

Pick Of The Week



ARE YOU NOW OR HAVE YOU EVER BEEN?

This is a powerhouse production of critic/scholar/playwright Eric Bentley's brilliant dramatization of "The Investigation of Show Business by the Un-American Activities Committee, 1947-1958." Drawing his dialogue exclusively from the record of the Congressional hearings, Bentley has contributed a remarkable restraint, condemning HUAC (rather than individual committee members) simply by showing us the subversion of justice as it was. Though he has imposed a showman's-structure on the material (Brecht is Bentley's ideological mentor), he has edited little. Allan Miller's solid direction of a uniformly professional, occasionally stellar cast gives exactly the right human realization to Bentley's intent to force us to confront the political ramifications of this bleak era, causing us to identify emotionally with the familiar individuals who were hounded, persecuted, blackballed and jailed.

As Larry Parks, crushed before our eyes, George de la Pena is so moving that I needed the entire first intermission to regain my composure. The short second act, however, was given largely to the arch and achingly wry testimony of Abe Burrows (played with detailed panache by director Miller). Joe George as a fortitudinous Lionel Stander is adamantly courageous, and Thalmus Rasulala is so glorious and articulate a Paul Robeson that his performance alone is well worth the price of admission. This play is one of the most important civil libertarian documents to come from the American theater, and one of the few straightforwardly political plays that absolutely works as pure entertainment. The timing of this tenth anniversary production could not be better, since the same anti-Semitic, racist, homophobic government forces that perpetrated these crimes against the Constitution have once again joined forces to strip away those freedoms inalienably granted to all by the Bill of Rights. *Are You Now . . . ?* is far more frightening a vision, for its being and having been fact, than any 1984 Orwellian fantasies. The Back Alley Theater, 15231 Burbank Blvd. (near Sepulveda), Van Nuys; Thurs.-Sun., 8 p.m.; mats Sun., 3 p.m.; thru July 8. Call 654-1703.

—Michael Lassell

We also recommend: *Bill and Eddie* at L.A. Actor's Theater, *Two Idiots in Hollywood* at Theatre/Theater, *Vicious* at the Second Stage Theater, *Heat* at Landmark Theater Alliance, *Vampire Guts* at the Pilot Theater, *It Had to Be You* at the Lee Strasberg Institute, *Factory Air* at First Street Theater, *Mother Courage* and *How to Be a Great Writer*, both at the Odyssey Theater.