THEATRE

Theatre of the victims

By ANN NUGENT

THE MASSIVE LOVE OF RISK by Splinters, at the Northside Community Hall, Corroboree Park, Ainslie. Until tonight at 8pm.

THE AUSTRIAN writer Thomas Bernhart has said: "Life is nothing but a penal sentence ... Share your imprisonment with your fellow convicts but never ally yourself with the warders."

I don't know if the performing arts group, Splinters is familiar with Bernhart's view but their production *The Massive Love of Risk* has much in common with it. In the show, the spotlight — there is no stage — falls on outcast, mad, lost and unloved people. This is the Theatre of the Victims.

The pieces challenge the audience to risk looking at life as it is lived — in the penitentary, on the dole and on the streets. In the first half in particular, all the protagonists seem to be on journeys without destination, living days which, prison-like, are precisely the same as those that have gone before.

For their show Splinters have made Northside Community Hall into a hollowed-out cavern littered with all kinds of material residue. The action shifts unpredictably around the cluttered space. Voices emerge from trees, boxes, an animate scarecrow crucified on the wall. Audience and actors wander in the same circular world. Seating is not provided.

There are some funny bits — a few sketches, and the red flying fox, that is, the red fox that flies. But the laughter always borders on the bizarre.

It is not possible to judge group-devised performance art by the standards applied to conventional, professional theatre. The work and its purposes are different.

With that said, I found *The Massive Love of Risk* an interesting and fairly original piece of theatre. The show will have greater appeal for those on the social and artistic fringe, Bernhart's "fellow convicts", than for their warders.

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