

STAGE REVIEW

'Are You Now' at Center Theater

BY SYLVIE DRAKE

Times Staff Writer

A fresh visit to "Are You Now or Have You Ever Been" at the Hollywood Center Theater reveals a production that has become stronger, tighter, more integrated than ever.

The show's been running at that location for close to nine months and, before that, played several weeks at the tiny Cast Theater on El Centro. In the fall, some of the

'ARE YOU NOW OR HAVE YOU EVER BEEN'

Eric Bentley's documentary drama at the Hollywood Center Theater, 1451 N. Las Palmas Ave., Hollywood. Producers Kathleen Johnson, Joseph Stern and Allan Miller. Set design Barry Robison. Lighting Robert Bye. With Tom Bower, William Burns, Jeff David, Wynn Irwin, Bob Larkin, Sil Words, Allan Miller, Jess Nadelman, Maureen O'Toole, Marc Piastrick, Richard Burns, David Spielberg, Jay Varela, John Lehne, David Glennon, Jack Miller.

members of the local company traveled to Washington, D.C., where director Bill Devane staged a production of the play at Ford's Theater on a limited run basis.

But nowhere else—not at Ford's, not at Yale where the show originated in 1973, and not in New York where it had an inconspicuous run of several weeks at the Theater of Riverside Church—has "Are You Now" enjoyed the vigorous response it has experienced here.

This phenomenon may have everything to do with the fact that the subject matter—the relentless investigation of the Hollywood entertainment community by the House Un-American Activities Committee over roughly a decade—is on home ground. Lives in this town were, at the worst, shattered and, at the least, disrupted by those ignominious proceedings. Some people, like the late Larry Parks, never overcame the damage. Others like Jules Dassin went into self-exile. Still others, like Lillian Hellman and Arthur Miller, stuck to their convictions and simply carried on.

Variety of Responses

It is to the credit of director Devane and his cast that this infinite variety of responses, all scrupulously true to the record, continues to be eloquently reflected in the performances at the Hollywood Center Theater. (We are warned early that no resemblance between witnesses and actual persons is coincidental. The language is entirely taken from the transcripts of the hearings though, granted, selectively excised and arranged by playwright Eric Bentley and further tightened by Devane.)

The production itself is documentary theater of the highest order, expertly staged and performed, with a power, a movement and a life rarely found on any stage.

Notable among changes in casting is Wynn Irwin's replacement of Allen Garfield as Lionel Stander. It is a totally different, flamboyant, almost raucous performance that brushes as close to parody as the confines of the

situation will allow, but stops short of the kill. We get the sobering awareness that the fun and games are deadly serious and that real people were really being devastated by unconstitutional and self-righteous witch-huntings.

Jeff David, who continues in his impersonation of an unctuous Jose Ferrer and turns in a solemnly seething Arthur Miller, is quite remarkable in a new role: as the twitching, tense Martin Berkeley, the screenwriter single-handedly responsible for naming 162 names.

Jay Varela presents a rather straightforward Elia Kazan. William Burns, who replaces Besson Carroll as Sterling Hayden, also provides a consummately reserved and vainglorious Jerome Robbins. Tom Bower acquits himself honorably as Ring Lardner Jr. and screenwriter Marc Lawrence, while Maureen O'Toole lends the right note of sobriety to the reading of Lillian Hellman's famous letter to the committee preceding her appearance there. Sil Words' Paul Robeson is a figure to be reckoned with.

Tongue-in-Cheek Portrayals

Of the old guard, David Spielberg is, if possible, even more shattering as the crumbling Larry Parks, and Allan Miller continues his superbly tongue-in-cheek portrayal of Abe Burrows.

It is, however, to John Lehne, the embodiment of several HUAC chairmen over the 10-year period, that a great deal of the praise must go. He relentlessly pursues the composite character of prosecutor with a constancy and intensity that do much to keep the dynamics of the production perpetually reeling. David Glennon and Jack Miller ably play his sidekicks.

If you think this kind of theater carries its own drama and is therefore easy to do, think again. The more dramatic the real-life situations, the less well they translate to the stage. No, the credit must go directly to the creators of "Are You Now": Bentley, Devane and this remarkable company of actors.

Negotiations are afoot for a TV special and possibly a film of this production—but if you haven't seen it onstage yet, don't wait. Audiences are thinning out and it may not be with us for very much longer.

'Man Friday' Due in Westwood

"Man Friday" starring Peter O'Toole and Richard Roundtree will open Christmas Day at Mann's Westwood. The Avco Embassy film was directed by Jack Gold from a screenplay by Adrian Mitchell. David Korda was producer and Gerald Green and Jules Buck were executive producers of the picture made by Keep Films in association with ABC Entertainment and ITC.

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