Itinerary: The War on Drugs

By ROBIN RAIIZI
TIMES STAFF WRITER

In his last statement as the U.S. drug czar, retired Gen. Barry R. McCaffrey said it was time to abandon the metaphor of a "war on drugs."

It seems a little late. Since 1970, the federal anti-drug budget has grown from $1 billion to more than $17 billion a year. Indeed, the efforts to fight drugs grew to fit that war metaphor.

In the U.S., drug use dropped between 1979 and 1992—from 14.1% to 5.8% of Americans over age 12 saying they'd used some illegal substance. In the last month. At the same time, drug offenders went from making up less than 25% to nearly 60% of inmates in federal prisons.

The politics of the drug war have provided ample material for artists and entertainers. From "The French Connection" to the teen drug dealer in "American Beauty." There are some serious— and humorous—examples this weekend.

Thursday

"Agents and Assets" is a theatrical show combined with real symposiums about the war on drugs.

Starting tonight at 7:30, Side Street Projects (425 S. Main St., 2nd floor, downtown Los Angeles, $5-$10. [213] 620-8895), the Los Angeles Poverty Department (LAPD) dramatizes a congressional hearing on the CIA's alleged involvement in drug trafficking. The LAPD is a theatrical group of homeless and formerly homeless actors, many from Skid Row. In "Agents and Assets," they play congressmen and government officials during the 1986 hearing about whether the CIA sold crack in Los Angeles.

Tonight, the post-show discussion is with Dave Fratello, who managed the successful Yes on Prop. 36 campaign—which requires drug treatment for nonviolent drug offenders—and has also coordinated initiatives for medical use of marijuana.

Friday's show, also at 7:30, includes a discussion with Sandra Alvarez, head of the Colombia Human Rights Program at Global Exchange, who is leading an education effort about the U.S. government's role in Colombia's civil war. Saturday, theater directors John Malpede and Peter Selser lead a discussion on the arts and social change at 2:30 p.m. Saturday performances are at 2 and 7:30 p.m.

If you drive up the 5 Freeway on your way home, you might pass the mural titled "Just Say No" near the interchange with the Pasadena Freeway. It was painted in 1991 by Steven Rose, a member of the other LAPD.

Saturday

Lighten up and go see "Heroine Addicts," which has nothing to do with the illegal narcotic. The all-female variety show has just gone weekly at bang (457 N. Fairfax Ave., L.A. 8 p.m., $5) after two years running monthly. Host Pelelo Lombard and fellow comic Amy Simon lassoed top talent from other comedy theaters—Groundlings, ACME, etc.—to assemble "Heroine Addicts," which moves beyond sketch comedy and parody into hilarious character pieces.

PLAN AHEAD: NEXT WEEKEND

- "A Slippy Slope" and "Morning Noon & Night" by monologist Spalding Gray performs two of his latest solo shows, Thursday ("A Slippy Slope") and Friday ("Morning, Noon & Night") at the California Center for the Arts, 340 N. Escondido Blvd., Escondido. $32. (800) 886-4253.
- The Iona Pear Dance Theatre of Honolulu performs Cheryl Flamberg's full-evening contemporary spectacle "The Mythology of Angels" on Jan. 18 at Pepperdine University, 24335 Pacific Coast Highway, Malibu. $15. (213) 556-1672.
- "The Knackers ABC," Boris Vian's anarchic vaudeville, may run Fri. 24 at Ochre.