

# Theater: 'Are You Now or Have You Ever Been' ...

ARE YOU NOW OR HAVE YOU EVER BEEN, a play by Eric Bentley. Directed by Jay Broad; setting by Alan M. Beck; costumes by Pamela Dendy; lighting by Lee A. Goldman; production stage manager, Thomas Mark Edlun. Presented by TRC'S Performing Cooperative, Arthur Barlow, producer. At the Theater of the Riverside Church, 120th Street and Riverside Drive.

Clarence Felder, Investigator.  
 Elliot Sullivan ..... Clarence Felder  
 Lillian Hellman ..... Anne Francine  
 Paul Robeson ..... Albert Hall  
 Sam G. Wood, Elia Kazan, James Hilbrandt  
 Jose Ferrer, Martin Berkeley, Joseph Leon  
 Abe Burrows, Ring Lardner, Allan Miller  
 Sterling Hayden.  
 Jerome Robbins ..... Michael Nader  
 Edward Dymtryk, Tony  
 Kraber, Mark Lawrence, William Newman  
 Lionel Stander,  
 Louis Mandel ..... Arnold Soboloff  
 Larry Parks,  
 Arthur Miller ..... Peter Thompson

## By CLIVE BARNES

The Un-American Activities of The Investigation of Show Business by the Un-American Activities Committee during the years 1947 to 1958 were among the more shameful incidents of recent American history, and I guess it is safe enough to say that now. If there is one thing easier than being wise after the event it is being courageous after the danger.

Eric Bentley has constructed a "theater-of-fact" documentary on these trials or investigations, or whatever you want to call them. The title of the play is grimly appropriate. It is "Are You Now or Have You Ever Been"—and it refers to what the investigators themselves cheerfully called the "\$64,000 question." Are you now, or have you ever been, a member of the Communist party? Even in these days of Nixon détente, you can see the question on applications for citizenship.

The play has opened a new subscription series of the Theater of the Riverside see the question on application Church, a theater and a series I cordially commend to you. Mr. Bentley's play, which was having its New York premiere following its initial production earlier this year by the Yale Repertory Theater, is oddly entertaining yet oddly unlikable.

I am never too happy about this new form of documentary, the "theater of fact." Theater and fact make odd bedfellows. The playwright here assures us that "The proceedings of the House Un-American Activities Committee were taken down by a stenographer and then printed. The dialogue you will hear is taken from this record. No words are attributed to anyone which he or she did not speak or write."

The words have, however, been selected and edited. The director, Jay Broad, has felt

free, naturally enough, to permit his actors gestures and intonations that might be as far removed as the original. There is probably a film record of most of this material, and a film documentary of these hearings would perhaps be fairer to the participants.

The incidents—for people have regrettably short memories—concerned the Hollywood and show-business blacklist. Actors, writers and directors thought to have links with the Communist party were witch-hunted down by a group of politicians and lawyers, many of whom seemed more interested in their reputations and fame than in the lives of the people they were so casually destroying. There was a madness there—and if this play serves no other purpose it does at least remind us how easy it is for a governmental bureaucracy to vilify, damage and destroy people with an almost irrational vindictiveness.

Arthur Miller, himself both victim and hero of this Inquisition, said it for us all in his play "The Crucible."

Mr. Bentley is concerned—at least in this dramatization—more in facts than the implications. We see people like Larry Parks—an accused actor—passing through the dark night of their soul. Yes, we do see their agonies, and with some of them we see their deceptions. Personally I would prefer to avert my eyes from these so-called facts.

The play by its very essence is partisan. It makes fun of the people who became stoolpigeons for the committees and offered information. It glorifies—with justice—the heroes such as Arthur Miller, Lillian Hellman, Paul Robeson and Lionel Stander. Such heroes should be honored. Yet when I saw this play and noticed the people sitting back and comfortably exulting in the success of the good guys and the discomfiture of the bad guys, I could not help wondering how heroic they would have been or how heroic I would have been. That is why I found the play unlikable. I also found it smug.

Yet I confess myself to be a sucker for courtroom drama. I find it difficult to turn off reruns of "Perry Mason," and undoubtedly Mr. Bentley has shaped his material in a very adroit fashion. Structurally we perhaps spend too much time on the suffering of poor Mr. Parks, although emotionally it did set the tone for the evening. And the ending, with Paul Robeson

defending black power before anyone knew what black power was, is impressive.

Mr. Broad has staged this succession of courtroom encounters with great zest and skill, and the acting is very impressive. Allan Miller is hilarious as a casual Abe Burrows, Albert Hall and Anne Francine are splendidly

outraged as Mr. Robeson and Miss Hellman, Arnold Soboloff is the fiercely combatant Mr. Stander, and Peter Thompson has great compassion as the baffled but doomed Larry Parks.

It was an episode we should never forget. I doubt whether this is the fairest way to remind us of it.