



Tarina Pouncy, Rob Nagle and Aleisha Force in *Human Interest Story*. (Photo by Jenny Graham)

The issue most affecting Los Angeles today is homelessness, and the Fountain Theatre confronts it head on with the powerful *Human Interest Story*. This world premiere, written and directed by the theater's prolific co-founder and co-artistic director Stephen Sachs, runs through April 5th.

Inspired by the 1941 Frank Capra film *Meet John Doe*, the play's storyline includes a newsroom beset by layoffs, a venal media overlord, a columnist who backs himself into a corner with a lie, and a homeless woman who may save his reputation and her own life.

Andy Kramer (Rob Nagle) is the laid-off newspaper staffer who fabricates a homeless woman for his final column. He makes "Jane Doe" the personification of homelessness, eloquently aware of it as a national tragedy and ready to kill herself on July 4th to make a statement.

The column sets off a media frenzy. It saves Kramer's job but puts him in the awkward position of both putting a face on the homeless crisis and having to defend his fake news. It's only when he meets a homeless woman in the park that a solution to his legal problem presents itself.

As the homeless woman “Jane Doe,” Tanya Alexander is remarkable. She evolves convincingly from park bench resident to media sensation, lending the story depth and obscuring some of the plot’s inconsistencies. A master’s degree and truncated teaching career lend her character credibility as the letter’s author.

In this cynical plot, everyone is using everyone and no one is honest except the corporate overlord Harold Cain (well-played by James Harper), openly slashing jobs and decrying freedom of the press. “Jane Doe” spouts religion but gets comfortable in a hotel suite and refuses to reveal her real name. The media focus on whether she will in fact kill herself on Independence Day. Columnist Kramer attempts to claim the moral high ground, even though it’s his dishonesty that sets the plot in motion. He insists on writing Jane Doe’s speeches, despite the fact that she’s an educated woman capable of speaking for herself. Kramer also has a long-running and transactional relationship with a co-worker, Megan (the powerful Aleisha Force).



Tanya Alexander stars as “Jane Doe” in *Human Interest Story*. Photo by Jenny Graham

Other actors play multiple roles: Richard Azurdia, Matt Kirkwood and Traina Pouncy as an opportunistic mayor of the unnamed city where the play takes place. All are excellent.

Toward the end, there’s extensive speechifying that could use a trim to cut the two-and-a-half hour running time. On balance, *Human Interest Story* astutely addresses one of today’s most pressing concerns from multiple angles with insight and grace, as well as a healthy dose of cynicism.

Spot-on projections by set and video designer Matthew Hill beautifully stand in for extensive sets.



James Harper in *Human Interest Story*. Photo by Jenny Graham

Human Interest Story plays at the *Fountain Theatre*, 5060 Fountain Ave. at Normandie, through April 5th. Tickets are \$40-45 (less for students and seniors) and available [here](#). Stacked parking is available for \$5 on-site and street parking is a viable option. Come early and have a glass of wine upstairs with other theater lovers.