

L.A. WEEKLY

FREE

MAN WITHOUT A CONTRA The plethora of scandals in the news of late has been both a boon and a problem for political humorists: There's more than enough real-life material begging to be converted into comedy, but it's hard to be original with so many Ollie jokes, Fawn jokes, Gary jokes, Jim and Tammy jokes and the ever-popular Ronnie jokes to be heard just from hanging around the water cooler of the national psyche. *Man Without a Contra*, a new revue by the Washington, D.C.-based group Gross National Product, creates a fresh viewpoint through incisive writing, on-the-button characterizations and zippy timing. The show is so fast-paced, in fact, that despite its resemblance to the fake-television formats of *Saturday Night Live* and *SCTV*, directors John Simmons and Susan Marya Baronoff (as well as Simmons' co-writer Joel Perry) owe an equal debt to the quick-changing blackouts of Monty Python. The cast of six is terrific, relying on facial expressions and voices more than costumes and makeup to create impressions of Reagan, North and friends. A few of the sketches are *interesting* rather than funny, and a couple barely work at all; since most of the stronger material is in the first two-thirds, the show actually loses momentum as it goes along. Overall, however, the ever-important laugh ratio is higher than that of any show I've seen in recent months. One complaint: The group's portrayal of Iranians crosses out of political satire and into the realm of cultural stereotyping. Cast Theater, 800 N. El Centro Ave., Hlywd.; Fri.-Sat., 10:30 p.m.; indef. (213) 462-0265. (Ben Kallen)