



Guests at auction to benefit Back Alley Theatre browse through display of doodles by the

famous, including a few light notes from Phyllis Diller, left, and philosophy from Paul Newman.

BRIAN GABBERTY / Los Angeles Times

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## LEAD NEWS

# Scribblings of the Stars Snatch Pretty Penny at Theater Event

By DOUG SMITH, Times Staff Writer

The crowd of San Fernando Valley theater lovers met over marinated salmon, crudites and tortellini tidbits in the backyard of a Sherman Oaks mansion and, along with all the genteel talk this setting spawned, managed to spend \$13,000, without apparent pain, on doodles.

Moved by the quiet appeal of an auctioneer whose voice was as mellifluous as the background music, they bid as much as \$650 apiece for creations by 65 illustrious names of film, sports and politics.

The jottings of Paul Newman, along with a touch of his philosophy, brought \$450. Bidders paid \$200 each for a page of a speech by Mayor Tom Bradley and an outline of the hand of Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

The beneficiary of the Saturday evening event was the Back Alley Theatre of Van Nuys, whose members bring new plays to Los Angeles and produce plays by the Valley's own playwrights.

Like all theater directors, those of the Back Alley Theatre must occasionally ask their supporters for money.

## Genesis of Idea

So Laura Zucker and Allan Miller, the Back Alley's producing directors, were delighted on a trip to San Francisco last fall when they discovered an idea that seemed to manufacture money out of thin air.

"We noticed an announcement in the paper for a fund-raiser for a group that helps playwrights," Zucker recalled. "Out of curiosity we showed up."

They found that the group had acquired about 20 doodles by fa-

mous people.

"It was really fun," Zucker said. "And it raised a lot of money. We knew nothing like that has ever been done in L.A."

"Between all the people we knew, we came up with quite a list. It's very easy to ask people for a doodle. They usually get hit up all the time for money and services and their time."

## Attended by 300

About 300 people paid \$20 each to attend the event at the restored Spanish Revival home of Jerry and T. J. Berns. As a trio of musicians wearing blazers and white slacks played softly, the guests chatted, devoured hors d'oeuvres made by the theater staff and examined the objets d'art.

Mounted in Plexiglas frames, the doodles covered three tables. They also covered every quirk of the artistic self-image, from a brooding, well-crafted portrait of himself by Donald Sutherland to a lipstick kiss by Lesley Ann Warren.

They were philosophical. "We are all animals. Let us care for one another"—Nancy Walker.

They were existential. "Oh what a rogue and peasant slave am I"—Newman, under a doodle of a pathetic-looking man shouting at the top of his lungs.

They were predictable. "Thanks for the Memories"—Bob Hope.

They were flip. "Phyllis Diller 85 (not my age)"—signed under a sheet of juvenile scrawling.

Some offerings were revealing. On a page from his inaugural speech, Bradley showed his preferences in political expression by frequently scribbling over the

typewritten words in his own hand.

But once the bidding started under a balmy twilight, it quickly became apparent that the depth and inventiveness of the work wasn't necessarily the measure of its value.

Celebrity was the true commodity.

Allison Liddi, who works for the theater, said she wanted the autograph of Fosse "because it's him. I don't care what the doodle is like. He touched the paper. Bob Fosse is a genius."

The Fosse signature came up after a fish blowing bubbles by Dom DeLuise sold for more than \$100. The bidding went to \$35. Liddi frowned. That was beyond her limit. "Shoot," she said, as it sold for \$40.

Not much later, however, Desi Arnaz, who signed his name five times down a sheet of paper, went begging.

"Open at \$100," said auctioneer Jim Goodman. That suggestion was met by silence.

"Where are all the *babatu* fans?" asked Goodman, who donated his good humor along with his time. "Can we start the bidding at \$50?" Silence again.

"I have a dollar," he said at last. "It's going to get fierce now. How about 15? Fifteen dollars? Bless you."

The bidding did get fierce at times.

Hope's motto sold for \$200; Sutherland's self-portrait brought \$250, and the autograph of Katharine Hepburn, \$300.

The highest price paid was \$650 for a work by Charlton Heston. He drew a scene from his recent mission to Ethiopia. It wasn't a doodle.

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