

8 Part VI Tuesday, December 13, 1988

Stage Reviews

New Cast in 'Bittersuite' Revue at Back Alley Theatre

A majority of the cast of the long-running "Bittersuite: Songs of Experience," at the Back Alley Theatre, has changed since it opened. But the revue was still in fine form during a recent visit.

The stars here are composer Elliot Weiss and lyricist Michael Champagne, more than any cast members. Weiss and Champagne write tuneful, witty music that sells itself, regardless of any particular performer. Let's hear this team tackle a book musical.

Which is not to say that anyone can sing "Bittersuite." Some of it sounds treacherously difficult—for example, too many of the words of "Snap Back" are still blurred because of the number's rapid-fire rhythms.

Generally, however, this cast is as professional as the first, if not quite as right in terms of casting. While the newcomers don't add striking new dimensions of their own to the songs, they do make the writers' points clearly and cleanly.

Of the newcomers, Susan Holder is most successful at holding up her solos. Her husband, Christopher Holder, doesn't have the chameleonic looks of his predecessor, and his solos seem a trifle bland by comparison. Nor does he look quite

at home in his short-sleeved shirt during the first act.

Valerie Miller powerfully interprets her more serious numbers, such as "Mama, Don't Cry," but she doesn't have as much of a gift for comic ditziness as her predecessor.

Yet this remains a very funny show, particularly in the second half. Carol Woodbury, the senior member of the cast, is still winningly frantic about turning 50 without being famous, and Rick Roemer still sails through his many transitions with utter conviction.

So does the show itself. As the director, Roemer provided some ingeniously seamless segues between disparate numbers.

Some have found the numbers not disparate enough, and it's true that Weiss and Champagne dwell on the passages of the middle-aged and the middle-class to an extent that might wear the patience of some of those who are not middle-aged or middle-class. (Their "Ice Cream" is also a poor runner-up to the song of the same title in "She Loves Me.")

But generally Weiss and Champagne particularize their concerns. They create characters, not just attitudes. And their show remains essential listening for anyone who appreciates theater music.

At 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys, Tuesdays and Wednesdays at 8 p.m., Saturdays at 2 and 10 p.m., through Feb. 12. Tickets: \$14.50-\$18.50; (818) 780-2240.

—DON SHIRLEY

Fun Fails to Appear in 'Dr. Silkini' Show

There are only two reasons to see "Dr. Silkini and His Original Great Ghost Show" at the Las Palmas Theatre, and neither has anything to do with ghosts—or Dr. Silkini.

They are the so-called "special acts": The juggling Villams and the unicycling Volantes.

The sequined Villams from Hungary—a husband and wife team?—are a sparkling breath of fresh air in a show otherwise as musty as a coffin. They're real entertainers who know their stuff and do it with élan and minimal talk, which, in this context, is a relief.

The Volantes from Las Vegas are gabbers as well as doers, and while their physical routines are more skilled than their patter, there's a shamelessness to their punning and lounge act humor that somehow manages briefly to win you over.

It's more than we can say for the smoothie Doctor whose stage presence is as limp as a corpse and whose portion of the show should be embalmed. His brand of sexism and the third-grade level of his

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