

# Proscenium Picks

MIRIAM FINK COHL

A powerful, but not necessarily proud era of Americana is the subject of the play *Are You Now or Have You Ever Been*. This drama of the McCarthy witch-hunting period is the current attraction at the Back Alley Theatre. Allan Miller, director, was one of the original three producers at the Cast Theatre nine years ago when this potent work was first played. During the decade following, it has lost none of its strength or dramatic appeal for the audience.

*Are You Now or Have You Ever Been* is a play by Eric Bentley, conceived from actual excerpts he heard during the hearings before the House Committee on Un-American Activities during a period of 30 years, 1938-1968, and all taken at the interrogation of the various men and women involved in the hearings. This particular piece involves itself with the questioning of writers, actors and others in the entertainment world.

Allan Miller is a consummate performer, both in directing, having chosen his cast with a finely tuned fork, and in acting. Miller plays Abe Burrows, not only complete with the twitching of eyes and face, but with excellent fencing repartee, warding off his interrogators with clever and amusing comments. From the various performers, he has extracted every nuance, gesture and movement to command meaningful performances.

Outstanding in their roles are George de la Pena for his agonizing delineation as Larry Parks, the first entertainer and probably the one most affected by the proceedings of the Un-American Activities Committee; Joe George as Lionel Stander, riding rough-shod over the committee and Thalmus Sasulala, whose Paul Robeson is fraught with dignity, integrity and intelligence.

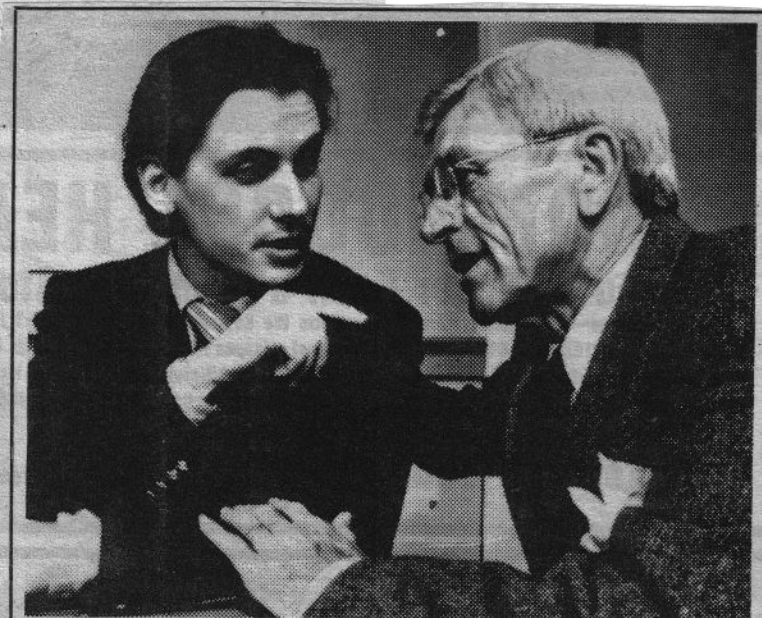
The three committeemen, Martin E. Brooks as chairman, and his assistants Michael Cavanaugh (consulting attorney) and Byron Morrow (the latter two recreating their roles from the previous 1975 production) add to the excitement of this production.

The others in the cast, some of whom play more than one role, are: Howard Honig, as Sam G. Wood, Martin Berkeley and Arthur Miller, Sam Vincent as Edward Dmytryck and Elia Kazan; John Medici, Ring Lardner Jr. and Jose Ferrer, Frank Aletter, Louis Mandel (counsel to Larry Parks) and Marc Lawrence and J.M. Jackson, Sterling Hayden and Jerome Robbins. Others in the cast are Rick Manheim as Assistant Committeeman No. 1 and Cameron Thor, Assistant Committeeman No. 2. The one woman is Toni Sawyer who plays Lillian Hellman.

Making this production so noteworthy are Laura Zucker, producer, Allan Miller, director, George Beckett, scenic designer, Dawn Hollingsworth, lighting designer, Marshall New, assistant director and Phoebe Sutton, stage manager.

*Are You Now or Have You Ever Been* plays at the Back Alley Theatre, 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys, Thursdays through Saturdays at 8 p.m. and Sundays at 3 p.m. and 8 p.m. until July 8. Don't fail to see this extraordinary production of a fearful time in history, which, hopefully, will never be repeated.

For reservations call 654-1703. Special reduced prices are available for seniors and full-time students.



OVERHEARD — *Are You Now or Have You Ever Been* by Eric Bentley; from left: George De La Pena as Bert Parks and Frank Aletter as his counselor.