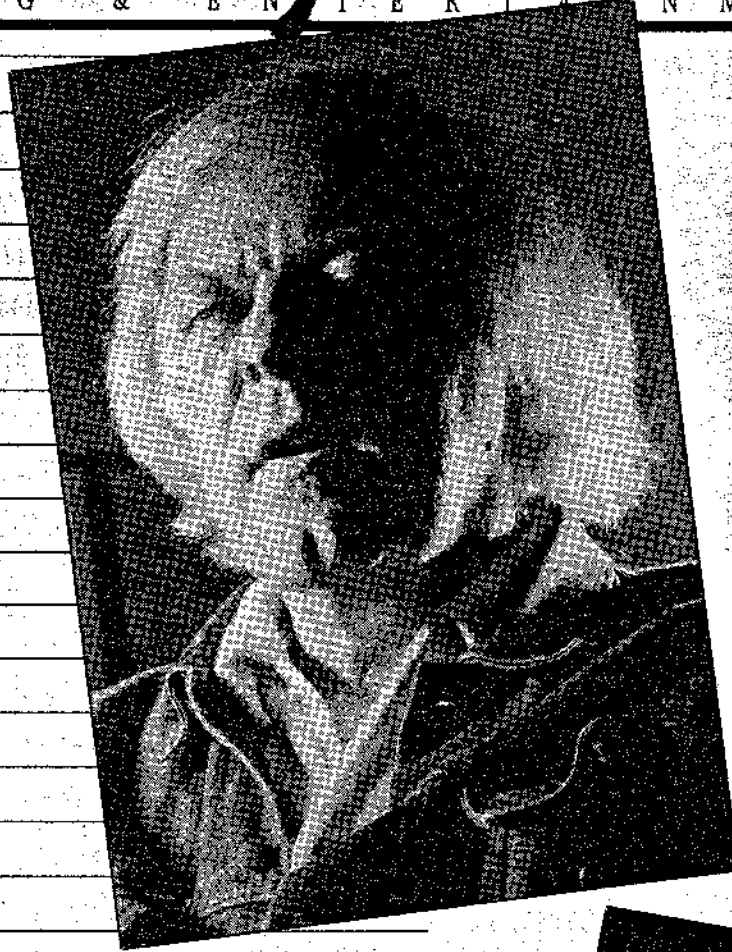


PLAYING PROPHET



by Lenore Blossom
Hermosa Beach is not going to break off and slide into the ocean when the "big one" hits California... that's the good news. But that devastating quake so recently on everyone's mind will hit in 1999; according to Alan Vaughan, world famous psychic and channeler. Vaughan, the former editor of "Psychic" and "Reincarnation Report" magazines, has authored several books on this fascinating subject and appeared hundreds of times on talk shows, including "The Tonight Show" with Johnny Carson, demonstrating his channeling ability and extraordinary talent for predicting the future. Vaughan has also often been brought in by stymied police departments to help solve dead end murder cases, including the grisly Atlanta child murders a few years ago. Vaughan claims baffled police detectives enlisting the aid of psychics is common practice if not common knowledge. "The Los Angeles Police Department, I am told, has an agreement; they make the psychic sign an agreement that they will not mention anything

►39

Back Alley Theatre

presents

AMAZING GRACE

Review by Lenore Blossom

"Amazing Grace," Back Alley Theatre, 15231 Burbank Blvd. Van Nuys. Thursday at 8 p.m., Friday through Sunday at 7 p.m., Sunday at 2 p.m. For tickets and information call (818) 780-2240.

Psychic phenomena is a subject that fascinates all but the completely incurious.

Playwright Sandra Deer has carefully crafted her ►38



Theater

◀37

script "Amazing Grace" playing now through mid-August.

Deer cleverly presents a play about real people, one of whom just happens to be a psychic and thus avoids the pitfalls of a possible mumbo-jumbo situation which could leave a disbelieving audience.

Psychic Grace Tanner is, in fact, amazingly gifted with insight but playwright Deer and actress Patricia Huston keep this character's feet so firmly planted on the ground one cannot help but believe in her ability to see into the future and by play's end, almost believe we all have the gift but only lack direction to utilize it.

The Los Angeles Police Department is stumped by a series of child murders and finally turns to Malibu resident Tanner, a Georgia born psychic who lives with her retarded grandson Troy (Jim Heistand). Tanner resists aiding the police at first, claiming she cannot change what will be and has had enough of finding dead bodies to last her a lifetime. She does, of course, eventually agree to help and the plot evolves around Tanner, the spirit guide she channels through, and a cast of characters brought together by uncommon circumstances and common needs.

Deer livens up her script with "Teacher," Tanner's spirit guide, a

pragmatic, dramatic soul who runs around, emphatically directing the lives of anyone who will listen and learn how to communicate with one's higher self. Actress Huston is excellent as Grace Tanner/Teacher, in complete control of both sides of the woman so easily controlled by her spirit guide and the bedlam of other minds. Huston dominates the stage with a seemingly effortless performance in a role that requires a great deal of effort, energy and confidence.

"Teacher" is an appropriate name for the spirit guide as playwright Deer's script teaches us to explore our own higher being, that the power of this universe is really the combined powers of those of us existing within its limitless boundaries; if we don't open ourselves to the possibilities in us, why exist at all? The power of positive thinking results in the power of positive being according to Tanner, Teacher and Deer.

The playwright's message hits home with force by her use of an ending with a twist; this is not just a play about solving heinous crimes, there is more satisfaction for the viewer than an criminal's getting his just reward.

Director Allan Miller keeps the pace moving throughout while still maintaining the necessary calm surrounding Tanner. Actor Daryl Roach pushes a little too hard as detective Josh Shepard, making it difficult to warm up to him, even

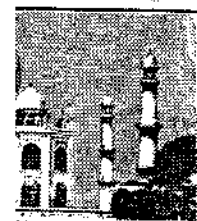
when circumstances dictate empathy.

Carmen Duncan is credible as actress Maggie Ames, showing a gradual, subtle growth of self-awareness. Young Jim Hiestand as the retarded grandson is well directed by Miller and performs a potentially uncomfortable role with ease and assurance, making the boy a warm and loving innocent. Christine Borna as the tiny victim Ramona almost steals the show with her beguiling though never cloy portrayal, but it is the remarkable performance of Huston as Tanner that is the backbone of this production.

Don Gruber's set has an earthy quality with a touch of mysticism just right for this show and Reid Woodbury's sound design is particularly effective with the perfect balance of volume, realism and a hint of the unexpected.

An added note of interest in keeping with the tradition of Thursday night "Talkback" sessions, immediately following the play, guest psychics, parapsychologists and channellers who have helped solve crimes are available for the audience to chat with.

The Back Alley has added a new feature with this production of "Amazing Grace," a special Friday night "Unwinder" ticket which includes a light supper and wine cooler with the cost of the ticket, all for \$20.



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