

## LAPD gives a powerful, honest portrayal of street life and neglect

■ "LAPD Inspects America," by the Los Angeles Poverty Department, last night through December 9, at On the Boards, 153 14th Ave. Performances Thursday through Sunday at 8 p.m.; 325-7901.

by Paul de Barros  
Special to The Times

Noisy, chaotic, vulgar and confrontational were some of the words that came to mind during the Seattle debut of the Los Angeles Poverty Department's "LAPD Inspects America," last night at On the Boards.

Probing, powerful, intellectually honest, sugar-free and just plain excellent theater were phrases that came up afterward.

LAPD is a 5-year-old, Los Angeles-based company, led by professional actor/director John Malpede, that dramatizes the situation of homeless people by incorporating them, and their lives, into their shows. Last night's performance included three Seattleites, including a man named Mike who invited everyone to visit the tent city south of the Kingdome.

LAPD works without a script, using sketches and characters developed through improvisation, autobiography and observation. The actors are excellent. They portray street types: pimps,

whores, drug dealers, gays, metal punks, out-patients, hotel keeps, disco dancers and so forth. But what makes LAPD more than a journalistic catalog is the threatening and explosive way the action teeters between drama and actual reality. Throughout "LAPD Inspects America," which recounts the difficulties the company had mounting a performance in San Francisco, players harassed each other, the audience and even the On the Boards emcee, in tones that felt impromptu and "real."

Of course, it was all an "act." The hysterical, cross-dressed gay, Robert (played by Malpede), for example, a homeless mentally-ill person who has joined the company, appears to be sabotaging the show. But half way through, "Robert" pulls off his wig and becomes a tough, street-wise hipster.

But blurring the line between acting and action isn't entirely the point. As Robert becomes more and more problematic, the company has to confront the same question America faces with the homeless at large: whether to write him off. Kevin Williams, the winning and agile narrator of the piece, says: "Nothing hurts like when you give something to someone and they just can't receive it, like it was lost in the mail. Robert is all by himself. I don't know what to do about that."

Neither, apparently, do we.