

CALENDAR THEATER

Theater New Reviews continued

THE LAST STREET PLAY Paula Jai Parker's adaptation of Richard Wesley's 1970 *The Mighty Gents* re-examines the poisonous effects of a big dream deferred. Among a group of friends living — barely — in Ghattotown, USA, Frankie (Forrest D. Martin) is the most restless spirit behind a singing/rap group called the Last Street Disciples — the performance arm of a fearsome street gang of the same name. Frankie's posse/fellow performers include the lanky Tiny (Derek Shaun), the ill-starred Lucky (Nema Williams), the mercurial Eldridge (Jemal McNeil) and Frankie's longtime girlfriend, Rita (Parker, who also directs) — a woman eternally caught between acceptance and her own nagging ambitions for a better life. The plot is too grimly fantastic — Frankie fumes and plots revenge against a rival neighborhood rapper, while Rita feverishly puts together a photo album to stave off an imminent tragedy, a Madame Defarge of the hood. Fortunately, the play needs no plot, so expert is it in drawing the hell of urban stagnation. The 20- to 30-something fellas hanging on the graffiti-pocked street corner with nowhere to go and nowhere to be are genuinely alarming to watch; it's no stretch that one of them will explode and the convivial atmosphere will turn cannibalistic in an instant. McNeil is more than convincing in the role of the black boy-man who continually throws punches at the world and hits nothing; Martin struggles antiheroically between being a dreamer and being society's dregs; Lamont A. Coleman nearly steals the show as the dazed, embittered bum Zeke; and Parker, with her mile-wide grin and sublime sexiness, plays Rita as a cross between Li'l Kim and Eartha Kitt. Coleman & Smith Artistic Company, 6902 Santa Monica Blvd., Hlywd.; Fri.-Sat., 8 p.m.; Sun., 7 p.m.; thru March 27. (323) 467-1599. (Erin Aubry Kaplan)