

MAY 23-29, 1985

THEATRE REVIEWS



Martin E. Brooks, David Hedison & Al Rossi embroiled in HUAC hearings

As theatre, Bentley's play works marvelously — from scene to scene. As a complete evening it leaves something lacking, feeling more like a documentary than a drama. The characters are carefully presented, though necessarily limited, and the composite creations of chairman and counsel are loathsome specimens, bordering on being too stereotypically villainous. The real interest here lies with the witnesses which include Sterling Hayden, Jose Ferrer, Elia Kazan, Abe Burrows and Lillian Hellman.

Director Allen Miller brings out important bustling, shuffling of folders and

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sudden whispers as prosecutors begin to penetrate the defenses of yet another witness. As mentioned before, however, the interrogators are unyieldingly treacherous and brutal; one immediately sees them as bad guys and the play loses some dimension as a result. Furthermore, Miller seems afraid of the play's length and rushes the action, producing a stagey effect not found in real government hearings.

Martin E. Brooks and Michael Cavanaugh make a frightening team and are every inch their characters as they question the witnesses. David Hedison gives a moving performance as actor Larry Parks, bringing out the charm of a man accustomed to stardom who suddenly finds himself on the brink of losing everything. Barry Gordon as Abe Burrows performs one of the most intriguing scenes (almost dizzying because of Burrows' artfully vague responses) as he describes how he became a Communist "by association" even though he never was an actual member. But Bennet Guillory as Paul Robeson really seems to bring out the idiocy of the hearings with his eloquent and wise answers to the petty innuendo of committee members. Guillory performs the role with style and passion.

Eugene H. Butler competently portrays four widely different characters while Al Rossi has fun with the subservient Jose Ferrer and the proud producer Lionel Stander. Anne Gee Byrd's skillful and strong portrayal of Lillian Hellman makes a nice counterpoint to the rest of the production. George Becket's set captures the atmosphere of a Washington government building. Dawn Hollingsworth's lighting is efficient and satisfactory.