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A *CurtainUp* Review

The Mayor's Limo

... I don't need your pity. I'm pitiful. I don't need to be reminded of it. I just want to be left alone. Roam the streets as I please. ---

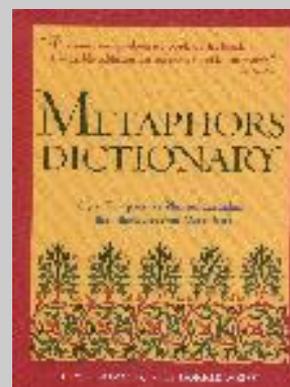
Banzai. But the audience does pity him, though, as written and performed by Mark Nassar, Your pity for the hopelessly hooked on drink and drugs homeless man is mixed with admiration, and regret for what might have been.



Mark Nassar, Michael Perri, Sharon Angela (Photo: Carol Rosegg)

The TV season has lots of new cop shows to keep viewers glued to their sets. But one of the best cop shows, more reminiscent of the old Barney Miller series than these snazzy productions, is playing live at the tiny Kraine Theatre in the East Village.

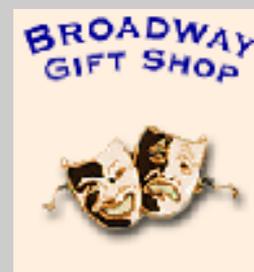
Like the Miller Show, *The Mayor's Limo* is set in a dingy downtown Manhattan police squad room -- no windows with a view, no fancy computers, just a few desks, walls covered with wanted signs and a holding cage. The bells



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NYC Weather

and whistles of the tragi-comedy written by and starring Mark Nassar come from pungent, rat-tat-a-tat dialogue and the actors who portray the believable, sharply drawn characters.

Nassar has written himself the showiest role, but his portrait of a man whose intelligence and wit still cling to him like the ragged clothes he wears is more searing than showy. And it never overshadows the ensemble.

The story plays out in a single afternoon, over the course of two and a half hours. The tensions and ambitions that prevail in the East Village police squad room are quickly set out Detective D'Amico (Patrick Michael Buckley on target as a not excessively honest motor-mouthed cop) and his partner Detective Owen Gleason (Robert Stevens, D'Amico's stick-to-the-rules work and sparring partner who's not adverse to a little off-duty fun) are pulled off their eagerly anticipated sting because their publicity-minded, bureaucratic boss, Captain Gould (Kevin Alexander), says the timing is wrong. To round out the squad room regulars, there's the cynical ready-for-retirement Detective Matty Kopac (played with tough likeability by James J. Hendricks) and Gilly an aptly surly Michael Perri), a rookie cop with a penchant for abusive behavior.

To add to the detectives' discontent with their deskbound state, they end up booking and investigating a homeless man arrested for urinating on the Mayor's limousine. This very conspicuous misdemeanor was actually inadvertent, but, as the media smells a *cause célèbre* and the homeless advocates see him as a tool to rouse public sympathy, he becomes the unwilling football in a political brouhaha. The man himself, is a wreck. His hands shake as if he were strapped to a vibrator instead of hand cuffed. His eyes are glazed from years of drinking and drugs. Though he will only identify himself as Banzai his crazed talk quickly hints at a smart, amazingly witty personality lurking within this wild social outcast (This is not a family show so the detectives' names for him are a lot more graphic!).

There's plenty here to warrant tagging this a comedy. The detectives' interaction with each other and with Banzai is filled with lots of laugh-out-loud savvy and often sarcastic observations (e.g. Matty disdainfully puts down the new crop of police recruits with "In the old days we'd beat you with a broom handle, but we wouldn't stick it up your ass").

For additional comic relief there's another unwanted prisoner, a hooker named Martel (Sharon Angela looking



and playing the part with enough pizzazz to lift it above its stereotypical roots). James Wormsworth makes a brief but telling appearance as the black legal representative of the Homeless protesters. He too is a homeless bum but he savvily recognizes that the public will more readily identify with white, middle-class Banzai. For an extra touch of diversity, another small role, that of an aggressive *Village Voice* reporter (Rebecca Weitman) might have been played by a black or Asian actress. On the same note, a minor quibble: No matter what the ethnic identity, reporters use special half-width pads not steno pads.

The humor notwithstanding, this is a deeply tragic story and the jokes serve mainly to ease the pain of what Matty's detective work reveals about Banzai's past: he's a once gifted athlete who's been on the run since his family perished in a fire set by drug dealers whom he then assaulted. His unexpected captivity (literally and to the political game he's unleashed) and the talk about his Benny Lambo days drives this tortured man ever deeper into the abyss.

Santo Fazio's maintains a sure balance between the play's comedy and tragedy though he allows Ralph Barile's mood-setting in between scenes to go on too long. Tom Hooper's gritty set handily accommodates all the action, and Rocio Matosas does admirable double duty as lighting and costume designer.

Though there are moments in the second act when the convergence of Matty's difficulties with his son and Banzai's problems veer dangerously towards sit-com contrivance, *The Mayor's Limo* is a well-written play that has something to say and, with the help of a solid cast, says it well. Mr. Nassar, who is best known for his involvement with plotless but extremely popular interactive comedies like *Tony and Tina's Wedding* and *Birdy's Bachelorette Party* proves himself an actor and playwright of substance.

The Mayor's Limo
Written by Mark Nassar
Directed by Santo Fazio

Cast: Mark Nassar as Benny "Banzai" Lambo. Also: Sharon Angela (Martel, the Hooker), Kevin Alexander (Captain Gould), Patrick Michael Buckley (Detective Paul D'Amico), James J. Hendricks (Detective Matty Kopac), Michael Perri (Gilly) Robert Stevens (Detective Owen Gleason), Rebecca Weitman (Ann Marie Libresca) and James Wormworth (Sammy Brown).

Set Design: Tom Hooper

Wardrobe & Lighting Design: Rocio Matosas

> Sound Design: Ralph Barlie

Original score: Rich Robinson

Running time: 2 hours plus one 10-minute intermission

Kraime Theatre, t 85 East 4th Street (Second/Third Avenues)
212/352-3101 or [web site](#)

9/17/02-12/29/02; opening 9/25/02

Reviewed by [Elyse Sommer](#) based on performance.

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