

KABC

9 A.M. Hour

Since promising to start kicking the rounds of many of the equity waiver houses and other smaller Southland theatres, I've been reminded of how many pleasant surprises there are to be discovered out there, and the production being discussed here this week is a good case in point. The show is called "A Walk On The Wild Side", and is running at The Back Alley Theatre in Van Nuys.

One tends to forget just how much can be accomplished by a committed group of young people with a lot of talent and a little bit of money. "...Wild Side" is, for want of a better label, sort of a dramatic social commentary set to music, and is based on the Nelson Algren novel focusing on the seamy aspects of Depression era Texas and New Orleans. The producers are referring to this production as a "World Premiere" performance, which is a little confusing, since it had been staged earlier at a musical workshop in New York.

At any rate, this innovative adaptation by lyricist and composer Bill Holt is well into a ~~two~~ week run and is an impressive example of what can be done with limited space and a couple of pianos.

The tale has to do with a young drifter, very nicely sung and played by ~~newcomer~~ newcomer, Jeb Brown. The character is an incurably confident optimist determined to make something of himself despite the economic hard times, ^{of} the fact that he is illiterate and has no skills to speak of. We follow his adventures, amorous and otherwise, from a rundown Texas cafe to a "cab house" in New Orleans where he achieves a sort of limited stardom as a stud on exhibition.

The story itself is something of a "downer", intentionally so,.... but the end-result manages, somehow, to be more entertaining than depressing.

Logistically, the production is imaginatively staged and choreographed, though there's a minimal amount of dance.

The highly mobile set is more suggested than constructed, and is incredibly versatile.

There's hardly time to invent individual performances, so suffice it to say that the show is generally well played across the board, with special mention for the work of James Dybas as a pimp with a flair for showmanship and Adrienne Barbeau as one of his staff of "working girls".

...Walk on The Wild Side" a small but ambitious effort with something to say.....something well worth watching and listening to.

For those unfamiliar with the theatre, the Back Alley lives up to its name, it is indeed in the back of an alley off Burbank Blvd., just East of the San Diego Freeway in Van Nuys.

Now quickly, turning to the ^{new} motion pictures ~~being~~ being released this week, there are worthy of mention. Of the 8 movies opening the one most likely to strike the public's fancy is the latest to star Tom Hanks called "Punch Line". Coming on the heels of his success with "Big" it would seem the young man can do no wrong. He plays opposite Sally Field, and the two of them portray struggling stand-up comedians with more than their share of problems.

Even as that film opens with actors playing comics,....just yesterday another picture opened in which real-life comics do the acting. It's an offbeat comedy starring Alan King and Billy Crystal, called "Memories Of Me". One note of interest, the movie's director was Henry Winkler.

The selection is pretty thin among the new offerings, but for anyone who cares about such things, I might mention there are a couple of strange comedies in the horror film mode. One called "Love At Stake", that's "stake" spelled S-T-A-K-E....and ^{there's} the feature movie debut of Cassandra Peterson, who YOU'll remember, Ken & Bob, from