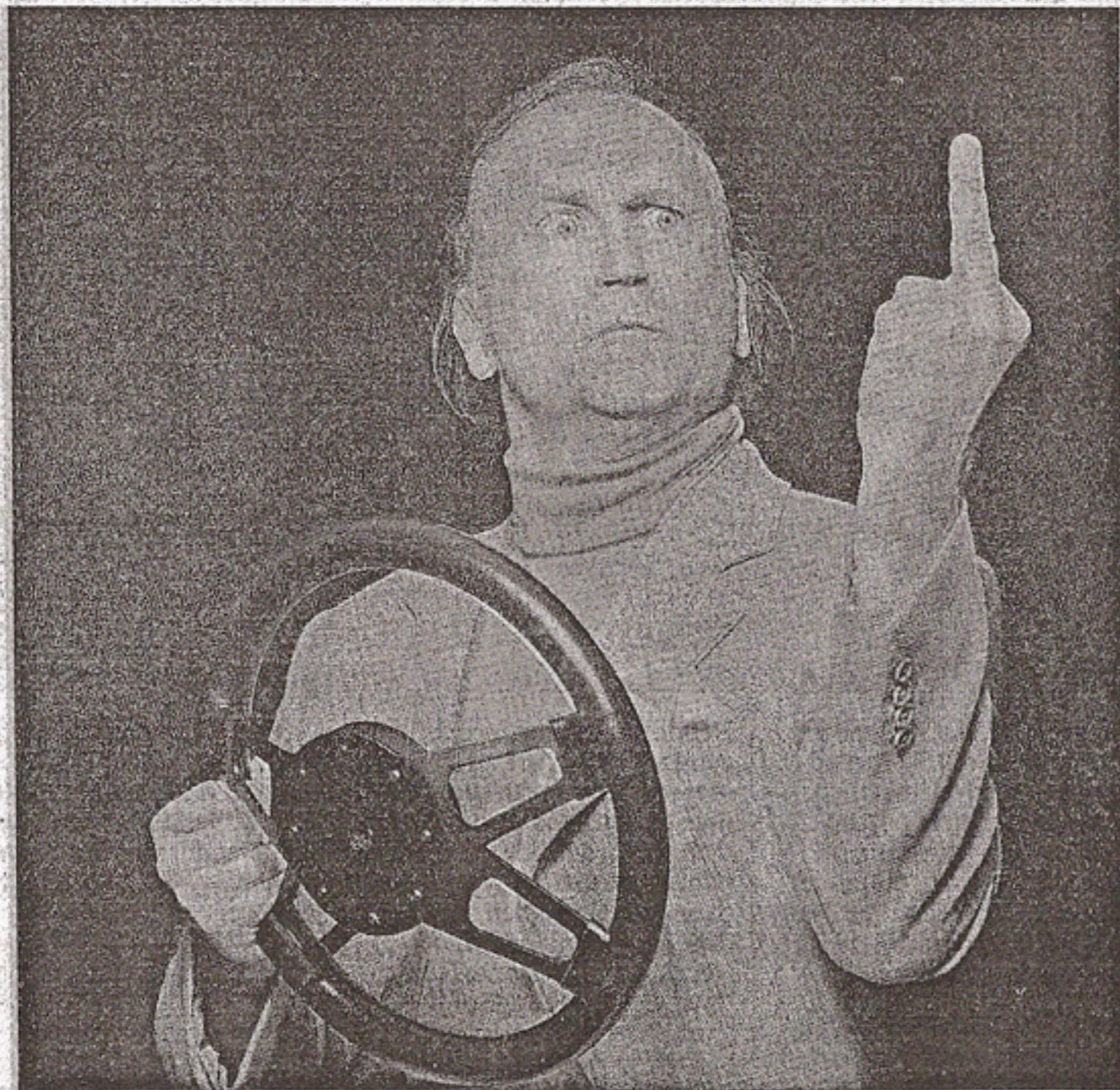


hotshow



Mark Soper plays ten characters and gives each a distinctive voice

THEATRE
AN AGE OF ANGELS
 ★★★★★
 ASSEMBLY @ GEORGE ST
 (VENUE 3)

ONE day, in Los Angeles, a schoolboy kicks a ball over a chain-link fence on to a highway, and a series of mundane events cascade into a tragedy. In this extraordinary one-man show, written and performed by American actor Mark Soper, the story unfolds through the eyes of ten different people.

The opening monologue takes the voice of a paedophile who hangs around playgrounds, a complex, fragmented, even poetic voice which evokes an inner turmoil of shame and longing. It sets the tone for a challenging multi-character show which refuses to bow to audience expectations or sensibilities.

Many of Soper's characters are hard to like: the control-freak executive traumatised by a bead of sweat; the school bully who shrugs off any responsibility for those who copy him; the redneck in the unlicensed truck who blames his problems on the immigrants; the geek with the high IQ and flatulence problem.

But Soper's versatile acting, clever, often funny, writing, and the direction of Ines Wurth – whose own solo show, *I Miss Communism*, was a hit on the Fringe two years ago – means that we not only begin to find these characters palatable, we actually start seeing through their eyes.

Soper shifts between characters with little more than minor costume changes, weaving each unique voice into a picture of a complete person.

In the background he sketches out a society in crisis: disenfranchised youth, Iraq vets who can't readjust, politicians who are too worried about the next photo opportunity to care. The black motorcycle cop serves the state but knows his son will not. The politician's flunky begins to wonder how much of the "message" is lost in endless ribbon-cutting. The truck driver believes in "red, white and blue and God", but finds his country has little belief in him.

Within the tight structure of a gradually unfolding plot, Soper brings us a gallery of tortured souls, and the mundane world they inhabit becomes darkly illuminated.

SUSAN MANSFIELD
 Until 27 August. Today 5.15pm