

Entertainment

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The oldest profession treated compassionately

By Dina Adler

Special to The Enterprise

The setting of "The Early Girl" is a house that definitely is not a home. It is more like a prison for the six prostitutes (euphemistically referred to as "working girls") who live and work there.

Under the absolute dictatorship of their madam, the women strictly adhere to the rigid rules that govern their lives, rarely leaving the premises, except for mandatory visits to the local doctor. Their relationships with each other are both empathetic and competitive, as they run in and out of the ultramodern kitchen to and from their assignments with dozens of unseen customers.

Written by actress Caroline Kava, who did her research for her role as a prostitute in the film "Heaven's Gate," the play is part comedy and part drama. It probes the lives of these women with understanding and candor, never slipping into clichés or sentimentality.

The acting is uniformly good, ranging from the brisk cynicism of the madam, Lana, who likes men as long as they pay for her favors, to the tentative vulnerability of Lily, the house's newest resident. At one recent performance,

Lana was played by Audree Chapman, the alternate, with a slick, all-knowing manner that could not have been improved upon, and Siobhan McCafferty's Lily had waiflike innocence that made me want to adopt her and "take her away from all this."

Kim Lankford as Laurel projects not only an intellectual aloofness (she is always reading between customers) but an icy beauty that marks her as destined

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for bigger — if not better — things. Cynthia Farr plays "George," a witty and robust woman who makes the big mistake of falling in love with a John and pays for it dearly. Louise Baker and Tracy Shaffer round out the excellent cast.

The scenery, lighting and direction are all up to the Back Alley's meticulous standards. This small theater in Van Nuys has, for the past nine years, provided theatergoers with a wide variety of productions on a very high professional plane. Laura Zucker, the producer, and Allan Miller, the director, are the professional and

personal team (they are husband and wife) responsible for the Back Alley's success.

On Thursday evenings, the Back Alley Theater has been inviting guest speakers to share their lives and their views of the play with the audience and to answer questions. On the Thursday night this reviewer attended, the speaker was Liz Temkin, an attractive and articulate young woman who had been a prostitute for three years. She is now involved with the organization "Catharsis," which helps "working girls" who either want to or have already left "the life." Located in Sherman Oaks, Catharsis assists these women to ease their transition into normal life. The audience asked many questions and Liz's replies were knowledgeable and thought-provoking.

It is well worth the trip to Van Nuys.

"The Early Girl" has extended its run to Nov. 22. The show runs 8 p.m. Thursdays through Saturdays and 2 p.m. and 7 p.m., with post-performance discussions each Thursday, at the Back Alley Theater, 15231 Burbank Blvd. For more information, call 1-818-780-2240. Tickets are \$13.50 to \$17.50.

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