

**SECOND YEAR****Theaters Tubthumping Passbook Plan**

Now into its second year, a theater-passbook plan that offers "off-Broadway" type fare at reduced rates is looking to boost subscription sales. The passbook allows subscribers to attend five shows a year at Equity-waiver theaters in the San Fernando Valley, Hollywood and Los Angeles areas.

The theaters involved are the Back Alley Theater, L.A. Theater Works, the Odyssey Theater, Actors For Themselves at the Matrix, and Stages.

The program was launched last year with an \$18,000 grant from the California Community Foundation. It was born out of a need by smaller theaters to attract a steady clientele

By KATHLEEN O'STEEN

without individual advertising campaigns that often put Equity-waiver houses in the red.

The response last year was very successful, selling 2600 passbooks, each. Good for one year.

"We were overwhelmed by the response," said Laura Zucker, producer and director at the Back Alley Theater, "so this year we hoped to double that."

Yet, to date, passbook sales have fallen short, with only 2000 sold.

"One problem is that last year we had the grant to work with which helped tremendously," Zucker said. "It really got this program off the ground. Now we are working

without that funding."

Zucker said the consortium also has had to deal with other pitfalls that have decreased sales.

"The bottom line is that it takes a very self-motivated person to follow through on this passbook plan," Zucker said. "They are not getting their tickets sent to them with the date they are attending, like the Taper does."

Subscribers instead have to make their decisions on the shows they'd like to see as the year progresses. Since these are smaller theaters, they often do not have their season planned a year in advance.

"Then they have to call, make reservations and get out to see the shows," Zucker said.

She noted that the consortium has tried to motivate its clientele through bimonthly newsletters sent to subscribers. Most recently the group started sending out postcards on off-months so that subscribers received something every month.

And in January, the consortium will start calling those subscribers who have not used their passbook, thus adding another encouragement.

"We have found that the people who do not use their passbook at least three times tend not to renew," Zucker said. "So we have to get them to use it."

Zucker said that ultimately as the passbook program becomes more established, they hope to gain a loyal following who will renew annually.

And even though sales are a bit down now, plans are already in the works to hit the student trail next year, offering reduced passbooks for those in college; next Fall, the group will start a campaign of newspaper advertising and student recruitment to boost those sales.

Currently the theater group is awaiting word on a government grant that would help subsidize the student program.