

What's wrong with this odd Back Alley show?

by Malia Boyd
staff writer

The production of "What's Wrong With This Picture?" by Donald Margulies should be renamed "What's Wrong With This Play?" because that is the one question that persists throughout the performance. It is a question that is not easily answered.

The play opens with a Jewish family talking/bickering after shiva has concluded. (You may want to bring a Hebrew-to-English dictionary along, for there is liberal usage of Hebrew slang throughout.) The dialogue is sensitive and witty and never slows down. In short, the problem does not lie within the words themselves.

Nor does the problem lie with the actors. Each character is expertly played and extremely believable. Lillian Adams plays the stereotypical Jewish mother. Patti Deutsch is the screaming and annoying sister, Ceil.

Allan Miller and James Stern as son and grandson, respectively, have some heart-wrenching moments together. Phoebe Dorin

plays the complex and elusive wife, Shirley.

By far the most wonderful performance is given by Sandy Kenyon as Sid, the father of the clan. His doddering walk, his selective senility, and his sweetly confessed crush on his daughter-in-law work together to make him the most real and loveable character onstage.

So, what is wrong with this play? Well, the set is basic, but effective. The lighting is fine. The costumes fit well and are true to both time and place. So . . . ?

Within the script, there is a bizarre and unrealistic plot twist that essentially undermines the wonderfully realistic dialogue along with the real and moving emotions of the characters. Though this flaw doesn't ruin the play, it does seem to hold it back from being the great Simonesque play that it wants to be.

"What's Wrong With This Picture?" runs through May 15, and plays Thursdays through Sundays at The Back Alley Theater in Van Nuys.

For more information call (818)780-2240. Ticket prices are \$13.50 to \$17.50.



What's wrong with these guys? Allan Miller (left) and James Stern doing the "Alleycat" in "What's Wrong With This Picture?" now playing at the Back Alley Theatre.