

'A Walk on the Wild Side' offers real theater

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There are only two words that come to mind when describing The Back Alley Theatre, minimal and marvelous. There's no glitz, no glamor, no pretense. Go to The Back Alley Theatre and expect to find what theater is all about.

Their current performance, Will Holt's "A Walk on the Wild Side," is a compelling musical drama about one person's struggle to feel accomplished and worthy in life. It follows his rise and fall and the lives of the people he touches and who touch him.

Set in the great depression years, "A Walk on the Wild Side," takes a look at life when we hit rock bottom and asks the question: "How much will we sell of ourselves to survive?"

That's but one of the many meralistic questions confronted in this play. The morals are laced throughout the story and, if you're not paying attention, you can miss them.

It centers around Dove, a young, impressionable youth from Texas, whose goal in life is to move up. Dove, played by new-comer Jeb Brown, has but one thing standing in his way of fame and fortune. He cannot read.

He turns to a Mexican woman in an effort to overcome his handicap and works in her small restaurant in exchange for reading lessons.

'A Walk on the Wild Side' is currently playing at the Back Alley Theatre, located at 15231 Burbank Blvd. Showtimes are Thursdays at 8 p.m. and Fridays-Sundays at 7 p.m. The Sunday matinee begins at 2 p.m. Ticket prices range from \$14.50 to \$18.50 (\$3 student discount).

Dove brings his new mentor a children's book about a tin soldier's travels around the world. All the tin soldier wants to do is return to his home, to safety and acceptance.

The small book is intertwined throughout the play, paralleling the plot of the performance.

Talya Ferro plays the Mexican woman, Terasina, who takes Dove in and eventually teaches him more than just reading. The twists and turns of life separate the couple and Dove ventures to New Orleans to move up again.

Once in New Orleans, Dove, like everyone else in this destitute period, stands face-to-face with Maslow's hierarchy of need.

First, comes the struggle to survive. In desperation, he accepts a job in a brothel, which goes against every moral he has ever held.

Dove finds comfort and acceptance in his new job because he becomes the center of attention and of the business itself. He loses himself in drink. At this point, he is also lost in his own ego and comes to believe that he has finally moved up.

As this whole story turns, so

does Dove's luck. He is once again confronted with the reality of his desolate circumstances.

In the end, Dove accomplishes what he originally set out to do. He learns to read. But, there is yet again another twist of fate and plot leaving Dove in much the same condition as the tin soldier at the end of the children's book.

Ferro has an incredible voice and does a wonderful job of playing Terasina. Her singing is more believable than her acting sometimes, but her strong and melodic voice makes her performance worthwhile. "Shut Out the Night" and "Since the Night" are excellent showcases for Ferro's musical range.

Brown, on the other hand is not as impressive a singer, but his character does not really demand him to be. The ignorant Dove can easily get away with singing in his own character's voice.

Dove's ignorance was overplayed in points throughout the beginning of Act I.

The characteristic ignorance was magnified until, at times, it almost seemed as though Brown was playing a stock character, rather than the real-to-life boy of the Texas country side.

As the play progressed, Brown began feeling more comfortable with the character, as he was not required to be so intellectually inept. He did a fantastic job of maintaining Dove's original mannerisms and voice inflections, even after Dove's personality changed in the play.

The star attraction is Adrienne Barbeau, of television's "Maude" and Rodney Dangerfield's "Back to School." She doesn't get her chance to really perform until Act II.

She plays a hooker who is less than happy with her lifestyle, but like everyone else in this play, doesn't have much of a choice. It's a means of survival. Her performance is very believable and her voice fits the song "Fancy Nighttime Women" beautifully.

The supporting cast does a good job of portraying all of the happiness, the sorrow, the sarcasm and the wit that was written into the script.

When entering the Back Alley, a whelming, overproduced sets and costumes. This is not "Les Misérables." Just expect to see what theater is all about. The actors rely on their performance to pull the show together, not flashy sets or ornate costumes and awesome light shows.

This is the backbone of theater, the beginnings, the heart. This is where every young actor starts out and prays, as the curtain rises that it will not be where he ends. This is theater at its best.



The cast of "A Walk on the Wild Side" performs the song "Little Darlin'".