

**ENTERTAINMENT**

**MIRIAM FINK**

Two top shows are now available to theater goers with the productions of *Amazing Grace*, an intriguing psychic drama, making its West Coast premiere at the Back Alley Theatre in Van Nuys and the old tried and true *South Pacific* at the Showboat Dinner Theatre in the Swedish Inn, Woodland Hills.

*Amazing Grace*, written by Sandra Deer and directed by Allan Miller, has four wonderful protagonists. Patricia Huston as amazing Grace; Jim Heistand as Troy, her somewhat retarded grandson; Carmen Duncan, Maggie, an actress approaching the wrong side of thirty and Daryl Roach, Josh, a policeman, who is investigating a number of unsolved child murders.

Grace Tanner (amazing Grace) has helped police in the past in her Alabama home, but now lives in Malibu with her grandson. Baffled by a series of child murders, the police department, reluctantly, decides to consult her, although they feel she may be faking her psychic powers. Maggie has bought her life story so she can make a picture, with herself as the star. She spends a great deal of time at Grace's home studying her. Grace has a very hypnotic effect on people's lives, making them aware of the powers they have within themselves. Huston (Grace) brings incredible depth to her role and the change from being Grace to assuming the spirit guide "Teacher" is a real tour de force. Heistand as the retarded grandson is superb. Roach is very likeable as the policeman who warms to Grace's marvelous powers and the love she exhibits toward people. Duncan's acting is excellent as an actress trying to make a new career for herself after being discarded by her husband.

The direction by Arthur Miller is toned down, but he inspires his performers to attain their finest efforts. The set (Don Gruber), costumes (Cathy

Oberman) and sound (Reid Woodbury), all add to the effect.

The ending is very dramatic and the play keeps you on the edge of your seat. It should not be missed, as it is an unusual theater experience.

The Back Alley Theatre is located at 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys. Shows are at 7 p.m. Thursdays thru Sundays with a matinee at 2 p.m. on Sunday. The theatre has a new Unwinder policy on Friday night. Patrons can arrive at around 6 p.m. for a light supper with a wine cooler, before seeing the performance. The all-inclusive Unwinder tickets cost just \$20 but reservations must be made at least three days in advance.

The theatre is air-conditioned and wheel chair accessible. *Amazing Grace* will run until August 14. For reservations to either the regular performances or the Unwinder, call (818) 780-2240. Box office hours are 10 a.m. till 6 p.m. every day.

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PLAYERS—Jim Heistand and Patricia Huston in the Back Alley Theatre production of *Amazing Grace*.

Photo by Ed Krauer