

CHARLES FABER

THEATRE

"SUGAR"

"Sugar" is, to coin an old phrase, sweet and low. The sweetness is a widespread derivative of the heroine, Sugar (who else?), whose dearest wish is to marry a young, handsome

millionaire with a yacht. Low refers to the musical's main allure, comedy, which gets to you principally in the person of Robert Morse. His performance restores the fading tradition of comic greats like Bert Lahr and

W.C. Fields. The final show of the Los Angeles Civic Light Opera's 37th annual season is made memorable by Morse's side-splitting antics. The only problem is that there's no center aisle for the audience to roll in at the Dorothy Chandler Pavilion. Face it that "Sugar" is a vehicle for Morse, and be glad he has one. He's waited a long time since "How to Succeed in Business Without Really Trying."

Librettist Peter Stone and lyricist Bob Merrill have moved chronologically forward from their "1776" to 1931 for this concoction, but have gone backward as men of the musical theater. They have turned the Wilder-Diamond screenplay, "Some Like It Hot," into a kind of "No, No, Nanette," contemporary style. Even the scenes at the beach are there, but this time it's Miami instead of Atlantic City.

Bass fiddle player Morse and saxophonist Larry Kert are on the lam from some tap-dancing gangsters. (It's a neat, shock-absorbing trick to gun down rival mobsters to rhythm.) They join an all-girl band for bread and safety.

Although the two guys in drag would scarcely fool the transvestite-innocent pursuers of Charley's Aunt, they're funny enough to encourage our willing suspension of disbelief. Morse's trying to find a place of hands used to a man's pockets, his undressing in an upper berth, a duet with his millionaire admirer, and his singing of "I'm Engaged," are highlights of a hilarious characterization which is seldom camp and never nellie.

These are boys in the band with a difference, and it takes Sugar till eleven o'clock to find out. Piquant Leland Palmer wraps up the title role as gracefully as she dances. A vivacious charmer in "Your Own

Thing" and "Applause," she's still waiting for a part completely worthy of her talents. Her love is Larry Kert, full-voiced and stalwart, even in drag. They have a strong duet in "Don't Be Afraid," and Kert gives the solo, "People In My Life," poignant power. But the Jules Styne score doesn't compare with his "Gypsy" and "Funny Girl."

Cyril Richard did a fine job of direction (based on Gower Champion's original), but had to

"THE BOLSHOI BALLET"

The Russians have come and gone. The smaller contingent of the Bolshoi troupe, bearing the stellar label, "Stars of the Bolshoi Ballet," played eight performances in seven days, Sept. 4-10, in Shrine Auditorium. Six years since the previous Los Angeles engagement, the Bolshoi still holds title to being one of the great ballet companies of the world. Perhaps the greatest, in certain respects.

The dancers' awesome stamina, technical mastery and complete dedication, encouraged by a regime and a regimen which demand it, form the strongest foundation imaginable. It is longstanding, carrying the weight of tradition with determined grace, and pardonable pride. In contradistinction to Western ballet, the Bolshoi has superb, undiminished power of movement. Everything is on a large scale: strong, purposeful gestures, full support from the waist, the big jumps that are preferred by the company to less spectacular but nimble footwork, and, above all, the breathtaking acrobatics.

These audience-rousing elements must necessarily succeed at some cost to subtlety, delicacy and refinement. The calm and poise of radiance give way before flashing, sometimes blinding, brilliance. The subdued radiance which should emanate from Act II of "Swan Lake" was simply not there in the two performances seen by this reviewer.

Maya Plisetskaya was the Swan Queen in both, but her Odette, notwithstanding her undulating port de bras, was no more the definitive classical interpretation of a bird-woman than was "The Dying Swan," which she danced at one performance only, the Saturday matinee. But the audience cheered, apparently unaware that what they had seen was purely an exposed technical display. The ineffable grace which should cloak the tremors was missing, and with it the emotional impact of an aerial creature's final earthbound struggle.

The mimed romantic ballets are not the Bolshoi's forte, but rather the gymnastically spectacular as represented by "Ecole de Ballet," which balletmaster-coach Asaf Messerer developed from dances presented by pupils of the Bolshoi Ballet School. It builds from practice to perfection in the special attainments of the Bolshoi technique. The male dancers leaped with thrilling virtuosity across the stage, and partnered the ballerinas with maximum security, especially in the lifts. Eighteen paired dancers simultaneously performing adagios and pas de deux is an unforgettable sight.

The "Carmen Suite" was choreographed by Alberto Alonso for his wife, Alicia Alonso, and not, as erroneously noted in the program, for Plisetskaya, who danced it three times during this engagement. The American premiere of the work, tremendously effective theatrically, excited the audience. But for some tastes, it is too close to the emotions associated with Bizet's opera to be wholly satisfying. Plisetskaya flirted with her feet very prettily, and while her Carmen looked seductive, there was no animality in the hoyden.

Aleksander Godunov was a (please turn to page 30)



Kert and Morse in "Sugar"

forego performing just before the show opened. His replacement, Gale Gordon, brings a delicate gallantry to the role of Morse's admirer, and takes easy command of two musical numbers. Steve Condos comes on strong as the gangland leader, sounding his taps with machine gun rapidity and impact. Virginia Martin is the brassy bandleader, and Joe Ross her quaking manager.

Production values are first-rate, with settings by Robin Wagner, costumes by Alvin Colt, and lighting by Robert Randolph. It's a lively, sparkling show, gay in a straight way. But the lasting impression is the Morse the merrier. □

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THEATRE

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passionate Don Jose, a striking contrast to his elegant prince in "Swan Lake." Natalia Kasatkina danced Fate, symbolized by the bull, with clear mimetic definition. She was powerfully dramatic in "Gypsy Dance," one of the many divertissements which graced every program. The outstanding pas de deux were "The Nutcracker" Adagio (Marina Sidorova and Nikolai Fedorov), "The Sleeping Beauty" (Nina Sorkina and Vladimir Tikhoov), and "Le Corsaire" (Galina Kozlova and Valery Anisimov).

Attended by the four princes, Nina Sorokina stood on point in attitude with the seeming effortlessness which makes the Rose Adagio from "Sleeping Beauty" a glory of perfect poise, a thing of eternal enchantment. Ludmila Vlasov and Vladimir Nikitin danced the most gymnastically spectacular divertissement of all, the Dunayevsky Waltz, a buoyant, airborne defiance of gravity, where in the ballerina flings herself and rushes toward her partner with controlled abandon. It is the quintessence of the Bolshoi Ballet style. Yuri Simonov conducted the orchestra with affinity for the dancers, fulfilling their special musical requirements. □

RTD

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hiring-in remains a struggle requiring endless patience, considerable fortitude and undue amounts of effort. The district's first black woman driver, for example, got her job only after going to a federal watchdog agency, the Fair Employment Practices Commission, which told the RTD to hire her or go to court.

Many drivers, black and white, agree that the union does little to defend black drivers from RTD supervisors who seem all too ready to hand out demerits for a variety of infractions, real or imagined. Consequently, many drivers say, black drivers get demerits all out of proportion to their numbers, and are held back of promotion time.

Neither do black drivers have any real representation at the local UTU leadership level, although they comprise more than half the local membership. The sole black union officer, Cue O. White, was purged from the leadership of his Long Beach UTU local by higher-ups in a unique sort of "kangaroo court" proceeding last July 27.

White was charged with "neutrality" during a campaign in which a Teamster-supported group of dissident rank and file drivers tried to lead others out of the UTU, claiming that the union wasn't responsive to its membership and ignored racist practices by RTD management. The UTU survived the decertification vote only by a whisker, so general was driver discontent with their union.

Cue O. White was one of the most popular of union leaders because he was willing to stand up for drivers during his 7-year tenure in office when they complained about bad working conditions and safety problems. Last fall, when a group of drivers, black and white, walked out because of rising, murderous gang violence on south side lines, Mr. White was the sole official to plead their case; UTU head Earl Clark, for

INTO L.A.

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New York, like the two terse Anglo-Saxon punctuations of its name, is brisk and compressed, while California is a Latinate ripple on the tongue that diffuses the energy of its opening click with a rolling coast of vowels and a final ahhh of pleasure and/or resignation. There are no jagged edges here like the broken teeth of New York's skyline, no whirling vortex of barbed filth and photon spot-balls of stimulation — just the sun oozing gently across the sky, urging introspection and growth, a non-verbal unclassified relation to your fellow man and the world.

The energy in Los Angeles is rhythmic and steady while New York's is wild and incoherent. Each offers its own sort of excitement and discovery. Paranoia, the most basic physical kind, is a fact of life in New York where the problems of survival tend to bind its denizens together into an unspoken solidarity, tinged with the pride inherent in the concept. "If we make it through this we can make it through anything." You notice in New York a sort of reverse snobbery at times — "I live in a worse neighborhood than you do" — while in Los Angeles, status marches right up the Hollywood

example, told the drivers he could do nothing because the walkout wasn't sanctioned. Due in part to White's efforts, Mayor Tom Bradley finally stepped in to help solve the problems.

A big UTU local election will be held here in about seven weeks, and some drivers say that most would have voted for White to replace Earl Clark. Whether or not that is true, undeniably UTU negotiators are playing it tough this year because their own poor leadership almost cost them the union last spring and drivers are insisting on a decent wage settlement this time around. Anything less and the UTU might be faced with a rank and file revolt in the November elections aimed at strengthening the union and getting some kind of effective black representation.

On one side of the strike, then, 3,700 bus drivers and mechanics determined that their representatives will win them a decent, living wage and a slight improvement in working conditions. On the other, an RTD management equally determined to bring in a settlement it doesn't think "outrageous," "excessive" or "anarchic" — and perhaps teach the unions a lesson in the process.

Last week RTD Board of Directors head Tom Neuson told UTU head Earl Clark that hundreds of thousands of sorely-hurting commuters were caught in the middle of the strike, blaming the suffering on the unions.

But most residents of this city work for the same wages these striking drivers and mechanics make; sooner or later, rank and file drivers say, John Mary Q. Public are going to figure out which side they're really on — and then the RTD bosses may well wish they'd spent on more important things all those thousands of dollars they poured into Los Angeles Times ads blaming the strike on its own underpaid, overworked and often harassed employees. □

Hills, on permanent and ostentatious display.

The fatalism of the San Andreas fault lends a different tone to life than the fatalism of a switchbladed mugger. It is less personal and more cosmic; you confront the possibility of not a private but a general apocalypse in accepting this city, and that greatly lessens the individual's sense of respon-

sibility for his or her fate.

Although I look forward to my visits to New York, I've come to like Los Angeles because it is a 20th century city whose incessant enforcement of "now" is a daily inoculation against future shock. New York is a 19th century city, on which the 20th has been awkwardly and maniacally imposed. I like Los Angeles because its vast grid of lights

stretching from horizon to smog-smudged horizon echoes the shape of McLuhan's electronic web of artificial neurons that provides the basis of the city's mass pop art forms — music, movies, and television. I like the city for its scores of disconnected fragments floating together Calder-like next to the sunny sea. I like Los Angeles because I'm a part of it. □

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