

FOR DIRECTING PAIR, IT'S 'THE GREEKS' TO THEM

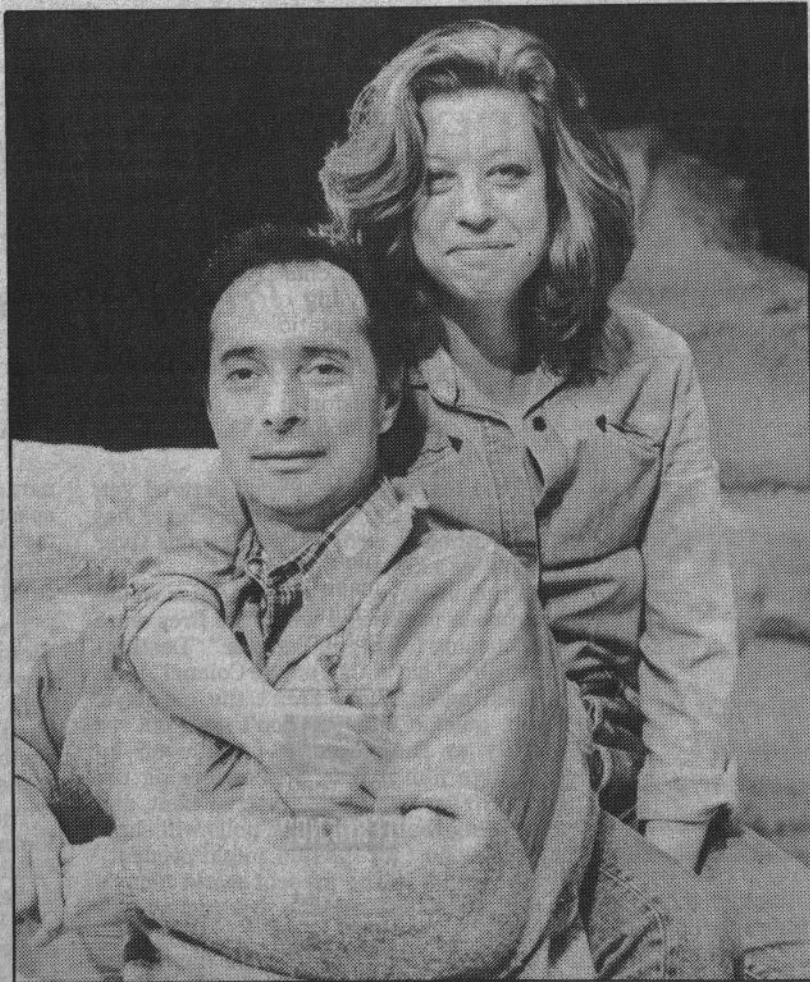
By JANICE ARKATOV

"If we don't seem happy," said Laura Zucker, "it's only because we're so incredibly tired."

With reason. On Wednesday, Zucker and Allan Miller (husband-and-wife producing directors of the Back Alley Theatre) will unveil their most ambitious project to date: "The Greeks," a collection of nine plays (six-hours over three nights) by Euripides, Sophocles and Aeschylus and an adaptation of the works of Homer, all by John Barton and Kenneth Cavander.

"What they've done," explained producer Zucker, "is take all the characters in the house of Atreus: Clytemnestra, Agamemnon and their children—Iphigenia, Electra and Orestes—and basically follow their stories. Also, there are some of the Trojan characters like Hecuba and Cassandra, connected in the sequential order of a story." As for the primarily untouched language, "It's not modern in the sense of street talk—not reduced to the vernacular—but it's direct: crisp and spare. And very accessible."

Zucker originally came upon the play three years ago in a London bookstore. "Immediately, I said, 'This is fascinating, compelling, different than anything we've done. Nothing like this has been done in L.A. for ages.' And I began the very



MONICA ALMEIDA

Allan Miller and Laura Zucker on the set of "The Greeks."

long, arduous process of negotiating for the rights. We applied as part of the (1984) Olympic Arts Festival—we thought we were a shoo-in, that nothing could be as thematically relevant as this—and were turned down by the the panel. They didn't think we could do it."

But Zucker came out fighting. She got the rights, and—after a long search—hired director Barbara Damashek. After two months in preproduction, however, Damashek departed, saying the project was "too big for her." Another director, Frank Condon, was found, but after grappling with the work for several weeks, he left too.

"It was all very amicable," director Miller noted. "But you have to understand, you're talking about an eight-week rehearsal schedule—and a Herculean task."

Although he had a string of successful directorial outings at the theater ("In the Sweet Bye and Bye," "Are You Now or Have You Ever Been"), Miller was initially reticent to get involved beyond a "supervising director" capacity. "After Frank left, we were trying to decide what to do, and I had some time off between acting jobs, so I began to read the material—over and over. And I found myself absolutely sucked in by it," he said.

"Allan did six weeks preproduction on this," said Zucker. "He

wrote down every light cue, every sound cue: he mapped out the production, the way you would a film. He had the entire thing schematized before he started rehearsal. So he can work on a piece in the third part before he works on something in the first part—and he knows how they're going mesh."

Stringing together that overall vision, Miller said, has been a real challenge. "During rehearsal, you watch each piece: 'Is this redundant? Are the rhythms moving from here to here?' It's like doing an orchestral piece—true of any play, but compounded by the fact that this is much more extensive."

And when Miller finds himself overwhelmed—and "can't see the forest for the trees"—he turns gratefully to his producer.

"I don't think anybody has any idea what a producer does," Zucker said. "Doing the budget and coming up with the money is the small part. I do *everything*: I sit in the back row and try to watch the shape of the piece, and I'm up at the sound board—and I'm also backstage, repinning Clytemnestra's dress and jumping on stage with Allan to restage a sequence."

Also vying for Zucker's attention: an original score (by David Kates), 35 actors, 90 costumes, 140 light cues, 87 sound cues, and a sprawling, rocky set—of plywood, chicken wire and muslin, polystyrene foam and 1,000 pounds of fiberglass resin.