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The Arts

Employing Broken English for Community Repair

By BRUCE WEBER

Danny Hoch, a 22-year-old Jewish actor from Queens, was doing his Yemeni immigrant, a grocery owner with a short fuse addressing a customer with whom he has obviously had a running feud:

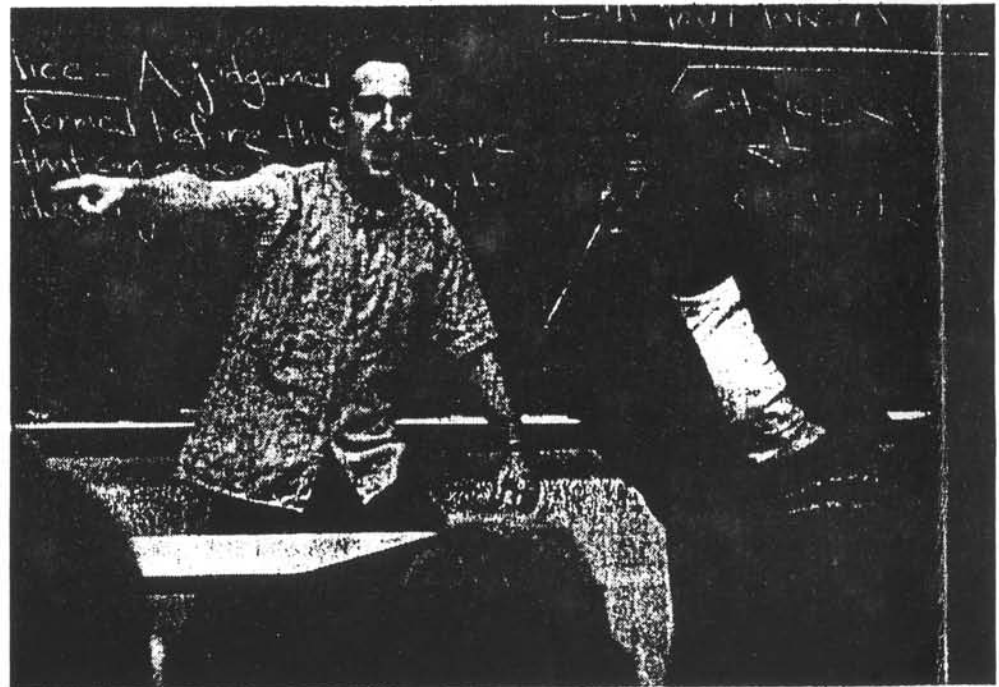
"You don't call me Arab in my store!" Mr. Hoch said, his rubbery features contorted angrily. "My name is Hassan. Hassan!"

This could've been part of Mr. Hoch's one-man, 11-character show, "Some People," a tour of New York that shows off Mr. Hoch's gift for ethnic vernacular and expressive broken English. Mr. Hoch's linguistically supple turns — as a West Indian radio host, an Eastern European apartment-building super, a black street rapper and a young Puerto Rican woman, among other roles — were described by Ben Brantley in *The New York Times* as "an astonishing gamut of voices." And the show, in the out-of-the-way Off Off Broadway house P.S. 122, received uniform praise from the critics who managed to get to the East Village to see it. (From Friday through Nov. 14, he'll be appearing at the New York Theater Workshop.)

But in fact this was his day job. Mr. Hoch is a member of the Creative Arts Team, the educational theater company in residence at New York University's Gallatin division, which sends out teams of actors to schools and prisons to dramatize social problems and conduct discussions about them. On this recent morning, Mr. Hoch (rhymes with lock) and his partner, Leslie Jones, were performing a skit about racial prejudice for a special-education class at Edward R. Murrow High School in Brooklyn.

A Familiar Situation

In the skit, which served as the introduction to a lesson about the dangers of judging people by stereotypes, Ms. Jones portrayed Latoya, a black woman who lives in the neighborhood and resents the fact that the



John Solomon/For The New York Times

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only convenient grocery is run by a foreigner. This was a drama the dozen or so students recognized, an ethnic standoff, the predicament of an Arab merchant in a black neighborhood. As the scene progressed, Latoya returned to the store, tempers flared and the language of racial hatred flew back and forth. At the moment where violence seemed inevitable, Mr. Hoch and Ms. Jones snapped out of character and made T's with their hands, signaling a timeout. "Freeze!" they said in unison, call-

ing the drama to a halt, at which point the students applauded. It was a racially mixed class, but there were no Arab students in it, and the response of one black teen-ager not only proved the effectiveness of the performance but also showed that the lesson had a way to go before it hit home. "I have a lot of Arabs who live by me," the boy said. "They act just the way you were acting. They're really snooty people."

It's rare that a young actor in New York gets to feed his art with his

breadwinning; just ask your next waiter. But for Mr. Hoch, his work, both in the classroom and onstage, comes out of a lifelong immersion in, and fascination with, the melting pot as it is made manifest on the streets. "I get lines from these kids all the time," he said after class. "But I took a lot of my characters from my growing up, too."

Mr. Hoch, who lives now in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, is an amiable,

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