

THEATER

## PICK OF THE WEEK



Studs Schwartz: a victory two ways, artistically and politically.

### NO STONE FOR STUDS SCHWARTZ

**R**ead Brecht on "epic theater": You'll have a much better idea than I could give you of the theatrical effect created by the Los Angeles Poverty Department, America's first homeless ensemble. *Studs Schwartz*, developed by the L.A.P.D. from a story by Jim Beame, follows the flashbacks (or fantasies) of a homeless man, Saul "Studs" Schwartz (Beame), gunned down in Union Station for alleged gambling debts. As he lies dying, a man (Julius Jenkins Jr.) tries to rob him, while another man (Kevin Williams) monologues about seeing the corpse. Schwartz rises and suddenly we're at an interracial boxing match in 1972 New Orleans from which the plot takes off into an amazing odyssey to Miami, Brazil, Israel, Jamaica, the Golan Heights and Vietnam as a union organizer and a former district attorney (Williams, Carl Bunker) chase Saul for obscure reasons having to do with the AFL-CIO, the Teamsters and the Mafia (Italian and Jewish). Throughout *Studs Schwartz*, the spectator feels like a participant in a collective act of imagination, a communal undertaking that embraces and implicates everyone who does it and sees it. You don't just watch, you actually care about the outcome because a successful evening with the L.A.P.D. is a victory two ways, artistically and politically. The members of the L.A.P.D. — Frank Christian, John Malpede, Elia Arce, Bartholomew Bridges, Irene Adams, Brian Young, Marlon Payton, Pat Perkins, Apolo Severs plus those mentioned above — play both inside and outside their characters, performing *and* commenting on their own actions, a dual posture that produces some of the most intensely funny moments I've seen on stage ever. Malpede, a performance artist and titular director of the piece, acts as Schwartz' alter ego, the only solution to keep *Studs Schwartz* from bogging down in unscripted digressions. From every conceivable point of view, this is truly experimental, truly ensemble work, and everyone should see it. Brecht said that epic theater was the only form of representation that could adequately depict the "highly involved incidents of the class war in its acutest and most terrible stage." What he wrote in the 1930s goes for the 1980s. Boyd Street Theater, 305 Boyd St., dwtwn.; Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m.; thru Feb. 7. (213) 629-2205.

—Helen Knode