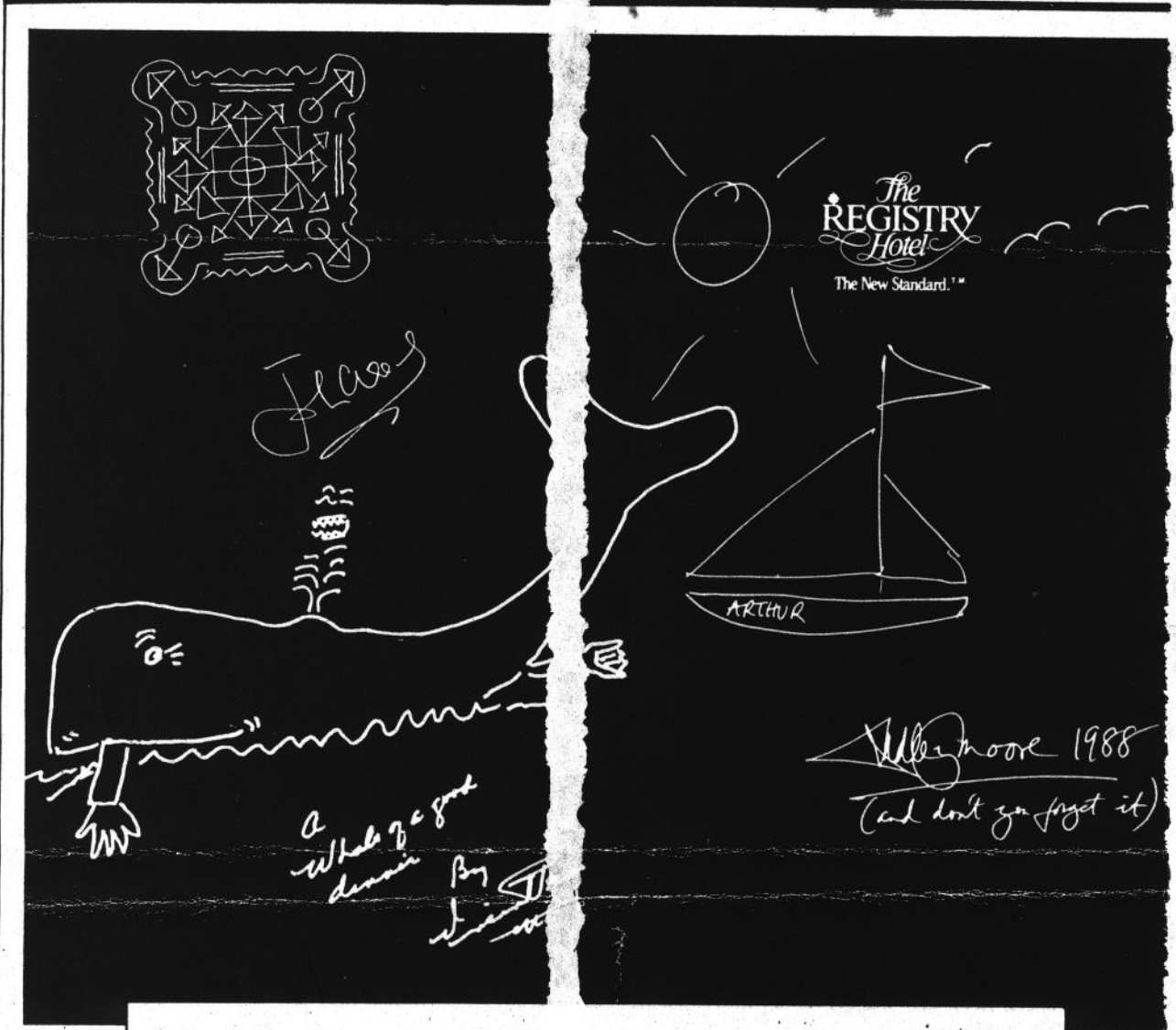


# Easy Week

D I N I N G & E N T E R T A I N M E N T G U I D



by Lenore Blossom

South Bay theatre has changed forever.

In fact, national theatre emerged brand new on Oct. 3 when Equity Waiver Theatre became history. Actors Equity (stage actors union) no longer waives the right for members to work for little or nothing. With the inception of the equity-waiver ruling in 1972, small

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(99 seats or less) under scale or no lent; enabling pro ducers to and provid unemploye result was tre at an a South Bay Without its perform

theatres could draw crowds and, hopefully, stay in the black or, at best, remain open. The equity-waiver also provided, in the rare case, that if a production moved to a large equity house (i.e. "The Hasty Heart" and "A Woman of Independent Means"), the actor could then move to an equity cong

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Doodles au the sake of Alley Thea

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>36

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## Doodles

tract if he stayed with the crew.

This arrangement seemed to everyone, for a while. But all good things come to an end, even the land of make believe. Equity began to believe its members were being taken advantage of by unscrupulous producers who brought in large profits while paying performers nothing. On March 21, 1988, Equity mailed its proposed new 99-seat theatre plan to all members, and it was passed:

1. Rehearsal time: 8 weeks
2. Rehearsal honorarium
3. A show can run up to 12 weeks if in a 99 seat theatre and longer if in a smaller house, all shows must run up to 12 weeks if in a 99 seat theatre and longer if in a smaller house, all shows must convert to an equity contract or close after allotment.
4. Performers are to be paid from \$5 to \$14 a performance, depending on how many seats.
5. Equity has the right to advise this plan at any time.

Much to the dismay of many 99-house theatre producers, the contract has become law and the amount of small live theatre productions could diminish for lack of revenue.

One Equity Waiver theatre has found a brilliant method of raising revenue for its non-profit organization. The Back Alley Theatre in Van Nuys, under the expert guidance of producer/director Alan Miller and wife Laura Zukor, recently held their fourth annual Doodle Auction, raising \$35,000 in support of their theatre, dedicated to bringing only original productions to Los Angeles audiences.

A warm Saturday afternoon found a large group congregated on the sprawling green lawn of Dr. and Mrs. Marc Friedman, Encino residents. The silent auction began promptly at 2 p.m. and the very exciting live auction took over at 4:15 p.m., with Alan Miller as auctioneer. What was a

Doodle Auction? Sketches, paintings, memos, scribbles, signed books, everything from Johnny Carson's autographed necktie to Magic Johnson's tennis shoe were sold to the highest bidder, raising money for the Back Alley Theatre's non-profit productions.

Carefully framed in beautiful acrylic, displayed on tables shaded by meticulously tended trees, the various art works were hard to



John Russell  
May 1988

Doodle by Sir John Gleigud, sold for \$450.

resist. For a mere \$35 admission fee (also donated to the theatre) each guest was courted by a string quartet, canapes, caviar, open bar and the singularly most intriguing and enigmatic art show ever assembled.

For an hour, the silent auction proceeded to bring forth competitive bids, each art work requiring a various opening bid, set increments, and the bid lists grew as more guests mingled and monitored their chosen treasures.

Jane Russell's stylish self-portrait drew a small crowd, as did the beautifully rendered sketch of a pregnant woman by actress Bonnie Bedelia. Hugh Downs' curious drawing of "Parts of a Dagger" amused enough people to draw several bids. But as the silent auction drew to a close, a large crowd gathered as two women faced off, pencils drawn, and fought for possession of a typewritten memo with the spiky, unadorned signature of Katherine Hepburn slash-

ed across the bottom, dated Dec. 2, 1986. A verbal bid-off was the final solution and an unobtrusive woman in turquoise triumphantly put her autograph on a check for \$925.

Even mere signed photographs brought in bids as several mothers of teen-agers competed for a dashing eight by ten glossy of young River Phoenix, recently proclaimed star of "Running On Empty." When the live auction commenced, almost 100 charming doodles had raised a handsome sum of money in support of the theatre.

But when Alan Miller stepped up to the microphone, held up the first item for bid in the live auction, a skillfully rendered effacing portrait of Alistair Cooke the real fun began, and suddenly the crowd heard "SOLD for \$500."

Miller's doozie doodle idea came about during an enlightened visit to San Francisco several years ago. Miller and his partner, in business and life, wife Laura Zukor saw an advertisement in the local paper for a doodle auction by an arts council and "we had never heard of a doodle auction before."



Actress Jane Russell doodle self-portrait.

because of our interest in the organization we wanted to know what this was and they had a little appetizers and some drinks and some very well dressed people and about 25 doodles of

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### Doodles

436  
ple like Van Johnson and some movie star people and was delightful; we found ourselves bidding on a couple of doodles but the prices went way past what we thought (they would be) and we realized they were giving money to the organization and we thought what a wonderful way to have a possible fund raiser. I really know a lot of people, that I've worked with (Miller is an actor) I've been around, taught or acted with from Paul Newman to Lily Tomlin and I made a whole list of all these people and we said let's do our own doodle auction."

Miller says four out of five people he wrote those first letters of request to gave him doodles. "They knew it was for the theatre, they knew of the theatre, they were delighted to do it and it has grown each year. We get more and more doodles and more and more people coming to the doodle event." Word of mouth brings doodles: L.A. Laker mega-star Kareem Abdul-Jabbar's vet is on the board of directors of the Back Alley Theatre and asked Kareem for a doodle and the basketball legend traced an outline of his head and it sold for a good deal of money. Kirk Douglas has a house and Miller and his wife know and wrangled a doodle through their mutual connection and then because he did a doodle I could write to Burt Lancaster and say your buddy Kirk did this and then Walter Matthau gave me a doodle the first year, so then I was able to write to Jack Lemmon and say your buddy gave me a doodle and so on. It's a very nice letter that tells essentially what the doodle is, what it does, how it fits into

structures itself. Anyone who buys a doodle is making a tax-deductible contribution to the theatre."

Publicity and the auction grows each year; last year "People" magazine featured the event as does the L.A. Times, Herald Examiner, t.v. news programs and now, as Miller delightedly noted, "the Easy Reader is covering it! It is a most unusual event and the cheerfulest way we've ever found of raising money for the theatre."

Good manners keep Miller from requesting doodles two years in a row from the same celebrity but there have been exceptions, a choice of the donor; Paul Newman and Dr. Seuss graciously sent consecutive doodles. Politeness notwithstanding, Miller is an avidly organized and determined "doodle snatcher," carrying around a doodle kit wherever he goes and grabbing stars on the run. He caught up



Rocky Graziano's self-portrait

do him justice, but still sold.

Trek series fetched \$250 in this year's live auction, which one of the greatest minds in science fiction history contributed a marvelous drawing to the Back Alley Theatre, selling for \$500. I doodled as the lucky bidder and sold his doodle by Isaac Asimov.

Isn't Alan Miller sorely tempted to covet priceless items for himself? "I can't tell you how useful it is to get some of these doodles from people who are multiple models and idols of my life that I personally want. Arthur Miller sent us a doodle and I bid on it but I got outbid by so much I had to stop bidding." I know how he felt as I was swiftly outbid for a doodle by Sir Alec Guinness (self-portrait with woodpecker on head) for \$550. Sir John Gielgud's flowers whisked by for \$400 and several cartoons by the great Walter Steig left me languishing at a bid of \$900.

As the live bidding progressed, Miller never losing his nerve under the heat of competition after the afternoon sun, it became obvious that the more "artistic" creative the doodle, the more extravagant the bid. "Golde Rue McClanahan's very intricate and colorful felt pen painting of a sun and moon brought in \$400. The Olympic champion Brian Boitano's colorful and animated sketch of a skater executing a layback jump sold for \$250 and the new golden boy athlete, Wayne Gretzky's subtle pair of stick figures, one frowning under a rain cloud and the other grinning under a brilliant sun was snapped for \$450.

Top prize of the afternoon was a bargain price of \$2,200 sold to a lovely brunette who purchased more items than any other bidder, was a pencil sketch of the White House with the note "not a bad place to live"; artist... Michael Dukakis.

Alan Miller has discovered a gold mine, a profitable and cheerful way of raising money for his theatre. Perhaps the famous and near famous of the South Bay could be cajoled into doodling for a good cause, to ponder for Hermosa County leaders and fund raiser



Bob Hoskins waxes whimsical as he doodles.

with George Burns this year and the tiny work of art hastily sketched on a piece of Caesar's Palace stationery sold for \$400. Ray Bradbury once sent his grocer shopping list with aliens and sci-fi doodles all over it. "Alien" Leonard Nimoy's sketch of himself as Spock from the ever popular Star

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