

'Wild Side' is not yet in step

By TOM JACOBS
Daily News Theater Critic

"A Walk on the Wild Side" is a bit too tame.

Will Holt's musical adaptation of Nelson Algren's novel opened its premiere production Sunday at the Back Alley Theatre — a

play. It's an uneven work, at times compelling, at other times flat and superficial.

Holt calls it a work in progress, and as such it has a lot of potential. There are many fine dramatic moments and strong songs. Now, the entire thing has to be strengthened, lengthened and deepened.

The Depression-era story centers around Dove Linkhorn (Jeb Brown), a young man from Texas who hopped a freight to New Orleans in order to find fame and fortune. Dove is shoeless, penniless and illiterate, but he has faith in himself.

He eventually finds himself at a house of prostitution, where he agrees to star in a live-sex show (the precursor of today's porno-
tance, he doesn't mind the work, and he loves the money. But he makes several enemies among the

employees and regular customers, and an encounter with one of them leads to the play's violent climax.

Holt's songs, which are in a folk-country style, are often catchy and clever. But too many of them seem too benign for this abrasive story and seamy setting. There should be more darkness

underneath the transparently
mism: Dove is entering into a cesspool of degradation, but we don't really feel it.

Another problem is that, at a little over two hours, the story seems too condensed. What's more, the optimistic ending (more upbeat than the book's) doesn't seem entirely earned.

Dove isn't an easy character to care about, but Jeb Brown has enough magnetism to keep him compelling. The entire cast is

THE FACTS

- **The play:** "A Walk on the Wild Side."
- **Where:** Back Alley Theatre, 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys.
- **When:** 8 p.m. Thursdays, 7 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays, 2 and 7 p.m. Sundays, through Nov. 14.
- **Starring:** Jeb Brown, Adrienne
Cyrus and Alex Corbett.
- **Behind the scenes:** Written and composed by Will Holt. Directed by Patricia Birch and Allan Miller.
- **Tickets:** \$14.50 to \$18.50. For more information, call (818) 780-2240.
- **Our rating:** B.

strong, in fact, and Patricia Birch and Allan Miller have done a remarkable job staging this good-sized show in a cramped space.