

## STAGE WATCH

# AN UNEXPECTED 'ANGEL' DROPS IN ON 3 THEATERS

By SYLVIE DRAKE  
*Times Theater Writer*

Fresh is in the air. It's the essence of this day—the chance to try again. We've rung out the old, want to embrace the new.

At the top of the year, what could be more thrilling than word of a visit from a ministering angel unexpectedly tapping three Los Angeles theaters on the shoulder?

The "angel" is David Spedic, director of the arts program of the W. Alton Jones Foundation of Charlottesville, Va. He came like Santa Claus, bearing grants for the Mark Taper's Improvisational Theatre Project (\$50,000), the Back Alley Theatre (\$22,250) and Pipeline Inc. (two consecutive grants of \$10,000 each).

(Four other local arts organizations are also recipients of Jones munificence: LACE, \$40,000; Plaza de la Raza, \$50,000; the L.A. Conservancy, \$30,000, and the Afro-American Museum, \$20,000.)

Who is this man and why is he giving away money? Spedic, a former director of cultural affairs for Philadelphia, heads a pilot program called "The Best of Tomorrow" for the Jones Foundation. It is designed, said foundation director Jeffrey Kelleher, "to nurture the creation of new art and new initiatives by existing arts organizations" within "the traditional visual and performing arts."

Don't rush to the nearest phone. It's a program you can't apply for—not at this stage, Kelleher said. It was only established in March, 1986, and the first grants made in September. The 1987 giveaway? "Just over \$1 million," though it'll vary year to year.

"We found that there is a huge amount of energy [in arts organizations] devoted to fund-raising—energy that is siphoned off from more creative uses," Kelleher said. "The program is national in scope, but we've limited ourselves to a handful of cities and states. This year we're concentrating on Los Angeles, Baltimore and Virginia."

The foundation, established 42 years ago as a broad-purpose body (by Jones, founder of City Services Oil Co., absorbed by Occidental

## 'ANGEL' VISITS 3 LOCAL THEATERS

*Continued from Page 1*

Petroleum), "now focuses," Kelleher said, "on the environment, the prevention of nuclear war—and the arts."

Local response to the windfall? "Yippee!" was the Taper's Mary Kay Bailey's uncensored reaction. Of the Taper's "Chinese menu" of activities, Bailey said, "Spedic was most interested in ITP—I think for two reasons: It's one of the few fully professional youth theaters working out of a resident theater and he liked the way the company works in developing the material it takes to student audiences."

"It came out of the blue," said the Back Alley's Laura Zucker, who loved the lack of red tape and plans to use the money to expand the theater's marketing program and augment salaries "for actors too."

"We were surprised anyone knew about us from so far away," said Aaron Paley, administrator for Pipeline Inc. (which this year also received a \$5,000 grant from the Rockefeller Foundation). The money, he said, "will go to general operating support" and to generating local matching grants. "We've been running 85% on earned income. We've begun to pay our staff and some of the artists. The money will help us hold our ground."

"Next summer we'll be doing another Angel's Flight Series," added artistic director Scott Kelman, "and we hope to have a Los Angeles Avant-Garde Foreign Theatre Festival—on a small scale," he warned, "but a start."



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*Scott Kelman of Pipeline and Laura Zucker of Back Alley, excited about their grants.*

