

CRITIC'S NOTEBOOK

They're the LAPD,
but their justice is
done on the stage

This may be the biggest opening week of the year for local theater, with seven new shows starting their runs in local playhouses by next weekend.

Performance Network is presenting

the world premiere of **Adam Kraar's** "The Spirit House," Oct. 17-Nov. 10, (734) 663-0696; while the

Hilberry mounts the 400-year old "King Lear" Oct. 18-Dec. 14, (313) 577-2972, directed by **Lavinia Moyer**.

Halloween comedies at **Planet Ant** — "Tales from the Script." (313) 365-4948

— and the **Hastings Street Ballroom** — "Night of the Living Dead: The Musical," (313) 870-9002 — vie for the right to scare you silly beginning Thursday. And Wayne State's **Studio Theatre** presents its first show of the season — "Painting Churches" — this Friday (call (313) 577-2972).

Just down the street from the Hilberry and the Studio, the **First Unitarian-Universalist Church** is presenting a very different kind of play. The **Los Angeles Poverty Department's** "Agents and Assets," Oct. 17-19, is based entirely on transcripts from actual Congressional hearings looking into allegations that the CIA was instrumental in bringing crack cocaine to American cities.

The accusations were first leveled in a series of articles in the San Jose Mercury News in the late 1990s. The play focuses on the testimony of the CIA inspector general, who vigorously denies the charges.

The mix of stagecraft and journalism also is informed by another layer of reality — the show's cast is made up of what the LAPD calls "real-life veterans of the crack epidemic" including former addicts as well as residents of neighborhoods shattered by drugs and crime. The play originally was staged in Los Angeles in 2001, where LAPD won critical acclaim for making theater that was "stunning in its honesty."

Artistic director **John Malpede** began the LAPD in 1985 as a collective of homeless and formerly homeless people with the goal of creating "community on Skid Row," while raising awareness about life on the streets. More than 300 people a month work with the LAPD in workshops and staged original performances.

The Detroit performances of "Agents and Assets" will feature seven LAPD actors who have been in residence for a month, working with a number of Detroit residents. Call (313) 671-3583.



John Sousanis

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