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Photos by LORI SHEPLER / Los Angeles Times

The faces of New York come to life as Danny Hoch presents characters such as, from left, Blanca, Kazmierczack and Floe at the Taper, Too theater.

The Accents Are on New York

Linguistically Resourceful Danny Hoch Conjures Up Characters in 'Some People'

THEATER REVIEW

By LAURIE WINER
TIMES THEATER CRITIC

Some people live inside of Danny Hoch, and his key to getting them out is to master their way of speaking. Every character has an accent in "Some People," the one-man show by Hoch, a linguistically resourceful and very funny 24-year-old New Yorker. The show is the second installment in the Taper, Too's Virtual Theatre series at the Ford Theatre.

Trinidadian, Lon-Guyland Island or rap-ese, these accents are the distinct garb of each vivid personality Hoch puts on stage. Of course, they can also be a stubborn obstacle to a larger world view, particularly in the case of the characters who probably don't even realize they have an accent.

Hoch provides a tour of a lively but largely segregated and often paranoid New York (and environs). He segues from a fast-talking, happening Caribbean deejay with fluid body movements to Kazmierczack, a stolid Polish fix-it man whose English is largely limited to "You something broke?" and "I fix." With incredibly few words at his disposal, Kazmierczack manages to tell an entertaining story about a cat depositing a fur ball

into his shoe while he napped.

Hoch's characters are extremely articulate, no matter how English-impaired. His long, changeable face and squashed nose encompass an array of ethnic types, or at least Hoch wills them into seeming to. His people are then given soul by Hoch's large, mournful eyes.

One character says nothing at all. A lounge entertainer in a blinding rhinestone dinner jacket and Jim Nabors' smile steps out of the spotlight only to become exquisitely morose. Here, Hoch proves he can deliver a character in a single flash of observation.

Most of Hoch's people converse with unseen company, and their responses to unheard replies are a Hoch

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specialty. Flex, a spirited teen-ager who moves sinuously beneath a stocking cap, is amazed that his friend has no beepers (he has five): "You livin' like Fred Flintstone, man." His jaunty high spirits and improbable plans for success are touching, until he insults the guy behind the counter in a Chinese carryout, just because he can.

Showing off a little virtuosity, Hoch transforms from Doris into Flex. Doris being the Jewish mother whose primitive racism continually offends the sensibilities of her adored son, a liberal who does some kind of work in a neighborhood that his mother finds worrisome. "David, let them shoot each other and not you!" she says, then waits as her son upbraids her. "How is it possible for the Jews to be racists?" she answers, with interesting logic. "I said they shoot people; I didn't call names."

"The hate groups are all connected; I saw this on '60 Minutes,'" says a New Jersey Jeep driver named Bill who prides himself on being well informed, particularly about "terrorist countries." From his faithful monitoring of the TV news, he develops incoherent theories about the Moroccans stealing real estate from the Jews. So much for information dispelling fear. Bill is the antithesis of Hoch in his approach to language. He would like to be President so that he could teach everyone to speak English. "How are we gonna communicate, you know, for peace?"

Hoch is smartly lit by David Castaneda and directed by Jo Bonney, who has done so well with Eric Bogosian's more hard-edged characters. Bonney (who is married to Bogosian) shows sensitivity in bringing out the quieter people in Hoch, particularly César, a father who uses his mouth to push back the grief as he discusses his murdered son with a therapist.

Hoch uses language the way Laurence Olivier used false noses, and Hoch's range, his observations and his compassion are all impressive. Watching him, one hopes perhaps we *can* all communicate better—you know, for peace.

■ "Some People," *Taper, Too*, John Anson Ford Theatre, 2580 Cahuenga Blvd. East, Hollywood Hills, Tues.-Fri., 8 p.m.; Saturday, 2:30 and 8 p.m.; Sunday, 2:30 and 7:30 p.m. Call for other dates. Ends May 14. \$20. (213) 972-7392. Running time: 1 hour, 30 minutes.