

On Stage in L.A.

The Readjusted Picture

By Jenee Gill



A posthumous Shirley (Phoebe Dorin) consoles her son Artie (James Stern) and husband Mort (Allan Miller).

What's wrong with this picture? Not a great deal in the case of the Back Alley Theatre's production of Donald Marguiles' "What's Wrong With This Picture." Under the direction of Stuart Damon (of General Hospital fame), the production is both entertaining and touching.

The play takes place just following the shiva for Shirley, convincingly played by Phoebe Dorin, who returns from the grave to see her husband Mort (Allan Miller), and her son Artie (James Stern). In a mixture of a Neil Simon saga

of a Brooklyn Jewish family and Heaven Can Wait, Shirley stays around long enough after her death to complete some of the unfinished business of her life, including the redecorating she had begun before she was relentlessly snuffed out by a tough piece of moo shoo pork. Allan Miller, as Shirley's frustrated and lonely widower, plays the part with a moving sense of the anguish of death, and James Stern as Artie has some truly electric moments. The three actors work excellently together, making this supernatural comedy both comfortable and close.

Other members of the family also appear in the play, giving a chance for some enjoyable family wit and poignant insight into how a family deals with unexpected death. Mort's insufferable sister, Ceil, a husbandless wanna-be mother, and Mort's mother Bella bring wit and mourning into the already chaotic household. Mort's semi-senile father Sid adds his warmly comic presence and commentary as well. All together this talented cast collaborates in a witty and sentimental show. Set design, lighting and costumes add to the production's delicately humorous mood, making the Back Alley's "What's Wrong With This Picture" well worth a trip to the Valley.

Performances are Thursday through Saturday evenings at 8 p.m., and Sundays at 2 and 7 p.m. until May 20. Tickets \$13.50 to \$17.50. The Back Alley Theatre is located at 15231 Burbank Boulevard in Van Nuys. For tickets information call (818) 780-2240.