

# Entertainment

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## Red-scare play is absorbing, and frightening

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The House Committee on Un-American Activities made a lot of headlines during its 37 years of existence, most of them with its investigation into possible communist subversion into the movie industry.

All kinds of Hollywood personalities — stars, bit players, directors, writers — were called before the committee to answer questions about their possible

### Theater Review

"Are You Now Or Have You Ever Been?" — Back Alley Theater, 15231 Burbank Blvd., Van Nuys. Thursday-Sunday at 8 p.m. with Sunday matinees at 3 p.m. \$12 and \$14. Through Sept. 2. (818) 780-2240.

communist activities, and to inform on others who might have been tainted by the Red Menace.

Careers were ruined, some defiant witnesses went to jail, a number of writers had to go abroad and change their names to continue earning a living, and in the end no shred of real evidence of communist subversion of the movies was uncovered.

The play "Are You Now or Have You Ever Been?" being presented at the Back Alley Theater in Van Nuys, dramatizes the HCUAC inquiries with real testimony taken from the actual hearings over a period of years, with cast members impersonating a number of the screen personalities who were summoned before the committee.

It makes for a strong, absorbing evening, sometimes frightening or anger-arousing in its revelation of politicians' disregard for human beings in their pursuit of headlines. But it is always interesting.



Former Riversider Thalmus Rasulala plays Paul Robeson in the drama, "Are You Now or Have You Ever Been?" at the Back Alley Theater in Van Nuys.

Former Riversider Thalmus Rasulala plays Paul Robeson, who made a memorable appearance before the committee and faced down its small-minded badgering with a magnificent display of scorn, contempt, irony and mockery.

Rasulala — who was known as Jack Crowder when he starred in football at Poly High and in football and musical productions at the University of Redlands — gives a powerful performance, fully embodying Robeson's intellectual and moral strength as well as his imposing physical presence.

(Rasulala was still known as Jack Crowder when he played Cornelius Hackl opposite Pearl Bailey in "Hello, Dolly" on Broadway. He took the name Rasulala — Messenger of Allah — when he came to Hollywood to star in the movie "Cool Breeze"

and play major roles in such television shows as "The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pittman" and "Roots.")

Among the other memorable scenes in "Are You Now or Have You Ever Been" is the heart-rending appearance of Larry Parks, played by George De La Pena, who knows that his own career has been ruined by the summons but begs, to no avail, not to be forced to reveal names of colleagues in his youthful experience with the Communist Party.

Jenny O'Hara gives a ringing presentation of Lillian Hellman's defiant letter to the committee, in which she refuses to tailor her conscience to fit political fashion.

Allan Miller, who also directs the production, provides welcome comic relief as Abe Burrows, and Joe George adds some fiery moments as Lionel Stander, loudly defiant, if not wholly convincing

in his sincerity.

Other personalities portrayed, with some actors doubling in roles, include Sam G. Wood, Edward Dmytryk, Ring Lardner Jr., Sterling Hayden, Jose Ferrer, Elia Kazan, Jerome Robbins, Martin Berkeley, Marc Lawrence and Arthur Miller. Some of these defy the committee, others fall over themselves to declare their penitence for any early communist activity and to name names of associates in those activities.

Martin E. Brooks plays the badgering committee chairman throughout the show, although, as we are told, the committee had several different chairmen during its 37 years, including one who went to jail for stealing the taxpayers' money.

The play has been extended through Sept. 2 at the tiny theater which is, literally, in a back alley in Van Nuys.