

# The Theater

## *Oswald on Trial*

*New York*

"The Trial of Lee Harvey Oswald," at the ANTA Theater, attempts to continue the controversy over the circumstances of the assassination of President Kennedy in November 1963. The assumption is made that Oswald didn't die when Jack Ruby shot him, but lived to go to court.

The play, written by Amram Ducovny and Leon Friedman, purports to exhibit new evidence which, if accepted, would lead to the conclusion that if Oswald were the assassin at all he was not alone.

The play's courtroom drama turns out to be of a rather pedestrian order. Toward the end, however, there is a statement by Oswald himself that does create low-keyed dramatic intensity. Peter Masterson as Oswald not only looks the part but manages to convey the flavor of a distorted personality with a seeming strain of sincerity in it. Mr. Masterson is seated on stage, under a spotlight, when the audience comes into the theater and stares woodenly at the courtroom and audience for the first half of the play.

Clifton James plays the prosecutor with heavy Southern hamminess. Ralph Waite, more restrained until a climactic outburst pleading for the jury's sympathy, is attorney for the defense. The audience, as in more than one bygone courtroom play, is addressed as the jury.

As a succession of witnesses is examined, Oswald's defense bears down on evidence that the bullet that the prosecution says wounded Gov. John B. Connally, who was riding directly ahead of President Kennedy, could not indeed have done so. It is contended that a second rifle and a second person must have been used to have caused the several wounds. Projections of photographs and diagrams accompany this discourse. The defense also gets an expert witness to testify that Oswald's rifle was not an accurate type.

Oswald finally takes the stand to tell a strange story about trying to help the CIA thwart a murder plot and catch the actual assassins, a couple of Cubans. He contends that the CIA man unaccountably failed to show up and that he, Oswald, was framed. In the presentation of this unsupported story and the cross-examination by the prosecuting attorney, no attempt is made to soften the lopsided, antisocial character of Oswald.

Under Tunc Yalman's direction, the play doesn't build up the tension of most courtroom dramas, perhaps because the question to be decided by the audience is an open one. There are discrepancies in the evidence produced by both sides, with numerous loose ends and non sequiturs. It's hard to believe that if a trial of Oswald had indeed been held better preparation wouldn't have been made, particularly by the defense in attempting to find the mysterious CIA agent.

"The Trial of Lee Harvey Oswald" may attract audiences who have followed the twists and turns of the Kennedy assassination, with its host of accompanying commentators. The Warren Report, incidentally, is not mentioned in the play.

Gene Persson produced the play and Robin Wagner designed the stark courtroom setting.

—RICHARD P. COOKE