

CHRIS JARMICK'S

Stage Scenes

THEATRE REVIEWS

ARE YOU NOW OR HAVE YOU EVER BEEN by Eric Bentley
at the Back Alley Theatre (780-2240), Van Nuys, Thurs.-Sun.
8:00 p.m. Sun. mat. 3:00 p.m.

Because the new typesetting machine jumbled around a few paragraphs of my reviews a couple of weeks back and because this is the best show currently running in the Valley (Brooklyn USA is second), here we go again:

Prior to Watergate an even darker blotch in our history was the investigations 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 blacklisted 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 through the Hollywood community.

If you are curious about what these hearing 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 play then enjoyed some success Off-Broadway and opened at Los Angeles' Cast Theatre in 1975 to become 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 unfeelingly 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 the committee as to its right to destroy careers and imprison people without actually charging anyone with a crime.

In between these three major confrontations which close Acts 1, 2 and 3 respectively the committee cross examines others including, Ring Lardner Jr., Sterling Hayden, Jerome Robbins, etc.

Under the direction of co-producer/actor/director Allan Miller the play makes quickly, each act building to a more involving play than the one before it and each actor pouring

Week of June 27, 1984

Up-Date