

# 'Are You Now' relives HUAC film hearings

By LAURIE SOSNA  
Special to the News Chronicle

There has always existed in the theater the fine line between the play and reality. There are times when the play becomes so much like real life that the audience must continually remind themselves not to interfere, not to reprimand, not to stand up and remark on the proceedings.

"Are You Now or Have You Ever Been" in production at the Back Alley Theater, is just such a play. It deals with the House Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) and its investigation of Communist activities in the motion picture business between 1947 and 1958. It deals with life and death realities; with decisions that made or destroyed lives and careers. An appearance before HUAC destroyed more careers in Hollywood and elsewhere than any other form of investigation in Hollywood's short lifetime. The term "blacklisting" became a household word.

What is remarkable about "Are You Now" is that there are times in the play when it is important to remind oneself that this is only a play. We are not really in the council chambers, we are not surrounded by cameras and reporters and facing a large group of committee members, listening to the testimony of half of Hollywood. But this play is produced with such care and such understanding that it creates the feeling of being a part of history.

The play was written from actual testimony from the HUAC meetings. Playwright Eric Bentley has carefully extracted the essence of the committee's questions and the witnesses responses in such a way as to cover a whole range of emotions.

George De La Pena plays Larry Parks, one of the first actors to "name names." De La Pena's performance is brilliant and thoughtful. Parks was a man torn between his need to explain his actions (he had been a member of the Communist party for a very short period of time) and his conscience, which told him that it

## NEW VICE PRESIDENT

NEW YORK (AP) — Anne Maitland, director of publicity and public relations for Pocket Books, has been named vice president.



George De La Pena (left) and Frank Aletter in a scene from "Are You Now or Have You Ever Been" by Eric Bentley.

was not necessary to inform on others.

De La Pena portrays Parks as a gentle, friendly man with a wife and two kids, who is destroyed by a power he cannot come to terms with. Parks' pain is aimed at gut level. It hurts to watch him forced by the committee, to name names. His constant badgering by members of the committee, particularly Martin Brooks as the committee chairman, is one of those moments in the theater where life and art stand on that fine line.

There were those who were unwilling at first to talk, such as Elia Kazan and Edward Dmytryk, both directors, both portrayed by Sam Vincent, who captures their initial reticence to talk, then their gut level feeling of saving themselves and naming names.

There were those who spoke up, who named names, without second thought, such as Sam Wood and Martin Berkeley, played by Howard Honig; or Sterling Hayden and Jerome Robbins, played by J. M. Jackson. All of these men felt they were doing the right thing; all felt that they had made a mistake as young men, and wanted everyone to know that they had been wrong.

Others would never talk about others, they would only speak for themselves. They would, they felt, serve no purpose by naming names.

Artists such as Arthur Miller (Howard Honig) and Lillian Hellman (Toni Sawyer); Lionel Stander (Joe George) and Paul Robeson (Thalmus Rasulala). People of principle, they knew the risks they took because of their decision.

One witness, Abe Burrows, masterfully played by director Allan Miller, seems to have the key to the entire HUAC meetings. Burrows, a satirist as well as a screenwriter, although he named names, made his testimony a comic relief; his answers served to point out the ludicrousness of the proceedings. The issue of Communists infiltrating Hollywood and motion pictures was never really an issue; many of the so-called "party meetings" were simply discussions of how actors and writers could make more money.

Other members of this distinguished Back Alley company are John Medici as Ring Lardner, Jr. (one of the "Hollywood Ten") and Jose Ferrer. The other committee members are played by Byron Morrow, whose patronizing attitude deserves a right-cross, and Michael Cavanaugh, whose brilliant and incessant portrayal of the "\$64 question" man is just incredible. Rick Manheim and Cameron Thor are our narrators and paper handlers during the meetings.

Lighting design by Dawn Hollingsworth is disquieting enough to make us feel a part of the action. George Becket's set is just enough to portray a committee room, without too much to clutter things up.

Allan Miller has been acquainted with "Are You Now" for 10 years. He knows all of the nuances of the play, all of the tricks to make it work.

He directs this production with style and polish, the actors know exactly what to do and where they are at all times. They make these real people out of our not-so-distant past come to life. We share their anger, their frustration and their destruction.

Miller and company have a splendid production on their hands; they should be very proud.

Performances are Thursday through Sunday nights and Sunday matinees. The Back Alley Theatre is located at 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys. Phone (818) 780-2240.