

## TELEVISION

# Homeless share fears, anger in KTCA special

The LAPD of tonight's extraordinary episode of "KTCA Presents" has very little to do with police chief Darryl Gates and LA's hard-hitting finest. In fact, as far as a lot of people are concerned, this LAPD, the Los Angeles Poverty Department, is all about LA's worst: street people and the flotsam of modern American life.

LAPD is a 7-year-old theater troupe composed of people who are or have been homeless. Actors were picked off the streets of Los Angeles and other American cities by artistic director John Malpede and encouraged to dramatize the daily events of their lives. The idea clicked in LA, where performances were often ferociously emotional and, to drop a very overused word, startlingly *real*. Audiences instantly recognized that what they were seeing was something far different from what might be taught to alienated prep-school kids in some method-acting class. These "actors" were exorcising genuine torment and anger.

As the LAPD picked up critical acclaim and financial support, it hit the road, acquiring "talent" off the streets of cities such as Minneapolis and St. Paul. (It has since made a swing through northern Europe.)

The troupe came to the Twin Cities in January 1991 on what it calls an "inspection tour." It recruited local street people and gave a series of largely improvised performances at Southern Theater. Tonight's "KTCA Presents" is the video version of some of the material used in those shows, and it is powerful stuff. (That means profanity and dialogue of a "sexual nature.")



**BRIAN LAMBERT**  
TV COLUMNIST

■ **WHAT:** "KTCA Presents: LAPD"  
■ **WHEN:** 10:30 tonight  
■ **WHERE:** KTCA, Channel 2

As Minneapolis streetperson/actor Bruce Smith (a.k.a. "Disney Spielberg") asks in one of the brief interview segments interspersed throughout the piece, "What do you want? A group of actors pretending they're homeless, or a bunch of homeless people pretending they're actors?"

The answer, given this level of intensity, is obviously the latter.

The performance portion of tonight's show, shot in a barely converted warehouse, is a kind of anthology of street life. The segments are filled with aimlessness, rage, harassment, remorse and fear. Couples, ostensibly describing separate views of the same incident, bicker over where in Minneapolis they have to go to find "really real people." A woman, Lyn Tars, does a bit recalling her time as an exotic dancer. A man, whom she finally, reluctantly, allows herself to get close to, attacks her in her own apartment. As a dancer, her audiences were filled with more of the same.

Tragically appropriate for a lifestyle that offers a 40-year life expectancy, both Smith and Tars died months after the taping.

In another scene, a man re-enacts stealing a cup of coffee at a diner and his reaction to a woman who smiles at him from across the counter. A numbed instinct tells him to "say something to her." But what? Ask her back to the soup line for lunch? Stifled by humiliation, he returns to his sleeping bag in an alley and masturbates. He knows it is as close to love as he dares get.

KTCA producer Barbara Wiener was the first to convince Malpede to submit his performances to a camera. When he agreed, the performances were shot in a single, 15-hour day.

Perhaps because it is the most disquieting aspect of homelessness, what leaps out at you is how easy it is to relate to these dramas. What's the saying? Thousands more families are only two paychecks from homelessness?

Malpede and KTCA estimate the size of America's homeless population to be 8 million. LAPD's anger and our unease are responses to the realization that it could happen to any of us.