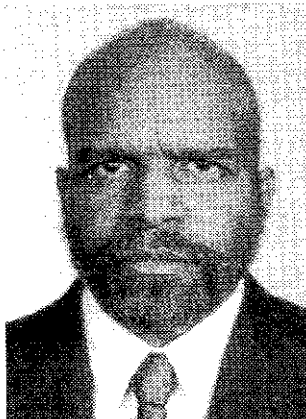


Community Theater

Watching Olympic organizers shunt Los Angeles' homeless population out of public view in 1984 provided John Malpede with an unlikely inspiration: to start a theater company. In the 15 years since that improbable "Let's put on a show!" moment, the **Los Angeles Poverty Department** — with its ironic acronym, LAPD — has been making drama by, for, and within Skid Row, the 55-square-block area of downtown where one-third to one-half of Los Angeles' homeless population, the largest in the nation, lives. Drawing its performers from the current and the formerly homeless, LAPD offers its members a voice and an active role in the creative process. Its latest work, *Agents and Assets*, runs January 11-13 at Side Street Projects.

This is not recovery-group drama. LAPD favors challenging, cutting-edge projects. A crucial part of its creative mission is exploring the forces that create and shape places like Skid Row. *Agents and Assets* examines the CIA's alleged involvement in the drug war, tracing two parallel experiences: The script is drawn from testimony in 1998 congressional hearings, and the performers come from a world on which drugs have had a visceral impact. "It seems that the drug war really went unquestioned until the Shadow Convention this summer, and all of a sudden people are asking what's going on," says Malpede. "In some ways, the presidential election pre-empted us. It had a similar effect to what we're trying to do with the show, which is to put the democratic process out there with all its seams showing and watch it unravel."

Agents and Assets promises another unique exploration of the forces that shape Los Angeles, with the sharp contrast between the words of the government elite and the performances of LAPD's inner-city actors mirroring the imbalance between those in charge of the drug war and those on its front lines. — **By Zanthé Taylor**



Agents and Assets

Agents and Assets runs Jan. 11-13, \$8-\$10, Thurs.-Sat., 7:30 p.m.; Sat., 1 p.m., 400 S. Main St., downtown. Tickets, 213-620-8895. A different symposium follows each performance; Peter Sellers participates in one about arts and social action on Saturday at 2:30 p.m.