

Los Angeles Poverty Department *Jupiter 35*

It is impossible to imagine any other theater company doing LAPD's *Jupiter 35* with such devastating effect. Though this piece chronicling the horrific events in the life of LAPD member LeRoy "Sunshine" Mills is in the main finely written and possessed of considerable dramatic value, the graphic gravity of streetlife becomes undeniable in the presence of Sunshine on the stage.

On September 6, 1988 Sunshine woke up in L.A. County General Hospital, his body damaged and broken in a hundred ways, without any identification and without memory of what had happened to him, and was thus labelled "Jupiter 35." *Jupiter 35* begins with a brief video of Sunshine before the events of September 6, where we saw and heard a street-smart young black man giving an extemporaneous commentary on the "life of the fucked up and damned" in America. Then came the jolt of a violent crash in complete darkness.

When the lights came up we were immediately confronted by the invisibility of Sunshine as his physicians leisurely talked about their privileged personal lives while he lay in a coma. This was the first scene of medical indifference that either objectifies or ignores the poor, that by evening's end had

been so thoroughly pounded in that one could only feel outrage.

More crushing still was the simultaneous disclosure of the events leading to Sunshine's hospitalization and a look at the present Sunshine. The video, and the presence of several large black and white photos of Sunshine before his "accident" on the hospital beds, forced the audience to see the consequences of street violence: Sunshine today is six inches shorter, 40 pounds lighter, his face is re-arranged (with no careful help from his doctors), and ambulation is grossly restricted.

It was during Sunshine's near hallucinogenic unconscious reveries that the audience learned what happened to him. Scenes acted out in the dark by the rest of the company, which took place all over the performance hall, steadily built up the sequence of events: Sunshine came across a crack deal where a mother offered her little girl as sexual chattel in exchange for drugs. Sunshine's successful intervention to stop the rape resulted in his being beaten up, robbed of his general assistance check, and then summarily thrown from a third story window.

Sunshine took us inside the motivation for his intervention, which resonated with the video where he extolled American capitalism

and bemoaned the fact that the people he likes and who are good to him are leftists. It was Sunshine's male sense of protecting little girls and his admiration for the calvary that compelled him to risk his life. This portrait stood out as a gritty and ironic twist on the American notion of having strong beliefs of right and wrong and acting on them, and of the emboldened, innocent soul of the poor.

Jupiter 35 would have been almost unbearable had it not been for Sunshine's superb colloquial humor—a mix of macho braggadocio and chillingly perceptive paranoia—and for Sunshine's almost joyous survivalist spirit. His rendition of the 23rd Psalm included lines like "I in the baddest motherfucker in the valley of the shadow," and crescendoed at the end with a triumphant "I am alive!" *Jupiter 35* is a witness to the transformative powers of human beings, and a dramatic achievement by a group of streetpeople on their own terms that has left an indelible imprint on the chord connecting my heart and mind.

—Charles Wilmoth

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Charles Wilmoth does arts coverage for the San Diego Gay Times



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