

Back Alley Theatre

The Back Alley Theatre began in 1979 as the hobby of actor Allan Miller and his wife, acting coach Laura Zucker. Today the tiny Equity Waiver theatre in the flatlands of Van Nuys has an international reputation, largely through the production and publication of two diverse works.

Their 1981 production of *The Fox*, Miller's play based on D.H. Lawrence's novella, resulted in the kind of success story every playwright dreams of. A critical and box office hit, it moved, when the Back Alley closed for renovations, first to the L.A. Stage Company and then on to New York's Off-Broadway Roundabout Theatre in July, 1982 for a limited 12-week run. Among the 21 awards it garnered was the L.A. Drama Critics Circle Award for Distinguished Achievement in Direction to Allan Miller. It's been optioned for productions in the Scandinavian countries, Belgium and Hong Kong, and Miller is scheduled to direct the production in London next spring. The play has been translated into German and Japanese, and published in both an acting edition by Samuel French and a hard cover edition by Doubleday.

"'24 Hours'... proved highly popular at the box office and was a unanimous critical success."

24 Hours, the Back Alley's second project to be produced and published, grew out of work done in its Playwrights Laboratory led by noted playwright Oliver Hailey.

Hailey wanted to work with new playwrights and his reputation and experience were ideally suited to Los Angeles' unique mix of writers from many disciplines. Since its inception, the Lab's membership has included Pulitzer Prize winners Paul Zindel and Beth Henley, as well as screenwriters, producers, actors and journalists. Hailey culls top panelists to address the Lab, among them playwrights Levinson and Link, Sam Bobrick, Ron Clark, Laird Koenig, television producer Garry Marshall and actress Betty Garrett.

24 Hours, which consists of 24 original short plays, proved highly popular at the box office, was extended well past its original run and was a unanimous critical success.

In a deal Laura Zucker negotiated for *24 Hours*, Dramatists Play Service paid a record sum for the publication, stock and amateur rights; according to Zucker, it was more than had ever been paid before for a play that had not received a New York production. Under a unique arrangement, the Back Alley, which receives a 1/25 share of the royalties,



Allan Miller & Laura Zucker.

playwright, 19 of whom had never been published before.

Done after *24 Hours* was Sam Bobrick's comedy-mystery-fantasy *Are You Sure?* which, although mystifying to some reviewers, was generally acclaimed.

Cisterns, a short original play by Julie Jensen, directed by Laura Zucker, got mixed reviews. While the play was praised for its originality and production values, its brevity caused it to be generally considered a work in progress.

Another Playwrights Lab project, short plays on the theme of the four seasons, was scheduled for fall at press time.

Miller and Zucker, who both produce and direct, say they "spell each other" in administering the Back Alley. Zucker found herself forced to make a career choice between her profession as an acting coach to such successful actors as Lynda Carter and Gabe Kaplan and the growing demands of the Back Alley Theatre. She chose to devote the major part of her time to the theatre where she produces, directs, and acts as agent for Miller and the theatre.

Zucker, who is also the Back Alley's administrative director and grant writer, says, "We're a writer's theatre, not an actor's theatre." In addition to supporting new playwrights, says Zucker, the Back Alley "exists" to produce plays new to Los Angeles. And, since the success of *The Fox*, film and television actor Miller has returned to writing. One of his plays, *Faro Rides Again*, which appeared in *24 Hours*, was termed "a tasty tidbit" by the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner*.

Miller and Zucker don't want a subscription theatre, preferring the flexibility of open-ended runs. They're considering the possibility of a coupon discount book and plan to start a campaign for cor-

government grants.

Zucker points with pride to a budget that has doubled and plans to expand the theatre to seat 95 by the end of the year. Within five years, they hope to become a full Equity company with a 350-seat facility, she says.

— LAURA HITCHCOCK

BACK ALLEY THEATRE

15231 Burbank Boulevard
Van Nuys, CA 91411
(213) 780-2240

Laura Zucker and Allan Miller, Producing Directors
Founded: 1979; Seating capacity: 78.

24 HOURS

October 10 — December 12, 1982

Twenty-four short plays in repertory conceived by Oliver Hailey; Producer, Laura Zucker; Associate Producer, Joanna Bongiovanni; Direction supervised by Allan Miller; Set Design, Zoe Wells; Costume Coordination, Hilary Sloane; Lighting Design, Christopher Milliken; Sound Design, Leonora Schildkraut; Music composed by Dick DeBenidictis; Technical Director, Charles Flood; Stage Manager, Michael Wymore. *AM Playwrights:* Allan Miller, David Link, Jeff Levy, Daniel Gregory Brown, Terry Kingsley Smith, Michael Leeson, Lee Thomas, Jerry Mayer, Pamela Chais, Christine Rimmer, Bonnie Zindel, Paul Zindel, Susan Silver. *AM Directors:* Dona Cooper, Beverly Sanders, Marcia Rodd, Will Mackenzie, Allan Miller, Barbara Schultz. *AM CAST:* John Anderson, Elizabeth Hoffman, Jim Hornbeck, Paul Keenan, Joy Garret, Alan Oppenheimer, Doris Roberts, Margaret O'Keefe. *PM Playwrights:* Jim McGinn, Sam Bobrick, Ann Ray-

L. to r., Alan Oppenheimer, Doris Roberts, Margaret O'Keefe in "24 Hours." Photo: Ed Krieger.



mond, Jack Matcha, Michael Lewis, Oliver Hailey, Dona Cooper, Marcia Rodd, Fredi Towbin, Rick Lenz, Beth Henley. *PM Directors:* Marcia Rodd, Dona Cooper, Beverly Sanders, Barbara Schultz, Michael Lessac. *PM CAST:* Phillip R. Allen, Sandy Kenyon, Mary McCusker, Val Bettin, Peter Van Norden, Maxine Stuart, Rosanna Huffman, Jackie Cassel.

UNDERSTUDY: S. Ann Ganz.

ARE YOU SURE?

February 10 — March 27, 1983

By Sam Bobrick; Producer, Laura Zucker; Director, Allan Miller; Set Design, Jim Billings; Costume Design, Hilary Sloane; Lighting Design, Kraig Aaronson; Production Stage Manager, Michael Wymore. *CAST:* Lois Nettleton (Caroline), Ronny Cox (David), Jack Collins (Simon), Ellen Maxted (Stephanie), Catherine McLeod (Marie), Jeffrey Haddow (Charlie).

CISTERNS

June 12 — July 17, 1983

By Julie Jensen; Producer, Allan Miller; Associate Producer, Brad Nye; Director, Laura Zucker; Set Design, Jim Billings; Lighting Design, Joe Morrissey; Sound Design, Jerry Sider; Production Stage Manager, Michael Wymore. *CAST:* Jenny O'Hara (Samantha Harris), Jennifer Salt (Winifred Harris Richards), Michael Cavanaugh (Legrand Richards).

DREAMS

August 4 — September 18, 1983

A dance drama by Mark Barron; A visiting production at the Back Alley Theatre; Producers, Elizabeth Bruns-Taylor and Curt Boulware; Director/Choreographer, Elizabeth Bruns-Taylor; Composer, Chas Steven; Stage Manager, Vince Pesce. *CAST:* Elizabeth Bruns-Taylor (Susan Harris), Curt Boulware (Terry Nelson), John Bertelsen (Mark), Pamela Gray (Dr. Williams), Harry Redd (Billy), Chrispin Martin Rivera (The Director), Vallerie Redding (Lisa Wetherby), Kat Pearson (Kathy), Kelly Sinclair (Courtney), Catlin Cole (Rachel), Tricia Wood (Danielle Jenkins).

The cast of "Are You Sure?" Photo: Ed Krieger.

