

'LAPD Inspects' is vigorous, charming

ROY M. CLOSE STAFF WRITER

Early in "LAPD Inspects the Twin Cities," the remarkable work that is closing Walker Art Center's "Out There" series at the Southern Theater, a woman asks a homeless man whether he's a hobo, a tramp or a bum. Before the man can reply, a heckler answers for him: "A bum!"

The heckler is a plant, of course, but the interruption is entirely in keeping with "LAPD Inspects," a raucous, funny, often poignant piece about homelessness performed by people with firsthand knowledge of life on the streets.

The actors, about a dozen in all, include members of the Los Angeles Poverty Department, a five-year-old ensemble consisting mainly of homeless or formerly homeless persons, and local street people recruited when the company began its Twin Cities residency three weeks ago.

The hourlong work is unscripted; the cast follows a scenario developed during rehearsals, but all dialogue is improvised. It's a credit to LAPD Artistic Director John

WHAT: "LAPD Inspects the Twin Cities"

WHERE: Southern Theater, 1420 S. Washington Ave., Minneapolis

WHEN: Through Sunday

TICKETS: \$9-\$7

BOX OFFICE: 340-1725

CAPSULE: A raucous, funny, poignant piece about homelessness

Malpede that the performers — none of them trained actors — bring off "LAPD Inspects" as smoothly as they did at Thursday's first performance.

Although there are a few notable exceptions, including a rowdy courtroom scene wherein Thursday's audience was forced to rise not once but three times, "LAPD Inspects" unfolds mainly as a series of monologues in which individuals talk about their own experiences with homelessness.

Sometimes there are overlapping monologues with two or more people speaking at once — at cross purposes, as often as not — but monologues they remain, underscoring the point that homeless people tend to be isolated not only

from society but from one another.

Among the episodes is a very funny double monologue in which two performers give simultaneous — and wildly conflicting — accounts of a car ride they took together. In a more disturbing scene, an innocent man is bullied into pleading guilty to a crime he didn't commit.

The funniest sequence is a standup comedy routine delivered by Alex Alexander, an LAPD member who was homeless when she began performing four years ago. Not surprisingly, hers is a humor of alienation ("I'm only afraid of two things: other people and their friends"). The most affecting is a man's touching account of loneliness after the breakup of his marriage.

As you would expect, "LAPD Inspects" has many rough edges. But that's part of its vigor and charm; refinement would seem out of place here. It's animated, boisterous and enriched by humor, and it serves as a useful reminder that having no permanent address does not turn a person into a lower form of life.



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