

'THE FOX' RETURNS TO THE BACK ALLEY

Allan Miller's Dramatization

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BY POLLY WARFIELD

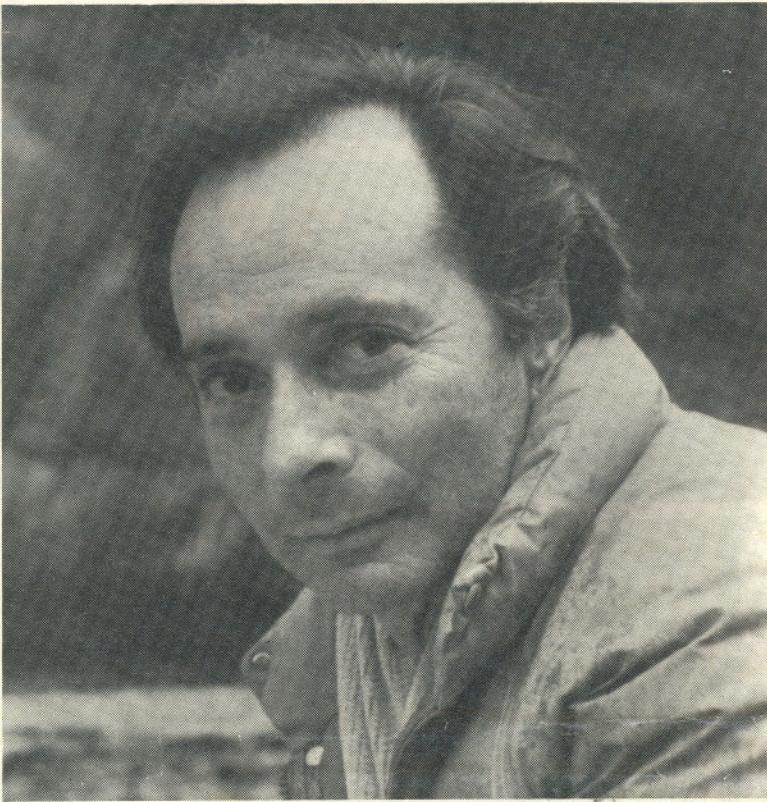
Thirty two years ago Allan Miller wrote a play for himself to act in but he never acted in it. Thirty one years ago he "almost" directed his play in a production starring Geraldine Page that "almost" got staged on Broadway. Seven years ago that play finally had its world premiere at the Back Alley because Miller's wife and partner Laura Zucker insisted on rescuing it from the trunk where it had languished forgotten for decades.

Zucker was right. It was a fortuitous rescue. *The Fox*, Miller's taut, electric dramatization of the D.H. Lawrence novella of that name, captured 21 awards for direction, writing, adaptation, acting and production. Each of the 11 actors who performed in its three member cast during its Los Angeles area run received an acting award. Miller got the prestigious Los Angeles Drama Critics Circle award for his direction. After its sold out run at the Back Alley *The Fox* moved to the L.A. Stage Company at the Las Palmas theatre in Hollywood, then on to a successful off-Broadway run at New York's Roundabout Theatre, directed by Miller. It had a bus and truck tour of the provinces in Britain.

Now *The Fox* returns to herald the Back Alley's tenth anniversary, opening Dec. 8 for a 10 week run through Feb. 12, then to a 1989-90 tour of California. *The Fox* is a riveting theatrical experience. Miller, the playwright, with precision and passion has transposed Lawrence's literature to stunning dramatic effect. He puts the right words in his character's mouths; then Miller the director, sees to it that his actors move and behave from inner conviction — compulsion — as his drama moves with irresistible force and momentum to its bang-up conclusion.

"I must say the play seems to hold up awfully well in the execution," Miller observes mildly. "We have decided to tour it because our tour of *Are You Now or Have You Ever Been* [another Back Alley hit] was so successful people kept asking us if we had anything else to show them. We already have dates lined up in Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo and other places."

During the first week of previews, now completed, Miller says "men and women were arguing all over the



place. All the men are convinced Henry, the man, must be psychotic. All the women say, 'No, Henry's not psychotic. He's just like you.'

People comment on the dialogue, how true it is to Lawrence's style, yet there is practically no dialogue at all in the story. "The novella itself is mostly interior," Miller comments. "At least 90 percent of the dialogue is my creation. People also seem surprised to find so much humor in the play. That too is mostly my doing. If we are to move into this area of conflict and power struggle I felt we needed a little leavening factor. Yes, the play is dramatic but not just dramatic. It's life filled, warm, loving, funny, entertaining. A wide gamut."

Miller's cast includes two of its former members, Michael Horton, who originated the role of Henry, and Gretchen Corbett, who played Jill when the show moved to Hollywood. Linda Carlson, new to the Back Alley, is the new member of the cast in the role of Nellie; formerly played by Jennie O'Hara. Laura Zucker again produces with a new set

by Rich Rose and costumes by Hilary Sloane.

"The set this time is designed to tour. It's a fascinating set," says Miller, "probably more congenial to the material than before."

"It's kind of nice," he goes on, "to have a three act play around again; there are so few of them. There's an interesting structure to this play. It needs breathers for the audience to simmer with. It's very deep, this play; it gets into a lot of visceral areas. There are other plays currently dealing with a similar subject — *Carnal Knowledge*, *Hurlyburly*. But *The Fox* is not about sexual choice; it's something deeper, a power struggle between men and women. The movie made from Lawrence's story seemed to emphasize a lesbian theme, not thematically as deep a theme as in our play. There are primitive forces here — man as the hunter, the dominator, Nellie caught in the middle and Jill resisting to the death."

"Most actors want to play the boy, Henry, like a fox. I believe what is true

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ALLAN MILLER
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is that Henry is not a fox, he's a creature who learned about life from the woods. Not a predator but a hunter who believes in living by his instincts."

There has been talk of a Back Alley move to larger quarters; Miller confirms that a feasibility study is underway. "We've been trying to make this move for three years—not with Equity's help, I might add. We have a space in mind, close by, large enough for a 350 seat house. We should know by the middle of December."

He teaches, directs, acts and "helps produce" but Miller says "I earn my living as an actor" and he likes best to act. He has appeared in more than

50 plays (most recently *Days and Nights Within* and *Duet for One* at the Back Alley); 150 TV episodes and pilots, 15 TV movies, nine feature films and five soap operas. He has taught at Circle in the Square, the New Lafayette in New York, NYU, NYCC, Yale School of Drama and the Focus Theatre in Dublin.

"When I act well I feel most fulfilled," he relates. "Although as a teacher when I see someone blossom—take flight—it is quite fantastic. But if I had a singular preference it would be for acting."

It can hardly be less fantastic to see a play he wrote so long ago, long stored away forgotten, come so thrillingly to life on stage. Laura Zucker was right. *The Fox* was a fortuitous rescue. ★