

Back Alley Theatre comes to end of the road, at least temporarily

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The Back Alley Theatre, one of Los Angeles' most-respected small theaters, announced last week that it is going on an indefinite hiatus.

The 10-year-old theater had significantly cut back its activities since October, when it moved out of the 93-seat performing space in Van Nuys that it had outgrown. The theater continued to present a couple of children's shows at alternate sites, but those presentations are now closed.

"We feel that we made a connection to and a contribution to the community around us, and we regret that that has to end, at least temporarily," co-producing director Allan Miller said.

He said the Back Alley will not attempt to re-establish its exist-

tence as a small theater, with no more than 99 seats. It will only produce regularly again if circumstances arise that will allow it to grow into a larger theater.

"We still hope one of these days to maintain and manage a midsize theater in this area," Miller said.

In a recent letter to subscribers and other friends of the theater, Stuart Berton, president of the theater's board of directors, said the theater does not intend to produce regular seasons of plays in the foreseeable future. It will continue to exist as a non-profit corporate entity, however, and it might stage sporadic productions at rented facilities or produce touring shows.

Berton's letter reiterates several of the problems that the Daily News reported at the time the theater moved out of its Van

Nuys location.

Back Alley producing directors Miller and Laura Zucker told the board three years ago that they felt the theater had outgrown its site. Producing more than one show at once was problematic, since the building had only one stage. Yet, the theater needed to produce more shows to remain solvent.

The group looked for a site in the San Fernando Valley that could be adapted into a performing space with about 199 to 299 seats. Deals on three affordable sites fell through, however.

Berton's letter also cites difficulties created by the policies of Actors Equity Association, the stage actors' union.

Equity allows Los Angeles County theaters with 99 seats or fewer to reimburse actors with a small percentage of the box-office



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gross, while requiring larger theaters to make significantly bigger payments. Small-theater producers such as Zucker and Miller have asked Equity to set up a more lenient plan for midsize theaters, so that small companies have a better chance of growing into larger ones. But Equity has not changed its policy.

The search for a new theater has been suspended for the time being, according to Miller.

The Back Alley earned nation-

al attention in the last decade. Among its best-known productions was "The Fox," producing director Miller's adaptation of a D.H. Lawrence novella. The show originated at the Back Alley in 1981, moved on to a midsize L.A. house, and had an off-Broadway run at the Roundabout Theatre.

Among its recent acclaimed productions were the musical revue "Bittersuite" and the tense drama "The Deal," with which it closed its Van Nuys site.

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