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Westside

# UP-DOWN

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## ARE YOU NOW OR HAVE YOU EVER BEEN

Back Alley Theatre, 780-2240, Van Nuys; Thurs.-Sun. 8:00 p.m. Sun mat. 3:00 p.m.

Prior to Watergate an even darker blotch in our history was the investigation of show business (1947-58) conducted by the House Unamerican Activities Committee (HUAC). In 1975, a fine film, *The Front*, starring Woody Allen and former black-listed actors such as Herschel Bernardi and Zero Mostel, made us glimpse into the lives of show biz personalities and the fear of HUAC investigations caused throughout the Hollywood community.

Why, if some someone wasn't guilty of anything, would there be a fear? For one, most America believed that if you were called before HUAC, you must be unamerican—the unforgiveable crime during the time of H Bomb fever and the Red Scare.

If you refused to appear, or appeared but refused to name names of people you saw at rallies and meetings as long as 20 years ago, you could be held in contempt and imprisoned. If you appeared and cited the Fifth amendment then most of America assumed you did so because you had something to hide.

And if the committee did not clearly clear your name of guilt, the producers, directors, casting agents, theatre owners, nightclub owners, booking agents, etc. would most likely not hire you, fearing that the public, suspecting you of being un-American, would boycott your performance or connection with a vehicle. Or perhaps if someone did hire you, HUAC would decide to investigate them.

And if you did cooperate with the investigation and did name names of your associates, friends, etc. you would probably be labeled a stool pigeon and have difficulty securing



Left to right: Michael Cavanaugh, Byron Morrow, Martin E. Brooks, in "Are You Now Or Have You Ever Been."

work.

Thankfully those days are past. Frightening to note, however is the fact that HUAC remained active until it was disbanded in 1975 after Watergate.

If you are curious about what these hearings were about or need to be reminded of what it was like, a trip to the Back Alley Theatre in Van Nuys for a revival of *Are You Now . . .* will suffice. Written in 1972, first performed at the Yale School of Drama in 1973, Eric Bentley's *Cast Theatre* in 1975 becoming L.A.'s longest running play in its history.

The play consists of dramatized, but fictionalized transcripts of the original HUAC hearings, with all the names Arthur Miller, Jose Ferrer, Elia Kazan, Lillian Hellman, etc.) intact.

We watch as Larry Parks (George De La Pena) is broken down by the committee who unfeeling finally force Parks to name names. Parks is left a sobbing wreck of a man with little self dignity left.

Allan Miller as *Guys and Dolls* author, Abe Burrows satirically makes light of the proceedings but eventually tells the committee what it wants to know.

Thalmus Rasulala as Paul Robeson challenges which close Acts 1, 2 and 3 respectively the committee other including, King Lardner Jr., Sterling Hayden, Jerome Robbins, etc.

Under the direction of co-producer/actor/director Allan Miller the play moves quickly, each act building to a more involving climax then the one before it and each actor pouring as much emotion as possible and proper into their readings of the historical material.

Everyone in the cast is at least, good. John Medici as Ring Lardner, Jr. and later as Jose Ferrer overdoes it a bit, but not embarrassingly so.