



Joe George, foreground, portrays comic-actor Lionel Stander in "Are You Now," at the Back Alley Theatre.

This play's worth investigating

'Are You Now' re-creates drama of the '50s witch hunts

ARE YOU NOW OR HAVE YOU EVER BEEN, a docudrama by Eric Bentley; directed by Allan Miller; set by George Becket; lighting by Dawn Hollingsworth. Presented by Laura Zucker and Allan Miller at the Back Alley Theatre, 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys. 8 p.m. Thurs-Sun, 3 p.m. Sun, indefinitely. Tickets: \$12-\$14. Reservations: 780-2240.

Larry Parks.....	George De La Pena
Abe Burrows.....	Allan Miller
Lionel Stander.....	Joe George
Paul Robeson.....	Thalmus Rasulala
Jerome Robbins.....	J.M. Jackson
Chairman.....	Martin E. Brooks

By Jay Reiner

As I was settling into a seat just before the start of "Are You Now or Have You Ever Been," my lost ticket stub was passed to me by the stranger in the next seat. "Ah, a traveling stub," I said in a weak attempt at humor. "No," said the stranger without missing a beat, "a fellow traveling stub."

Well said. In one succinct ad lib I had been given an amusing introduction to Eric Bentley's docudrama about the House Un-American Activities Committee

hearings covering the years 1947 through 1958. Bentley's play not only takes us back to the days when the epithet "fellow traveler" carried enough weight to leave an indelible smear on the lives of those to whom it was applied, but it does so with economy, passion and a surprising amount of humor.

In the rash of nostalgia that has broken out recently for the good old days of the '50s, people tend to forget the bad old days that came with them. Careers were destroyed, friends and associates betrayed, lives ruined while HUAC went about its witch hunt into alleged communist infiltration of the entertainment community. The committee was finally dissolved in 1975, but not before the climate of fear engendered by these hearings had taken a terrible and irremediable toll.

Bentley's play, based on official transcripts of the hearings, is artfully constructed around the appearance of four major witnesses. Larry Parks' testimony provides a heartbreaking look at a man whose career was already in eclipse (re-

member the blacklist?) when he took the stand. Parks holds out as long as he can against naming names, but eventually crumbles from the pressure being applied by the committee. His final breakdown is skillfully executed by George De La Pena.

Allan Miller, who also directs the play, re-creates his role from the original Los Angeles production as satirist Abe Burrows. Miller is hilarious as he leads the committee round and round the mulberry bush in its attempt to ferret out information. Joe George is stonewalling comic-actor Lionel Stander and Thalmus Rasulala brings the play to a fiery conclusion as Paul Robeson. Some others in the cast aren't as successful as this formidable foursome, but Sam Vincent (who plays both Edward Dmytryck and Elia Kazan) and J.M. Jackson (as Jerome Robbins) offer interesting characterizations.

If you haven't seen "Are You Now" before (or even if you have), this is your chance to see a first-class production of an important and compelling play.