

REVIEW

The Troubles get a spirited telling in 'Alone'

By **ROB KENDT**

Special to The Times

Gardner Stage III is a cozy little hole down forbidding stone stairs in a mini-theater complex off Sunset Boulevard. These days the stage is piled high with junk — bed frames, headlamps, street signs, pallets — and the walls are plastered with graffiti.

It's in these properly unprepossessing environs that director Steven Friedland and his cast transport us to a barricaded, embattled West Belfast, circa 1985, where the three women of Anne Devlin's "Our-

selves Alone" negotiate fraught and distinct positions on the continuum between the personal and the political.

Both the committed IRA operative Josie (Elise Robertson) and her more ambivalent singer-songwriter sister Frieda (Laura Nlemi) are prone to clandestine affairs with the wrong men, while sister-in-law Donna (Kathleen Dunn) is resigned to a nominal marriage to volatile IRA lunk Liam (Jack Mungovan).

Their passions and peccadilloes play out against the ongoing war against the English occupation, a cause Devlin takes for

granted. Though she shows us some ugly Republican bigotry against an earnest Protestant socialist (Ed Cunningham), who voices telling objections to the ethnic hard line, this is a play more about the ways war complicates life than about the case for or against this war per se.

Friedland's cast is ideal, and he expertly uses live acoustic music by Jake Alston and David Lane as underscoring and across scene changes, with the stalwart men of the cast singing along as they do the heavy lifting. The whole thing has an assured, lived-in feel.

"Ourselves Alone" isn't the last word on the Troubles, but it's as convincing here as a well-rendered Irish folk tune — sad, plangent, a bit soppy, but ultimately spirit-lifting.

'Ourselves Alone'

Where: Crash Box Players and Lost Angels at the Gardner Stages, 1501 N. Gardner St., Hollywood

When: Fridays and Saturdays, 8 p.m.; Sundays, 2 p.m.

Ends: April 10

Price: \$15

Contact: (310) 583-2633

Running time: 2 hours, 25 minutes