



IN THE WINGS

Equity-waiver steals the show, and The Back Alley Theatre is no showcase.

by Harriette Smith

There are more theatres in the San Fernando Valley than there are on Broadway, and they're all doing very well, with projections for an extremely busy and successful fall season. Most of them, of course, are small Equity-waiver houses doing interesting works and charging nominal fees.

One of the most successful and innovative is the **Back Alley Theatre** on Burbank Boulevard in Van Nuys, founded in 1979 by the husband-and-wife team of Allan Miller and Laura Zucker. He produces, directs, acts, writes, and is a trained New York actor who has appeared in over 50 plays, TV episodes and pilots, feature films, and even soaps. She is the theatre's producing director, is an alumna of the Yale Drama School, and has a BA from Barnard.

The Back Alley's first production back in '79, directed by Ms. Zucker, was *Are You Now or Have You Ever Been*, the profound courtroom drama on the '50s McCarthy/Hollywood witchhunt.

The Back Alley is just that — it is entered through an alley passageway into a charming little theatre. Recent successes under the Zucker/Miller banner have been the *The Fox*, *A Woman of Independent Means* (by Elizabeth Hailey and starring Barbara Rush, who took it on tour, to New York, and back here to the Doolittle Theatre and the L.A. Stage in Beverly Hills), *In the Sweet Bye and Bye* (a poignant play with Rue McClanahan), *the Greeks* (a



Allan Miller and Laura Zucker of The Back Alley Theatre.

major endeavor), the successful *Duet for One* (starring Linda Kelsey and Allan Miller), and currently, *Found a Peanut*, a play about childhood, with adult actors playing the children. It's a day in the life of children living in Brooklyn, how they play and struggle through their friendships and how they deal with the local bully. It gives a marvelous insight into a child from an adult's perspective. Parents are encouraged to

bring offspring, since tickets are half-price for those ages 10 to 18.

The main distinction between the Back Alley and other small theatres is that the Van Nuys house does only plays that are new to Southern California. "We've never thought of ourselves as a showcase theatre," says Miller. "We perceive ourselves as a professional theatre. Our own proclivities are artistically challenged by new material, so we will continue to present only plays new to L.A."

The Back Alley is presently celebrating its seventh anniversary by holding its second annual Doodles Auction in the gardens of the fashionable Valley home of a sponsor on September 14. Call (818) 780-2240 for information. The celebrity scribbles of the stars last year netted the theatre a pretty penny for future productions. The first 1986 celeb sketches to come in were from Dr. Seuss and a historical piece from William Makepeace Thackeray, author of *Vanity Fair*.

Theatre Listings for September

Actors Alley, 4334 Van Nuys Boulevard, Sherman Oaks. (818) 986-7440.

The Main Stage, opening September 5 and running through October 11, presents an interesting work called *WORKING, The Musical*. This piece is based on Studs Terkel's book about blue-collar people looking for some value in what they do so they can leave something behind that has given them worth. Originally produced