

# A Walk On the Wild Side

reviewed by Dale Reynolds

**N**elson Algren's 1956 novel, "A Walk on the Wild Side," filmed in 1962, has been adapted into a musical by Will Holt. Algren's novel is about the seamy side of America during the terrible "Great Depression." The

*Algren's novel is about the seamy side of America during the terrible "Great Depression."*

story is replete with unsavory characters and losers. Holt has dramatized the novel by using a narrative, putting these characters into historical perspective. He should have worked on the characters

themselves so as to avoid the deadly stereotypes they have become.

Dove Linkhorn is 16, illiterate, dirty beyond belief, and eager to make it to the top. But his youthful dreams reveal a person so gullible that anybody can (and, in this case, does) take advantage of him, a person so gullible, in fact, that he comes across as mildly retarded, which was probably not the desired or intended result. Who can care about someone so out of it that he might drown in a rainstorm?

The other characters include a principled whore, a couple who are reminiscent of Porgy and Bess, myriad con artists and others. Everyone in this musical is doomed. In fact, it's all so grim that it looks as though they wanted to make one of those Brecht/Weill parables about the evils of humankind. Well, that can be entertaining, but it works better if you surround the package

with some contrasting colors, literally as well as figuratively.

Don Gruber's spare and makeshift set is all earth-tones and Bob Miller's costumes are drab and featureless—all in keeping, no doubt, with Patricia Burch and Allan Miller's concept of a dour, unhappy period. But two and one-quarter hours of drab is not very riveting. The book, score and look of the piece are not compelling enough. For a play which deals with back-alley sex, it's mighty tame and safe.

The cast is first-rate, and delivers the show with great energy, but there isn't very much to hold the audience. Hamilton

*Who can care about someone so out of it that he might drown in a rainstorm?*

Camp, James Dybas, Adrienne Barbeau, Job Brown, Alex Daniels, etc., are all fine and in rare form. Birch is credited for the

*The cast is first-rate, and delivers the show with great energy.*

excellent staging and choreography, Miller for the direction of the actors. They've done good work on material which doesn't have the courage of its convictions, and which, as it turns out, doesn't warrant the effort. ■

*Will Holt's musical adaptation of Nelson Algren's "A Walk on the Wild Side" plays through November 13th at the Back Alley Theatre, 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys (east of the San Diego Freeway). Performances are Thursdays at 8 pm, Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays at 7 pm, with a matinee on Sundays at 2 pm. Directed by Patricia Burch and Allan Miller, it features Adrienne Barbeau, Job Brown, Hamilton Camp, Alex Daniels. Call 818/760-2240 for tickets*