

# On Stage

By JACK MATCHA

"The Early Girl," Caroline Kava's play at the Black Alley Theater, is interesting on several counts.

First it is an absorbing story about a brothel that shuns discussion of sex. Secondly it concentrates on the emotional ups and downs of the girls without giving us even a peep at their clients.

This is an inside look, a look the author got when she spent some time as an observer in an actual bordello in the Rockies during the filming of "Heaven's Gate."

Kava has drawn the girls so realistically that you feel as if you know them. A great surprise is the atmosphere of the house.

It seems more like a sorority house at an expensive university than a cathouse in the Wild West. We see the girls mostly between customers. The early girl is the unlucky one who has to be on tap during the wee hours.

If there is a flaw it is the lack of dramatic movement in the first act. Too much talking between the girls and their madam, played excellently by Morgan Lofting.

But when a new girl, Lily, arrives things begin to pop and Sioban E. McCafferty milks the role for all it's worth. After her arrival, and especially in act two, the story moves faster. But fast or slow, it is engrossing theater.

Outstanding are Lisa Pelikan as an insecure girl who thinks constantly about leaving and wears an irreverent mask to hide her feelings, and Kim Lankford, Debra Sandlund and Tracy Shaffer as other resident tarts.

Tracy Shaffer provides some rich comic moments with her passion for changing wigs and buying new gadgets. These are all real people, fascinating to watch. It is not surprising that Universal plans to turn the play into a movie.

Allan Miller's direction is focused shrewdly on the girls' characters and emotional

crises and he is aided by a fine set by Derek McLane. The costume of Meg Gilbert — swimsuits in summer, gowns in winter — also help greatly to enhance the sorority ambiance. All in all this is a very unusual show.

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