

Entertainment

On Stage

**"Are You Now Or
Have You Ever Been"
Back Alley Theater
15231 Burbank Blvd.,
Van Nuys**

You wouldn't expect a play which advertises its dialogue as historically faithful to a series of congressional hearings to make for very good theater, but "Are You Now Or Have You Ever Been" is both accurate and compelling in its study of the House Un-American Activities Committee's investigation into "communist infiltration" of Hollywood in the 1950s.

Choosing key testimony given by important witnesses, compiler Eric Bentley and direc-

tor Allan Miller have given us a retrospective view of the repression of individual rights by a society obsessed with itself.

But what really sets the Hollywood-HUAC hearings apart as a rich source for theater is the fact that the original hearings themselves were intended as theater by the government. Hollywood, the government reasoned, had created public stars who could only be destroyed in a public setting. Therefore, television cameras, klieg lights, press photographers and overflowing courtroom audiences were all a part of the proceedings.

To recreate this air of intrusion and confusion, "Are You Now" leaves the house lights on dur-



Thalmus Rasulala (Paul Robeson) gives testimony before the House Un-American Activities Committee in a scene from "Are You Now Or Have You Ever Been," playing indefinitely at the Back Alley Theater in Van Nuys.

ing a court preparation period at the start of each act, letting the general hubbub of the theater audience serve as a reminder to itself of the nature of the proceedings.

It is difficult to see this play without being swept up in the politics of the situation. Therefore it is to the everlasting credit of those involved that for the most part "Are You Now" never loses sight of its human element, and so rather than just watching a parade of parroting ideologues we are treated to real insight into those whose lives and careers hung in the balance of an imbalanced society.

Witnesses include the characters of Ring Lardner Jr., Larry Parks, Sterling Hayden, Jose Ferrer, Lillian Hellman, Arthur Miller and Paul Robeson.

Particularly good performances from among a strong cast are turned in by Thalmus Rasulala (Robeson), George de la Pena (Parks — the first person to break down before the committee), and director Miller, whose nervous mannerisms and staccato delivery bring life to humorist Abe Burrows, a man whose offbeat testimony gave an air of self-parody to the original hearings.

"Are You Now" continues through July 8, with performances Thursday through Sunday at 8 p.m., Sunday matinee at 3 p.m. Do

yourself a favor and go see it.

—Bill Edelstein



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